

## **How Can Young People Reduce Language Barriers in Education?**

(Original)

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Education is one of the 5 basic human rights. People who lack education experience trouble getting ahead in life, have shorter lifespans and are more susceptible to exploitation than well-educated people. So I think it's safe to say that education is very important. However, there are many things that can stop people from getting a quality education, and the reason covered in this essay is language barriers.

Language barriers in education are a massive problem. Around 40% of school-aged children don't have access to education in a language they understand. For language minority students, this can mean that despite going to school for many years, they are left essentially illiterate. This is a huge problem all around the world, even in developed countries.

In Japan, for example, Japanese Educator Noriko Hazeki says "The challenges non-Japanese children face in the Japanese school system begin even before they enroll. She says some parents have been told that it will "Be hard for your child because their Japanese isn't good," and that, actually, "They don't have to go to school, so why make them go?". For context, In Japan, education isn't compulsory for those who don't have Japanese citizenship. And as Japan Times says, "The picture that often comes to mind when imagining non-Japanese children going to school in Japan is often one of a multicultural student body attending elite, expensive international schools in the heart of Tokyo."

This issue isn't only In Japan though. In Hong Kong, a study says, "Even after non-Chinese speaking students learn Chinese for many years, their Chinese ability is still significantly worse compared with Chinese-speaking students of the same age (Tse & Loh, 2008, 2009)." The same study says that "Although Hong Kong and other places have adopted measures to assess the language proficiency of second-language students who have just

entered schools, we have found that the Hong Kong

Education Bureau has not made any bridging measures to help students in need to successfully go from kindergarten to primary school.”

I am half Japanese, half English and living in Hong Kong. The only language I can speak fluently is English, and If I wasn't fortunate enough to be able to go to an expensive international school, I would have to go to a public school. Teachers in public schools in Hong Kong do not teach in English and I don't understand Chinese. Therefore, I would not be able to receive a quality education in a Hong Kong public school. Now imagine I lived in Japan. If I had to go to a public school there, I would not be able to receive a quality education there either, only because I am not able to speak Japanese well enough. Even though public schools are open to kids who don't speak Japanese, there is very little support available for non-Japanese speakers. It's outrageous that in 2023 some people still aren't able to get a quality education because of the language they speak. I can't imagine what it's like for children unable to learn anything at school because they aren't offered enough support.

To achieve a peaceful world, everyone has to be able to receive a quality education. And to make sure that everyone gets a quality education, we have to support people in the language minority that attend public schools. How can we do this exactly? As young people, there isn't much we can do about actually changing the school system to support people in the language minority. However, we can support them in other ways. For example, if you have a classmate who is struggling to learn your language, when speaking to them avoid using complex language such as idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm because this may confuse them. Make sure to correctly pronounce their name so that they feel less like an outsider and more confident in themselves.

In order to realise a peaceful world, schools and governments have to take action to help language minorities in public schools. But, young people can help. By doing some of the things I just said, we can help make those students more willing to learn and receive a better education than if they weren't supported by young people.