

**Diversity as Advantage in a
"Homogeneous" Society:
The Educational Environment for
Muslims in Japan**

By

Hideki Maruyama

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Abstract

Japan is one of the most homogeneous major nations in the world and needs to take action against population decline in order to maintain its economic future. Education based on efficient teacher-centered approaches accelerated past economic development, but today's dynamic world requires more flexibility in coping with rapid changes. The number of children is decreasing in Japan; and meanwhile, the proportion of non-Japanese children is increasing. These children represent different cultures and bring the necessity for change in schools. However, school administrations and classroom teachers have not accumulated and shared enough experience to understand different cultures such as Islam. This article focuses on the educational environment for Muslims, and the potentials for endogenous development of the Japanese educational system. The author briefly summarizes the concepts of Islam and education, the Muslim experience of Islamophobia, and human resources development for both Muslim and non-Muslim students. He suggests that Muslim students can be key people in shaping the future of a more tolerant Japanese society.

Hideki Maruyama is at the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER)

Introduction

Japan is still one of the largest economies in the world, but the United Nations reports the need for more immigrants to keep its economy strong: "In order to keep the size of the working-age population constant at the 1995 level, or 87.2 million, Japan would need 33.5 million immigrants from 1995 through 2050. This means an average of 609,000 immigrants needed per year during this period. Under this scenario, the population of the country is projected to be 150.7 million by 2050. The number of post-1995 immigrants and their descendants would be 46 million, accounting for 30 per cent of the total population in 2050."¹ Today, the proportion of foreigners among the total population is less than two percent of the 126 million people in Japan. The government is now considering opening the labor market to skilled workers from other countries.

It almost goes without saying that Japanese economic growth is based on the development of education. Education surely promoted economic growth during the social development process because it efficiently created a highly-qualified labor force. Education was the centerpiece of the race for recovery after the Pacific War. By the 1980s, when Japan had stable economic growth, there began strong counter-reactions from students, such as violence in school. There was very high competition in the 1990s, when Japan achieved the second largest GDP in the world, and the second wave of baby boomers survived entrance examination "hell" for universities. The Ministry of Education always attempted to create policies to improve the situation when problems came up. For example, the no-competition approach utilizing themes like international understanding became common in schools to enrich students' personality and life skills. The number of children is decreasing today, and more attention must be paid to the quality of education.

Recently, some school teachers are worrying about the lower level of students' academic performance. The Japanese media started to focus on the issue of low achievement when the results of international assessments seemed to provide evidence. Many local governments and schools have switched back their policies to increase students' abilities to perform well on the exams, and public support has swung back to a preference for academic competition.

¹ United Nations, *Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?*, United Nations, New York, 2000.

In the midst of such topics that have dominated the Japanese debate about education in the past decades, Islam has unfortunately remained one of the most unknown topics for Japanese. Japanese students are mainly taught English, and schools believe that it represents international education as a whole. This has been true even in the period of the no-competition approach, which emphasized international understanding.

Why is Islam not well known among the Japanese? We can find three immediate reasons:

- 1) Accurate information on Islam and personal, direct interactions with Muslims are very limited.
- 2) Schools function to assimilate children into Japanese society in such a way that each student's cultural uniqueness is not prioritized.
- 3) Japanese parents tend to care more about their own child's academic performance than about broader issues of life skills.

Of course, parents in Japan also want their children to be happy. But when the number of students is growing who have different cultural backgrounds from Japan-born students, we should also ask whether the direction of today's Japanese education is appropriate for the rapidly changing world.

This article focuses on the educational environment for Muslims and the potential of endogenous development of local teachers and schools. We will briefly summarize the concept of Islam and education, cultural experience (including Islamophobia), and human resource development for both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

I. Islam and Education

A. The Importance of Education for Muslims

There are three words in Arabic for the term education: "one emphasizing knowledge, one growth to maturity and one the development of good manners."² There is overlap among them, but the Muslim concept of education is to raise good Muslims with understanding of the Islamic rules of behavior and commitment to the faith based on knowledge.

Therefore, theoretically speaking, the curriculum should be designed in accordance with the Islamic understanding of knowledge and of human beings, whatever else the national curriculum covers. As the Quran is filled with exhortations to pursue knowledge, Muslim parents are usually eager to have their children acquire knowledge. Children are often sent to private tutoring after school. It is a responsibility for the parents, and sometimes for the community, and Muslim parents are motivated to educate their children to be Muslims with good behavior, values, and attitudes consistent with the principles detailed in the Quran and in Islamic traditions (*hadith*).

Islam seems distant to many Japanese people because they generally know little about it. Very few people know, for example, that "Islam is not simply the name of a world-wide religion but rather an all-embracing way of life with submission to the faith, constantly reaffirmed through personal behaviour. Submission to God or *Allah*, and adherence to religious principles is considered both a duty and a privilege leading to inner harmony and peace, and happiness in the hereafter or the next life."³

B. Islamophobia in European Countries

The largest turning point for both Muslims and non-Muslims in recent years was the tragic event on September 11, 2001. A strong consciousness arose among non-Muslim peoples toward Muslims, and at the same time, it led an increased awareness, including identity recognition,

² J. Mark Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education," *Comparative Education*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2004, p. 519.

³ Marie Parker-Jenkins, *Children of Islam: A Teacher's Guide to Meeting the Needs of Muslim Pupils*, Trentham Books, Chester, 1995, p. 23.

among Muslims themselves. The associated negative feelings of racism and xenophobia are called Islamophobia. Barry van Driel defines Islamophobia as: "an irrational distrust, fear or rejection of the Muslim religion and those who are (perceived as) Muslims."⁴ Strictly speaking, "phobia" stands for a lasting, abnormal fear, or great dislike of something.

Islamophobia is a form of xenophobia currently found in Europe. The term itself started to be used widely after the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) published a report entitled, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" in 1997. The report highlights the consequences of Islamophobia throughout society and sets recommendations for practical actions. The overall intention of the commission was to counter Islamophobic assumptions that Islam is a single monolithic system, and to draw attention to the principal dangers which Islamophobia creates or exacerbates for Muslim communities, and for the well-being of society as a whole. The Commission notes the dramatic aspects of social exclusion, the vulnerability of Muslims to physical violence, and to harassment. It summarizes the four main components of Islamophobia as exclusion, discrimination, violence, and prejudice. It also recommends that new legislation should include, "religious and racial violence" instead of simply "racial violence," and that education systems should promote social inclusion and cultural pluralism.⁵

The follow-up report was published in 2004 as "Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action," and covered the improvement of new legislation and severe post-9/11 concerns in Britain. It defined institutional Islamophobia as, "those established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce inequalities in society between Muslims and non-Muslims."⁶ It also pointed out the danger of intolerance, the importance of the recognition of diversity, self-criticism, and necessary steps for education.

⁴ Barry van Driel, ed., *Confronting Islamophobia in Educational Practice*, Trentham Books, Chester, 2004.

⁵ Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All," Runnymede Trust, 1997.

⁶ Robin Richardson, ed., *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action – A Report by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*, Trentham Books, Chester, 2004.

C. Muslims as a Minority

There are many Muslims living as minorities in European countries. It is very understandable that some Muslim children have an unstable identity or an inferiority complex as Muslims because of the effects of Islamophobia. Although they may not feel shame or anger about their own ethnicity, culture, religion, or county of national origin, they receive messages at school that over-generalize about the relationship between Islam and terrorism.

Yasushi Tonaga explains that Muslims think of themselves as connecting with God vertically and with other Muslims horizontally. This horizontal bond leads the Japanese people to misunderstand that Islam is dangerous. The horizontal bonds among the *umma* (global Islamic community) has the role of taking action for the sake of Islam when a conflict needs to be resolved.⁷

Japanese do not generally know that Muslims in the world share the pain and sympathies of their brethren when see and hear about such matters as the occupation of Iraq by the United States or discrimination shown in the media. Muslim identity can be regarded as being stronger than nationality in many cases. The 2004 CBMI Report also introduced a case in which Islamophobia increased the sense of solidarity among young Muslims.⁸ The Japanese view of religion generally focuses on the concepts love and peace (without a strong emphasis on justice), and therefore armed action supported by a religious philosophy or ideology is seen as an abnormal or threatening aspect of religion. There have been many "Islamist" terror attacks reported by the media, and Japanese often tend to believe that the attacks stem from Islam itself.

In this context, it is important to understand that Islam is not a united group or a monolith. If people believe that suicide bombers are supported by all other Muslims, this would be a serious misunderstanding. Suicide is traditionally forbidden in Islam, and Muslims are taught to fear the final judgment when he or she goes to the afterlife.

While many European countries are considering ways to utilize educational practices to combat

⁷ Yasushi Tonaga, "Sufizumu no Rekishi to Genzai (The Past and Present of Sufism)," in Motoko Katakura, et al., eds., *Isuraamu Sekai*, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 2004.

⁸ Robin Richardson, *Islamophobia*, 2004, p. 4.

Islamophobia, and try to combine these efforts with multi-cultural education supported by the community, Japan has not yet developed a recognition of the need for an inclusive approach in education. What Japan can learn from the European situation is the method to challenge Islamophobia and escape the vicious circle of information and perception, promoting an inclusive education by means of curriculum development, the networking of teachers, and the encouragement of a bottom-up approach.⁹

II. The Japanese School Environment

A. Japanese Recognition: The Reality for Muslims in Japan

We have to accept the reality that the Japanese recognition of Islam is extremely low at the education ministry and in local governments. This is basically because they have little experience of direct communication with Muslim peoples.

1) A Brief Profile of Muslims in Japan

The Muslim population is probably less than 100,000, although the exact figure is not known because the national census does not collect information on religious background. Many resident Muslims came as laborers in the 1980s and married Japanese women after they started to settle in Japan. Their Muslim children go to Japanese schools. Some reports count the Muslim residents based on the immigrant's nationality. The estimates have been 60,000 in 1995,¹⁰ and again 60,000 in 2000,¹¹ but none of the estimates provide exact and reliable information about the Muslim population in the country. The major nationalities of Muslims in Japan are Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Iranian, and about 60% of them live in the

⁹ However, there are also important differences between the cases of Europe and Japan. For example, there are currently about 120 Muslim schools in the UK, all of which are funded by parents and the community. There are now about 750,000 Muslim children in the UK. The establishment of private schools in Japan is not as easy as in the UK because Japanese parents must receive permission from the prefecture's governor when they establish a school for their children for a certain purpose.

¹⁰ Hitoshi Sugimoto, "Tai-Nichi Musurimu no Kyoiku Mondai: Nihon ni okeru mo Hitotsu no Ibunka, (Educational Issues for Muslims Living in Japan: Another Different Culture in Japan)," in Takekazu Ehara, ed., *Tabunka Kyoiku no Kokusai Hikaku—Esunishiti e no Kyoiku Taio*, Tamagawa University Press, Machida, 2000, p. 313.

¹¹ Keiko Sakurai, *Nihon no Musurimu Shakai* (Muslim Society in Japan), Chikuma Shobo, Tokyo, 2003, p. 36.

Tokyo area.¹² Ethnic Japanese who have converted to Islam are about 8,000, according to the Japan Muslim Association.¹³ Since the children of these people are also Muslims, the number is expected to increase in the future.

2) *Expectations for Academic Competency*

The hot education topics in Japan right now are academic performance, the inappropriate behavior of some teachers, bullying, suicides, and the amendment of the education law. The competitive environment is heating up among Japanese parents, although the pressure of the entrance exam is less intense due to the decline of the number of children in the Japanese population. Integrated study began in 2002 in order to develop students' life skills in the global knowledge-based society, but critical views are growing among politicians, academicians, teachers, and parents, because they believe that this type of education negatively influences the children's academic performance. This is particularly the case in terms of exam scores in math, science, and languages. Although the Ministry of Education is trying to improve the quality of education, the current political administration sets a higher priority on measurable academic performance, patriotism, and Japanese social norms. Education to instill patriotism is one of the main foci of the amendment of the Basic Education Law, or the "constitution" of education in Japan.¹⁴

There are also some parents who have strong attitude against promoting diversity in schools, no matter what racial, national, or religious backgrounds students may have. They tend to believe that their child's learning for the entrance exam is so important that no one should disturb them—school resources should be used only for their own Japanese children. They try to invest as much as possible in their children's education. Japanese families now have only one child on the average, and their expectations are sometimes very high for children to engage

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁴ Modern history as described in Japanese textbooks has been the hottest educational issue in Japan. China and Korea perceive that Japan invaded their lands in the first half of the 20th century, and some textbooks seek to justify the Japanese army's actions. On the other hand, some rightwing Japanese believe too many textbooks describe Japanese policies in a negative light, and influence children to lose their pride as Japanese. General public opinion is still undecided, but people are now generally more conscious of nationality or patriotism issues, especially after North Korea's nuclear weapons test in late 2006.

in competitive education.

This sort of view on the part of some Japanese parents can become a source of Islamophobia in the educational system, similar to the current issue of bullying.¹⁵ If these tendencies among the public and government can be regarded as a kind of ethnocentrism that seeks to eliminate all differences, then today's Japan may have become less tolerant of other cultures.

3) *The Potential for Islamophobia*

Hitoshi Sugimoto points out that the major part of education for domestic Muslims is supported by individual efforts without official assistance. He explains that the formal education policies have the tendency to promote assimilation into "Japanese" norms, and that the official attitude is that Muslims should be thankful for being able to attend Japanese public schools. The point, he explains, is that small minority groups do not receive special attention compared to other, larger groups such as Chinese, even when the small group must face severe pressure for assimilation.¹⁶

When a non-Japanese Muslim mother talks with a class teacher about problems for Muslims, such as school meals and sex education, and asks the school to understand religious needs, the school authorities tend to accept their requests as special cases. However, it is much more difficult for a Japanese Muslim mother to receive special consideration. Commonly, a teacher would ask, "What nationality are you?" to the requesting mother, and she would have a dilemma deciding between her traditional Japanese and Muslim identities. Their requests will often be ignored because of the perceived norms of being "Japanese" in society.

If the family is well off, the child can go to a private international school which may give more attention to the child's religious background. The students can receive the teachers' understanding about religion and English lessons. But public school is the only choice for

¹⁵ Japanese bullying includes not only violence, but also an implicit negative attitude against the targeted students. Theoretically, this could combine with negative feelings toward Islam if more Muslim students enter the Japanese educational system in the future. For more details on bullying, see Mitsuru Taki, "Relation among Bullying, Stress and Stressor: A Follow-up Survey Using Panel Data and a Comparative Survey between Japan and Australia," *Japanese Society*, Vol. 5, 2001.

¹⁶ Sugimoto, "Tai-Nichi Musurimu no Kyoiku Mondai," 2000.

parents with limited means. When the parents cannot obtain the understanding and support of the school authorities, they have little recourse, and are often socially isolated. In particular, it would be difficult for Japanese Muslim parents to have a good relationship with other parents who believe that their own child's academic performance is the highest educational priority.

We can thus foresee that Islamophobia may grow in Japan, not because of Islam itself, but due to cultural differences that may not be accommodated by school policies. We need to have a well-organized approach for both Muslim and non-Muslim students because the heart of the problem lies in the Japanese system's weak capacity to deal with cultural differences, especially religious issues, in the Japanese secular education system.

B. Newcomers: Guests or Catalysts?

"Newcomers" are those who are born abroad and recently come into Japan from the rest of the world for various reasons.¹⁷ The newcomers are mainly from China, Brazil, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Peru, and the USA. Muslims are also categorized as newcomers, and have similar problems to all of the others in this class. We will focus here on the problems of language, cultural experience, and being Muslim.

1) Language Problems

Language problems are one of the most common problems for all non-Japanese students. It seems that the students can obtain the necessary daily level of language skill, and, therefore, schools often take classroom communication for granted. But conceptual vocabulary and technical terms are more difficult in many lessons. The newcomer students may have difficulty in following the contents of some lessons and their academic performance decreases as they move on to the higher grades.

¹⁷ The total population of registered non-Japanese is 1.8 million (1.4% of the population of Japan), and two-thirds of these are categorized as "newcomers." The "old" non-Japanese communities consist mainly of Chinese and Korean permanent residents. Kokichi Shimizu and Mutsumi Shimizu, *Nyuukamaa to Kyoiku—Gakko Bunka to Esunishiti no Katto o Megutte* (Newcomers and Education: Regarding School Culture and Ethnic Conflicts), Akashi Shoten, Tokyo, 2001.

There are no support programs at the national level, such as experts in Japanese language education for non-Japanese, or advisors and trainers for the school teachers themselves. However, the level of language skill obviously affects students' academic performance, and schools must recognize that students often judge people based on how well they can express themselves—and those who express themselves poorly may be considered to be lacking in knowledge. Many students have difficulty in expressing their thoughts in as sophisticated a manner as teachers strive for.

2) *Enculturation*

In addition to language, cultural adaptation is another issue involving coping strategies of minority children. J. W. Berry summarizes the strategies of acculturation into four forms: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. They are conceptually the result of an interaction between ideas deriving from cultural change and inter-group relations. In the former, the central issue is the degree to which one wishes to remain culturally as one has been, as opposed to giving it all up to become part of a larger society; in the latter it is the extent to which one wishes to have day-to-day interactions with members of other groups in the larger society, as opposed to turning away from other groups and relating only to those of one's own group.

When these two central issues are posed simultaneously, a conceptual framework is generated that posits four varieties of acculturation. When an acculturating individual does not wish to maintain culture and identity and seeks daily interaction with the dominant society, then the assimilation path or strategy is defined. In contrast, when there is a value placed on holding onto one's original culture and a wish to avoid interaction with others, then the separation alternative is defined. When there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture and in daily interactions with others, integration is the option; here there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while moving to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Integration is the strategy that attempts to "make the best of both worlds." Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance, then marginalization occurs.¹⁸

¹⁸ J. W. Berry, et al., eds., *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 278-279.

The majority group's "school culture" might be unique for the newcomers in Japan, and many minority students may fall into patterns of marginalization because there are strong pressures for conformity. It is so strong for non-Japanese students that newcomer students are often hardly even recognized as minorities, and teachers often try to attribute the newcomers' problems to individual deficiencies.¹⁹

However, keeping order in the classroom is not necessarily more difficult for Muslim students than for European or Latin American students because many Muslim children are willing to accept teachers' orders in school. Japanese teachers may sometimes find that Muslim students are easier to deal with because, "Muslim children are taught to respect and not question elders, or those in authority, and accordingly they may appear to be stereotypically passive and accepting. If a child does not question teachers it does not automatically denote lack of interest or intelligence but rather respect for their authority and position."²⁰ But this also creates the potential for teachers to mistakenly believe that Muslim students have few problems in school.

3) Problems as Muslims

Marie Parker-Jenkins considers some aspects of the problems Muslim students face in Britain, and others have discussed problems in Japanese schools.²¹ There are some similar problems. The problems in Japan are clothing, school meals, physical education, language, and non-Japanese teachers. Among these, the unique problems are school uniforms, school lunches, co-education for physical education activities like swimming, and the lack of teachers from Muslim countries.

School rules are usually very rigid in public schools in Japan. For example, girls' uniform skirts should be long enough to hide their knees, but short enough to show her lower legs. The color of hair should be black; otherwise the students have to dye it in some cases. These school rules seem to represent a rejection of a student's uniqueness.

¹⁹ Shimizu and Shimizu, *Nyuukamaa to Kyoiku*, 2001, pp.72-78.

²⁰ Parker-Jenkins, *Children of Islam*, 1995, p. 28.

²¹ See Masanori Naito, et. al., "Zadankai—Musurimu kara Mita Nihon—Nihon Kyoiku no Ibunka Kyozon Taisei ni tsuite Kangaeru (Roundtable: Japan in Muslim Perspective: Japanese Education Living Together with Different Cultures)," in Masanori Naito, ed., *Mo Hitotsu no Yooroppa—Tabunka Kyosei no Butai*, Kokon Shoin, Tokyo, 1996.

School lunches are provided in most public elementary schools, and the menu is fixed for cost efficiency. The Islamic Center Japan advises Muslim parents have their children bring lunch boxes. Keiko Sakurai explains that parents can often check the contents of the school lunches, and make lunch boxes for the children in case non-*halal* food is being served.²² Treatments for allergies among children are common today, so students can usually receive understanding from other classmates and the teacher more easily than in the past. Sugimoto reports, however, that parents still worry that their children will be isolated if they carry their own lunch, while others take the school lunch.²³

Co-education for physical and health education is common at public schools in Japan. It is difficult to skip exercise classes due to one's religious background within the secular education system in Japan. A famous case involved a student whose religion was "Jehovah's Witness" who was not able to complete his high school education because he rejected a *kendo* martial arts lesson in 1991. This case developed into a lawsuit which the student won in 1997 because the judge concluded that there must have been an alternative way for the school to offer credit. Although the ultimate result was positive for the student in this case, the daily situation for devout Muslims in Japanese schools may still be difficult.

C. Development of Teaching Staff: Study Networks and Experienced Japanese

The dispatch of teachers from Islamic countries and their acceptance into Japanese public schools should be considered. As Hitoshi Sugimoto points out, this may be a useful step to meet the educational needs of resident Muslims.²⁴ But the permanent employment of non-Japanese is theoretically impossible because public school teachers are public officers, and there is a nationality clause in the law. If so, who can understand Muslim behavior and ways of thinking in the school context?

Great attention should be paid to a group of teachers around the Tokyo area who have formed a study circle to improve social study lessons. They have held meetings every two months since 2003. Their approach is based on gaining knowledge of history, and about Islam and the West

²² Sakurai, *Nihon no Musurimu Shakai*, 2003.

²³ Sugimoto, "Tai-Nichi Musurimu no Kyoiku Mondai," 2000.

²⁴ Ibid.

Asian region. The leading teachers visit the Islamic world quite often, and transfer their experiences to the students. This can aid curriculum development because misunderstanding comes from a lack of knowledge about Islam on the part of most teachers. The members of this study group sometimes even make field trips with their students to observe and talk with Muslims directly.

We should also focus on those who have experienced living in Islamic countries. One key official project is the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program. It was launched in 1965, and has had more than 25,000 participants in its history. The dispatched Japanese generally are sent to assist social and technical development in a developing country for two years. When the teachers come back to Japanese schools after two years, they are expected to develop better lessons in Japan. Their tolerance toward a different culture is usually enough to facilitate understanding of the backgrounds of many Muslim students because they have own experience living and learning in a different culture.²⁵

The decision to dispatch a teacher on this program depends on the local education council, and the council is also responsible for the returned teachers in regard to whether it can utilize their experiences for school education. Japanese schools need more bilingual and bi-cultural teachers. For example, the Kyoto City Education Council employs ten JOCVs under a special employment process because Mr. Daisaku Kadokawa, the official superintendent of the Education Council of Kyoto City, took the lead to recruit Japanese who have experience outside of Japan. His measure has had an effect on other local governments: Aichi, Nagano, and Toyama prefectures have initiated similar policies as of fiscal year 2006.²⁶

²⁵ Hideki Maruyama and Asako Uehara, "Seinen Kaigai Kyoryoku Taiin no Ibunka Tekio—Shiria oyobi Zambiya Taizai o Jirai toshite (Cultural Experiences of JOCV in Syria and Zambia)," *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2002.

²⁶ Nagano's policy implicitly mentions those experienced and who have skills in Portuguese or Spanish language because the local population has a relatively large number of students and parents from Latin America.

III. Discussion: Endogenous Development and Support

A. Cultural Sensitivity

The OECD introduces the five broad areas for the development of professional knowledge and expertise in teaching: the teacher's behavior, cognition, content, character, and knowledge of and sensitivity to the cultural, social, and political contexts and environments of the students.²⁷ The fifth area treats teachers' sensitivity to cultural backgrounds of minority students, and it is this aspect that we would like to emphasize here. Teachers themselves already know that classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse with students of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Teachers symbolize powerful authority in the classroom within some cultural contexts. For this reason, teachers themselves are required to have great tolerance and sensitivity. Children with limited language proficiency generally have a very difficult time learning, and may easily lag behind. This in turn may lead to a lack of confidence in their academic performance. Less confidence in language and communication negatively affects students' motivation to learn, and often leads to low expectations. This vicious cycle may appear among minority students in the classroom.

In the similar context, special attention should be paid to girls because, in many cultures, they are not encouraged to express their thoughts as much as boys. Teachers have to be sensitive in the classroom to all of their students' cultures.

J. W. Berry notes only the minority group's reactions, but we should think about the majority Japanese group's attitudes as well. The majority group maintains "separation" toward different cultures because they do not consider it to be of value to maintain relationships with them. The Japanese education system, again, is very secular and pushes religion away from classroom, but schools should preserve room to understand different cultures, even in a basically ethnocentric environment.

²⁷ OECD, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, OECD, Paris, 2005.

B. Endogenous Development of Schools and Local Education Councils

It is not the central government but rather local needs and individual consciousness that created the study network profiled above. Kazuko Tsurumi categorized as “key persons” those who create the possibility of endogenous development into tangible forms.²⁸ These were then divided into three groups: theoretical, practical, and political key persons.²⁹ Her unique categorization of key persons focuses on the political key persons who have power in the decision-making process.

Mr. Kadokawa, the official superintendent in Kyoto, could be considered a political key person within Tsurumi’s scheme. His initiative in the local educational council had a large influence in changing the local policies, and acting as a model for other local authorities. His motivation came from his own sense of responsibility for educating the next generation.³⁰

Additionally, Takaaki Matsumoto reports the results of questionnaires to Japanese high school students about the image of Islam and Muslims in Japan. He explains that fieldwork for understanding Muslim’s lifestyles brings about a change in students’ attitudes.³¹ He is one of the key persons who organized the informal study group described above.

Toru Miura is the key person to consult for the theory of Matsumoto’s approach, and he also introduces the results of his analysis of textbooks used in Japanese schools.³² They both point out the lack of correct knowledge about Islam and Muslim life.

The Japanese education system is highly centralized, and its management is usually controlled by the higher administrative authorities. Public school heads have little autonomy compared with European countries. This prohibits local teachers from exercising their own initiative to

²⁸ Shigeaki Uno and Kazuko Tsurumi, eds., *Naihatsuteki Hattenron to Gaikogata Hatten* (Endogenous and Exogenous Forces), University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1994, p. 8.

²⁹ The inclusion of political key persons may be criticized in that governmental power always has to represent exogenous forces to some extent.

³⁰ This is according to an interview with Mr. Nobuhiro Kumagai, Team Director of Public Relations and Promotion Team, Domestic Affairs Group, Secretariat of Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, JICA, on November 21, 2006.

³¹ Takaaki Matsumoto, “Nihon no Kokosei ga Idaku Isuraamu-zo to sono Zesei ni Muketa Torikumi (Images of Islam among High School Students in Japan and Proposals for Correction of Student Misperceptions),” *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, March 2006.

³² Toru Miura, “Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools,” *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, March 2006.

improve the situation at the classroom level. The central government must encourage endogenous development in the process of decentralization. Individual networking costs almost nothing because of information and communications technology, and teachers who have minority students in their classrooms are searching for appropriate pedagogical methods. Study networks of teachers and experts should spread with enhanced support from officials.

C. Support from Teachers in the Classroom in Resisting Islamophobia

Minority students need support from teachers and other students. Friends are the strongest supporters inside and outside of classrooms, but sometimes immigrant students have only teachers to ask for help. Teachers need to keep learning in today's knowledge-based society. Communication is clearly important in the classroom among students, and teachers must actively receive feedback from them. In addition to receiving direct messages from students, teachers may have to infer students' thoughts based on an understanding on their cultural and religious backgrounds. When teachers are able to shift their perspectives to accommodate differences, they will be more able to understand minority students' needs.

From the experience of Muslim students in Britain, Marie Parker-Jenkins categorizes student needs into four issues:

- 1) *Religious/cultural needs*: Time of school assemblies should be coordinated for daily prayers. School diet should be considered and understand the need of fasting. Dress code should be flexible, especially in physical education for girls, etc.
- 2) *Curriculum needs*: Sex education should be paid more attention, especially need for HIV issue. Language instruction for minor languages should be encouraged. Islamic dimensions should be promoted, etc.
- 3) *Linguistic needs*: Support for English language competence/acquisition, etc.

4) *General needs*: Home-school links should be emphasized because enlisting parental support is vital to all attempts to accommodate Muslim needs within the school system. Muslim organizations are encouraged to become more proactive in attempting to bring about change within the educational system for school governance.³³

Parker-Jenkins conducted her survey based on the needs and practices of British schools, and her findings suggested that understanding the processes of assimilation and acculturation within multicultural education are crucial. She also emphasized that teachers cannot be expected to translate educational theory into practice without adequate training. Recruitment of teachers with minority backgrounds is also important.

Japanese schools do not yet face major problems in this respect due to the small population of Muslims; but we can learn from other approaches within school environments. Japanese schools and local governments should keep in mind the experience of Britain as profiled in Parker-Jenkins' research.

IV. Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the need to analyze the educational needs of Muslims in Japan. We can summarize this into three main issues.

The first is the need for access to information about Islam and Muslims. When correct information is available to students, it may change their attitudes toward cultural and religious differences, and lead to a greater degree of tolerance in Japanese society in the future.

Second, schools need to create space for students and teachers to experience and learn about different cultures in today's knowledge-based societies because the image which media creates often differs from the reality. Schools need to create partnerships with parents and communities as much as possible, so that they too can share their knowledge and experience.

³³ Parker-Jenkins, *Children of Islam*, 1995, pp.118-120.

Finally, a more organized approach is necessary to address the specific educational needs of Muslims in Japan, while encouraging positive developments at the grass-roots level. Endogenous developments such as the formation of teacher study groups should be encouraged and supported officially. However, the official support should always bear in mind that their role is only to encourage local experimentation, but not to enforce orthodoxy: The focus is not on authority but on local student needs.

Education for Muslims and other non-Japanese provides a good opportunity for growth in Japanese schools and society. Compared to the state of Christianity in Japan the environment surrounding Islam is not very good today due to biased information in the media, and the degree of Islamophobia found at the global level. It should be remembered that Japanese Christians basically overcame the discrimination that once faced them, and now they are living among non-Christian peoples with little difficulty, although it took Japan more than 400 years to reach this point. We should recognize that contact with "unknown" Islam has just started, and there is no reason to prevent the creation of Muslim private schools when necessary legal conditions are met. Japan is geographically isolated, but it should more open to diversity in order to maintain its current level of economic activity. Diversity can be maintained by focusing on what is "different" about students in school. Because they are indeed different in some (but not all) of their educational needs, Muslim students can become key people in shaping the future of Japan as a more diverse and more tolerant country.

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