

**Language Policy and Language Use of Transnational Students with Roots
in Vietnam and Japan**

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Abstract

This study examines the language policy and language practices of transnational students with mixed roots from the students' point of view. Using narrative inquiry, interviews on Japanese-Vietnamese transnational students were analyzed thematically. The study found that the participants decided their own language policy, which was the one-parent-one-language policy, and at the same time negotiated with their parents' language ideologies and policy. The factors that influenced the participants' language policy and language practices were their agency, their communities, and the power dynamics between languages. I argued that the students' varying degrees of agency caused their negotiation with the parents' ideologies to play out differently. I also argued that the power dynamics between languages influenced parent's and children's preference for an educational system or a language policy, which in turn influenced the children's language practices.

要旨

本研究は、国家を超えて移動するミックスルーツの学生の言語政策と言語実践について、学生自身の視点から考察したものである。ナラティブ手法を用いて、日本とベトナムにルーツを持つフランスナショナルな学生をインタビューし、テーマ分析を行った。その結果、学生たちは「一親一言語政策」という自らの言語政策を決定していたと同時に、親の言語イデオロギーや言語政策と交渉していたことが明らかになった。学生たちの言語政策と言語実践に影響を与えたのは行為主体性、コミュニティ、そして言語間の力関係であった。学生の行為主体性の程度が異なるために、両親のイデオロギーとの交渉が異なる形で展開されると考える。また、言語間の力関係は親子の教育制度や言語政策の選好に影響を与え、それが子どもの言語実践に影響を与えたということ論じる。

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1 Introduction

This paper explores the trajectory of language learning and language use of transnational students with roots in Japan and Vietnam who have grown up experiencing high mobility between Southeast Asia and Japan. As movement between borders become more frequent than ever before, the number of Japanese children who grow up in transit with multicultural and multilingual backgrounds is on the rise in Japan. A number of how-to books exist on raising children bilingually in an intercultural context. However, families encounter difficulties such as the emotional demands (Okita 2002), and eventually they can give up bilingual parenting. To find a solution to this problem, the children's views on their language education need to be investigated as they are often overlooked in research. Multilingual children do not passively accept their parents' language policies but create their own policy and have their own language practices. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to research that examines the actual language policies and language practices of transnational students.

First, this paper discusses the context of mobility between Japan and Southeast Asia. The next section covers previous research on transnational students and language policy. Then, the paper examines the narratives of transnational young adults and analyzes their language

policy and language use, and the factors that influences them. Finally, the paper summarizes the findings from this study and gives implications for further research.

2 Context

Transnationalism can be defined as “the multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447), and it is a phenomenon that is rapidly gaining attention. Transnationalism covers diverse situations, and newer research focuses on the mobility of children and youth, virtual and psychological connectedness, and multigenerational experiences (Duff, 2015). In the field of linguistics, transnationalism in Asia remains largely unexplored.

Mobility between Japan and countries in Southeast Asia has been common throughout history, and a new characteristic could be seen during Japan’s economic revival after World War II. During the 1950s, Japan experienced a period of rapid economic growth. Japan’s companies quickly expanded to Southeast Asia, and employees were assigned a temporary post overseas. Some left their families in Japan, but others took their families with them. As the number of expatriate children grew, insecurities about their education began to arise (Sato et al., 2020). To answer to the needs of the professional expatriates to educate their children in

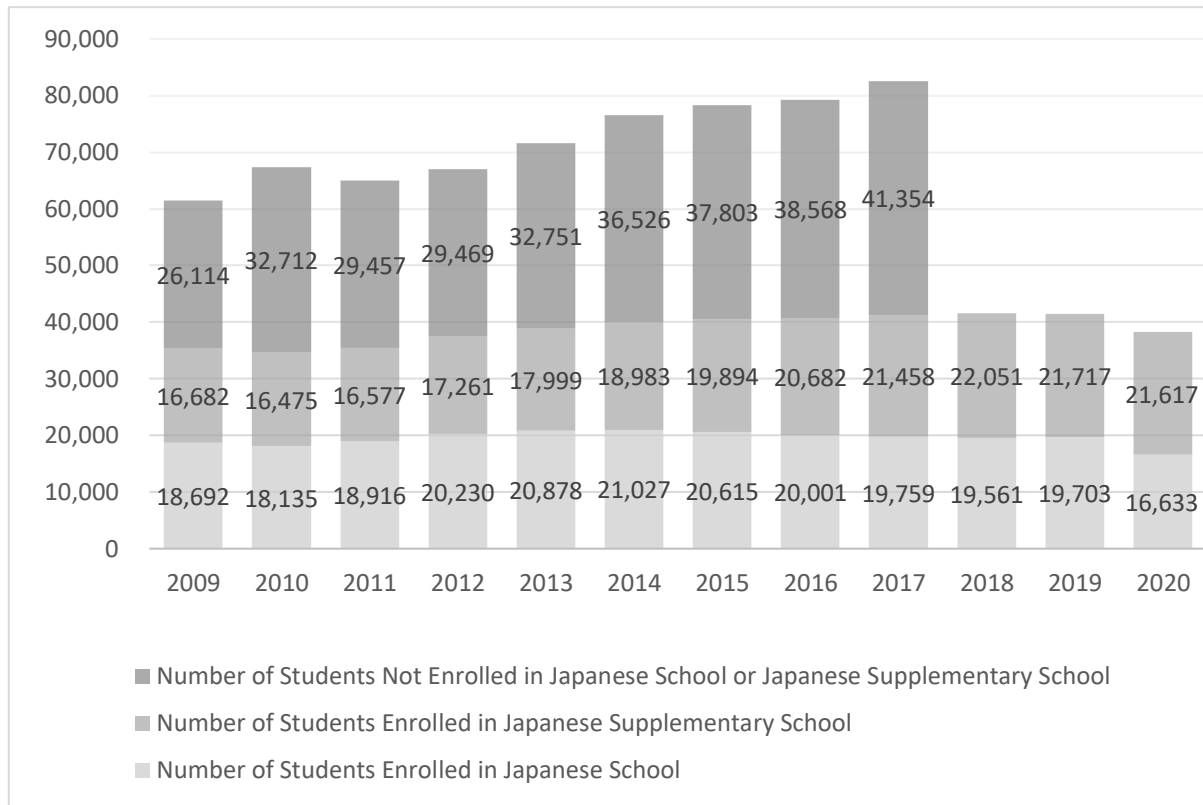
the mainstream Japanese curriculum, the Japanese government established Japanese Schools (*nihonjin-gakko*) and Japanese supplementary schools (*hoshuko*) (Danjo and Moreh, 2020).

Japanese Schools are full-time educational institutions which teach all subjects in Japanese. Most of them comprise elementary school and junior high school. The curricula of Japanese Schools are based on MEXT (Government of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology)'s curriculum guidelines, and they use Japanese textbooks authorized by the Ministry. These schools are run by the school management committee, which comprises representatives of the country or region's Japanese Association (expatriate Japanese community), parents, and representatives of companies establishing business in that region (MEXT, n.d.). Japanese supplementary schools, on the other hand, are schools established to teach the Japanese language to Japanese children after school and /or on weekends.

The graph below (Graph 1) shows the changes in the number of Japanese children living abroad from 2009 to 2020¹. It indicates that in the past decade, about half of expatriate Japanese children in their mandatory education age attended Japanese School or a Japanese supplementary school. It also suggests that the number of students not enrolled in Japanese Schools or Japanese supplementary school is gradually increasing, indicating the shift to

¹ No data exists from 2018 to 2020 on the number of children not enrolled in Japanese School or Japanese supplementary school (MEXT, 2021).

international schools and local schools (Iwasaki, 2011).



Graph 1: Number of Japanese Children Living Abroad (MEXT, 2021)

In Japanese society, the children who return to Japan after living abroad for a few years tend to be called *kikokusei*² (returnees). Goodman (2012) lists five features that define

² The term *kikokushijo* may be more widely known and used in Japan. However, in recent years, the transition to the term *kikokusei* can be seen, reflecting the argument that *kikokushijo* may contain “discriminatory connotations” to the kanji character 女 (*jyo*) referring to female (Hori & Sugihara, 2022, p.

kikokusei [*kikokushijo*]: 1) the parents are Japanese, 2) they went overseas before reaching the age of 20, 3) the reason of going abroad is often because their father was posted temporarily overseas, 4) they stay abroad for three months or more so they are registered as *chūzaiin* (businessmen/businesswomen) or *kaigai chōki taizaisha* (long-term Japanese residents), 5) when they returned to Japan, they entered schools in the mainstream education system and not international schools (p. 32). *Kikokusei* are seen with mixed views in Japan; on one hand, they are seen as students who have a deficiency in Japanese; on the other hand, they are seen as privileged, international children who are proficient in English (Goodman, 2012, p. 33). Both views do not accurately reflect the diverse linguistic abilities of these children. Other literature on *kikokusei* in Japan discusses educational issues and stereotypes surrounding the term. In this study, I will introduce cases of students who would be seen under the scope of this term; however, I choose not to categorize them so that the negotiation of their identity would be shown through their narratives.

3 Literature Review

Here, I examine qualitative research that has been conducted in the past two decades on transnationals and language, focusing on the family language policy of transnational

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families, multilingual children's agency, and language learning of Japanese transnational students.

3.1 Family Language Policy of Transnational Families

Family language policy (FLP) is a new field of research that covers the areas of language planning and child language acquisition. King et al established FLP as an independent field of research in their definitive article, describing it as an “explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members” (2008, p. 907). Although FLP here is defined as “explicit,” some researchers such as McCarty et al. (2009) and Luykx (2003) have focused on the ‘implicit’ family language policy where the family does not set a clear language policy but nevertheless a policy exists.

In recent years, many FLP researchers have explored the FLP of transnational families. Zhu and Li (2016) point out that applied and socio-linguistic studies of multilingual and transnational families have tended to focus on overall patterns of language maintenance and language shift. To illustrate the diversity of the experiences, they conducted a sociolinguistic ethnography on three families living in the UK who migrated from China. Zhu and Li conclude that although their migration background is similar, the language perceptions and linguistic issues the families face are distinct.

Research examining FLP in the Asian context is still lacking. Curdt-Christiansen (2016) conducted qualitative research on the language practices of multilingual Singaporean families with Chinese, Malay, and Indian background. She found that FLP was influenced by not just the father and mother, but also by relatives who lived in the same house. This implies that in Asian families, FLP can be shaped by the ideologies of extended families as well, uncovering the need to expand studies of FLP beyond Western perceptions of family.

A common policy multilingual families adopt is the one-parent-one-language policy (OPOL), by which each parent uses only one language with the children. The aim is for children to gain competence in both languages (Romaine, 1995). Danjo (2021), through her ethnographic study of language interactions between young children and their mother, criticized the policy as a monolingual approach. Pointing out that the bilingual children in her study used their linguistic resources “strategically and creatively,” she argued that they challenge the monolingual ideology in OPOL policy which reinforces distinctions between languages and between parental and social roles (p. 293). However, OPOL remains a popular policy for multilingual families.

Although the OPOL policy has been widely studied, there are very few studies on children deciding their own OPOL policy. This is one of the gaps in child agency research, which I discuss next.

3.2 Multilingual Children's Agency

Agency is one concept that is crucial to understanding bilingual children's language learning. According to Duff (2012), agency is defined as "people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation" (p. 417). In the field of family language policy, child agency studies examine the child's role in language policy making. Fogle and King (2013) gathered three of their studies on transnational families to examine how children specifically shape, negotiate, and resist their parents' language policy and planning efforts. They found that children shape the family language environment through four processes: "metalinguistic comments about family language rules," "child use of interactional strategies that negotiate or resist parental practices," "parental response to children's growing linguistic competence," and "child enactment of family-external ideologies of race and language" (p. 21). They argued that greater attention must be given to the role of children as powerful agents in influencing the parents' explicit policy-making and implicit strategies.

McCarty et al (2009) conducted a large-scale ethnographic study on Native American youth's language practices. Drawing from the youths' practices in the context of peer, school, and community, they argued that the youths' decision-making processes concerning language are "de facto manifestations of language policy," and therefore language policy can be "implicit and informal" (p.292). They suggested that implicit policy making mechanisms can be

recognized within a social complex characterized by (a) dynamic, heteroglossic linguistic ecologies, (b) hybrid communicative repertoires, and (c) conflicting language ideologies. The researchers pointed out that messages they receive from their society reduces the opportunities with indigenous language use and lead to the construction of a “de facto policy that the indigenous languages are ‘better left unspoken’” (Pye, 1992, as cited in McCarty et al., 2009, p. 303).

Child agency studies in the field of FLP implies that the process of making a family language policy is not a one-way direction—it is not something that the parent imposes on the child. As Fogle and King indicated, children can also influence their parents’ policymaking. Furthermore, the study by McCarty et al (2009) on indigenous youths show that multilingual youths can hold implicit language policies apart from their parents’ views. What influences the negotiation of policymaking regarding language within the family is yet to be examined.

3.3 Language Learning of Transnational Japanese Students

There have been studies on the language learning of transnational Japanese students, but the role of Japanese schools and Japanese supplementary schools in transnational students’ language learning remains largely unexplored. Kanno (2003) conducted research on the identity of Japanese returnees (*kikokusei*) from Canada. Her participants went to a *hoshuko* (Japanese supplementary school), which Kanno suggests “provides intense cultural and

linguistic immersion on a regular basis” and is a “forum where Japanese students can socialize in their L1” (p.127). Examining the role of the supplementary school, she argued that going to these schools leads to a successful L1 maintenance because it provides an opportunity for students not only to learn L1 but also to cultivate a different public identity from the one in Canadian society.

In recent years, the number of children enrolled in Japanese Schools are decreasing, and the background of the students are diversifying (Sato et al., 2020, pp.17-18). This leads to the question of why parents choose to send their children to a school where Japanese is the medium of instruction. Mise (2020) studied the case of Japanese Schools in Taiwan and found that the parents chose to send their children to Japanese School because 1) they want their children to be disciplined in the ‘Japanese’ way, 2) they are interested in the Japanese curriculum style, and 3) they want their children to develop a high skill in Japanese language. She also found that the number of students from multicultural families are increasing, and the schools are responding to the needs of these students. Regarding language education, the Japanese Schools in Taipei and Taichung had extra Japanese classes for children from mixed Japanese families. In all three Japanese Schools in Taiwan, Chinese language classes were held once a week to raise the students’ level of Chinese. In my study, I will further explore the underlying factors that influences the parents’ choice for their children’s schooling.

The literature review shows that first, children can be agents of policy making. While

FLP research focuses on the parents as policy makers and considers children's roles within the parents' language policy, there are limited studies showing how children themselves can be active policy makers. Second, a large portion of studies on transnational children and language acquisition focus on immigrants in Western countries. However, children's mobility within Asia needs to be further discussed as well. This study will contribute to the growing body of research on transnational children by adding the Asian context of mobility.

4 Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research is narrative inquiry, which examines the narratives of the research participants. These narratives can be developed from qualitative data such as field notes and interviews (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry has become one of the principal methods of qualitative research in social sciences (De Fina, 2009). Zhu and Li (2016) stress the importance of studying bilingualism and multilingualism as experiences. As "narrative constitutes past experience at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past" (Riessman, 2008, p. 8), narrative inquiry allows researchers to tap into the experiences of multilingual people. By using narrative inquiry with a life story approach in this research, I examine the process of language policymaking and language use in each stage of their life.

4.1 Research Participants

Two young adults with roots in Japan and Vietnam were interviewed. Both of them attended the same Japanese School in Vietnam, although their enrollment periods did not exactly overlap. The rest of the background information is provided in the table below.

Participant	Gender	Current Age (College Year)	Parents' Nationality	Fluent Languages³
A	F	21 (Junior)	Father: Japanese Mother: Vietnamese	Vietnamese, Japanese, English
B	M	21 (Junior)	Father: Japanese Mother: Vietnamese	Vietnamese, Japanese

Table 1: Background of Research Participants

³ “Fluent languages” refers to the languages the participants themselves answered as “fluent.”

4.2 Research Question

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1) What kind of language policy do transnational students with mixed roots have, and what are their language practices?
- 2) What factors influence them?

4.3 Data Collection

For data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews, once for Participant A and twice for Participant B. Because of COVID-19, interviews were conducted online using the video-conferencing application Zoom. During the interview, the Japanese language was used. Before starting the interview, the overview of the research was explained, consent regarding handling personal information was gained and the participants right to withdraw was properly communicated. Each interview lasted for about an hour and was recorded with consent for transcription. Table 2 shows the transcription conventions used in this study, which were adapted from Duff (2008). After transcribing the interview, I translated it into English for use in this paper.

IN, A, B	IN = interviewer, A, B = participants
(#)	length of pause
(x), (xx), (xxx)	words that were inaudible (# of x = # of inaudible words)
(())	researcher's comments (explanatory details or notes by researcher, e.g., on participant gestures)
?	high rising intonation
Unattached dash	a short, untimed pause
One-sided attached dash	a cutoff

Table 2: Transcription Conventions (adapted from Duff, 2008, p. 157)

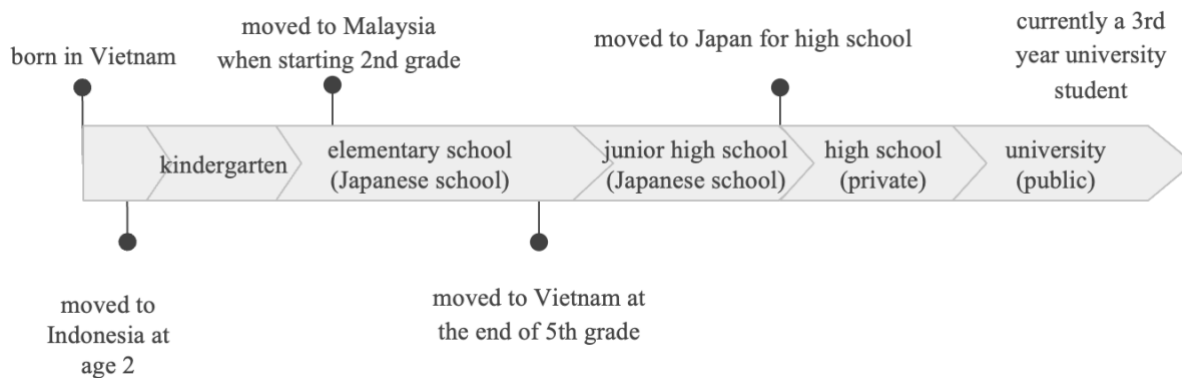
5 Data Analysis and Findings

Among the different methods of narrative analysis, thematic analysis was adopted for this research, which focuses on “what” was being said, instead of “how,” “to whom,” and “for what purposes” (Riessman, 2008, pp. 53-54). In this type of analysis, the researcher gives attention to the participants’ “reports of events and experiences” and theorizes across multiple cases by “identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take” (p. 74). In this study, the following steps were taken to analyze the data. First, the life events in the narrative of each participant were organized

chronologically. Next, for each country they lived in, the language policy and language practice were examined, along with the underlying factors that influenced them. The participants moved to a different country in the middle of the school year, and so it affected the changes their language underwent. Therefore, dividing their life stages by educational stage was not seen as useful for this research. Some stages, such as the infant stage, are put together with the adjoining stage, as there is not enough data to offer explanations on. The following sections present Participant A and B's life stories and their analyses.

5.1 Participant A

In this section, A's life story of her childhood is presented, divided into segments by the country she lived in. Interpretation of the narrative is given at the end of each segment, examining the language policy and language use in each country and the factors that affected them. Graph 2 shows the overview of A's trajectory of migration. The lines with dot ends point to the timing when she moved to a different country.



Graph 2: A's History of Migration

Vietnam and Indonesia: High Multilingual Competence and Emerging of Language Policy

A was born in Vietnam, where her father and mother met and were married. Her family experienced frequent mobility in Southeast Asia because her father's occupation dealt with water treatment in Southeast Asia. Throughout her childhood years in Southeast Asia, she "always moved" with her family. When she was 2 years old, she and her family moved to Indonesia. In Indonesia, she attended an Indonesian kindergarten.

Excerpt 1

A: For kindergarten, or nursery school, I entered a kindergarten where there were only Indonesian teachers and students. And midway through, I changed to a Japanese kindergarten for Japanese language education.

IN: Was that because of your parent's policy or something like that?

A: I don't know the details, but the amount of Japanese language *hafus* ((children with mixed roots)) use is less than regular ((Japanese)) children; it ((Japanese and the other parent's language)) becomes half-and-half.

IN: Mm.

A: In my house, we spoke Vietnamese to my mother and Japanese to my father, so it was fifty-fifty. Since my father was often away on business trips, basically Vietnamese was used more. So from an early age, my Japanese was getting a little rusty. So my parents probably thought they had to do something about it, and they put me in Japanese School.

A used Vietnamese with her mother and Japanese with her father. She stated that she “never spoken to my mother in Japanese and her father in Vietnamese.” She used Indonesian in kindergarten and “spoke Indonesian with the maid and driver because they were basically locals.”

A mentioned that her mother let her take English conversation classes, which A continued until 1st grade. She stated that her mother realized that A enjoyed learning languages; however, she later added, “I didn't feel like I liked it [learning languages] at first. I was probably

just good at it, or quickly learned it.” Some of her neighbors in her apartment were European, and she reflected “I often played with the children when I was little, so I think that’s how I learned it [English].”

Graduating kindergarten, she entered a Japanese School in Indonesia. The reason she went to Japanese School was because her father wanted her to learn Japanese so that he could raise her as a Japanese.

Excerpt 2

IN: So the choice of going to Japanese School, was the reason the same as in kindergarten, for you to learn Japanese?

A: Yes, my father wanted to raise me as a Japanese, so I only have a Japanese citizenship and passport.

Interpretation:

During her life in Indonesia, A’s linguistic repertoire was diverse, being able to speak four different languages (Japanese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and English). Even at her small age, she used different languages for different people to socialize. She chose to speak Japanese to her Japanese father and Vietnamese to her Vietnamese mother. She used Vietnamese to

converse with the driver and maid employed by her family. She learned and used English when playing with European neighbors.

From her early childhood, an implicit language policy can be observed in the family. A's father was to be spoken in Japanese, and her mother was to be spoken in Vietnamese. The policy became more overt when her Japanese declined. When her parents realized that her Japanese "was getting a little rusty," they became alarmed. They acted quickly, changing her school to a Japanese kindergarten.

Malaysia: The Japanese Community

From 2nd grade, she lived in Malaysia with her family for three years. For schooling, she attended a Japanese School there. She described the transition as "relatively smooth" because "transfer students were normal" at Japanese School. Every Sunday, her family had a "routine to go to the Japan club," which is an expatriate community. A took aikido (a type of Japanese martial arts) classes there, while her brother took karate classes.

Excerpt 3

A: There is a club there actually, in Malaysia, called the Japan Club, which is a Japanese community.

IN: Oh.

A: There's a sort of place, and if you go there, there are Japanese restaurants, Japanese DVDs, bookstores, and different things. And there's something like a community center only for Japanese. It's common for everyone to go there on weekends to meet up with friends and take lessons together.

Interpretation:

The "Japan Club" was a place she could socialize with the expatriate Japanese community and immerse in the Japanese atmosphere. Outside Japanese School, she had opportunities to use Japanese to play with Japanese friends. She could engage in Japanese culture through taking Japanese martial arts lessons, dining at Japanese restaurants, and shopping at DVD and bookstores selling Japanese products. The "routine to go to the Japan Club" aligns with her father's policy to raise her "as a Japanese."

Vietnam: Relationships with Father and Classmates

After living three years in Malaysia, her family moved again, this time to Vietnam. She transferred to a Japanese School there. She stated that "the class got along really well" and she

and her classmates often played together on weekends. During some vacations, she visited Japan with her family. During her life in Vietnam, the language she was most confident in was Vietnamese.

A stated clearly that she didn't really like her father when she was little because "he was strict." He was often away from home, as he frequently went on business trips to other countries in Southeast Asia. Sometimes he would be away for about three months. During her exam period and summer vacation, her father decided her everyday schedule, with the timetable "split by thirty minutes." On long-term vacations, he sometimes took her to the Philippines with him "for English study abroad programs." She said that she remembers "crying hard" because she "was separated from [her] mother for a month."

Interpretation:

Moving to Vietnam, she continued her education in Japanese School. This indicates that Japanese continued to be a medium of instruction for her, and she actively socialized with her classmates in Japanese. However, she reflected that among the different languages she could speak, she was most confident in Vietnamese. Her father's action to take her to English study abroad programs in the Philippines shows that he was not only passionate about her

Japanese education, but he was also concerned with her English skills as well. This indicates his view that English is the key to success in the globalized world.

Japan: Entrance Exams and New Culture

Since the Japanese School in Vietnam only had up to junior high school, after graduating many of the students went to different countries such as Singapore, the United States, and Japan for high school. A had the desire to go to high school in Japan. As a Japanese citizen, she looked for schools with admissions for Japanese returnees (*kikokusei*).

Excerpt 4

A: I sent an application for *suisen* ((recommendation by the school principal; those with *suisen* usually do not need to take a written test)) in the October of 9th grade, and I passed that one, and after that I took the exams for my first-choice schools, but I failed.

IN: Oh...

A: So I was thinking of entering the school that I could enter with a *suisen*, but then my father said, “Are you really okay with not passing a single exam (with a written test)?” And if you hear that, you would get infuriated, right?

IN: ((laugh))

A: And so, I took the general exam for the high school that I afterwards went, which was not through the returnee admission.

For high school she went to Japan by herself and started living in the school dorm. During her first month of high school, she, as well as all 10th graders, “could not bring a cellphone to school or dorm.” Thus, her parents would have to “directly call the school dorm” to talk with her. After the 10th graders were allowed to have their phones, she would call her parents “using LINE [a Japanese messaging app] and send emails.”

The culture at the dorm differed completely from her past school. The hierarchy there was “just so strict,” and the older students were treated “like gods.” As a result, the lower grade students “always used humble Japanese” in the dorm.

Interpretation:

For Japanese transnational students, entrance exams are one turning point that determines their high school, which in turn, can determine their future language learning experiences and language practices. A did not pass the exams to schools that had special admission for returnee students. Although she had received admission through *suisen* prior to those exams, her father

urged her to prove her academic ability by passing general admission exams, and she eventually went to the school her father suggested. Her high school was a traditional school with a strict hierarchy and very few multicultural students. Thus, she hardly had any opportunities to use her diverse linguistic repertoire. A mentioned that she “always used humble Japanese” to talk with the older students. Through the lens of language socialization, it can be interpreted that the hierarchy socialized her to use referent honorifics, specifically *kenjogo* (‘humble language’) when talking to the older students (similar findings can be seen in Burdelski (2013)). This contrasts with her previous experience in Japanese School, where she stressed her close relationship with her classmates.

Now

When A started thinking about university, she looked for places with programs “involving English” because she “wanted to keep using foreign languages.” Eventually she went to a university which specialized in languages.

Currently, she is currently in her third year and starting her job search. When asked about what she kind of job she wants to have, she replied that she had dreamed of working at a printing company. However, as her job-hunting season approached, she began to think that “it was not realistic.” She stated, “Since the only ability I have is foreign languages, now I am looking for jobs related to trade and logistics.”

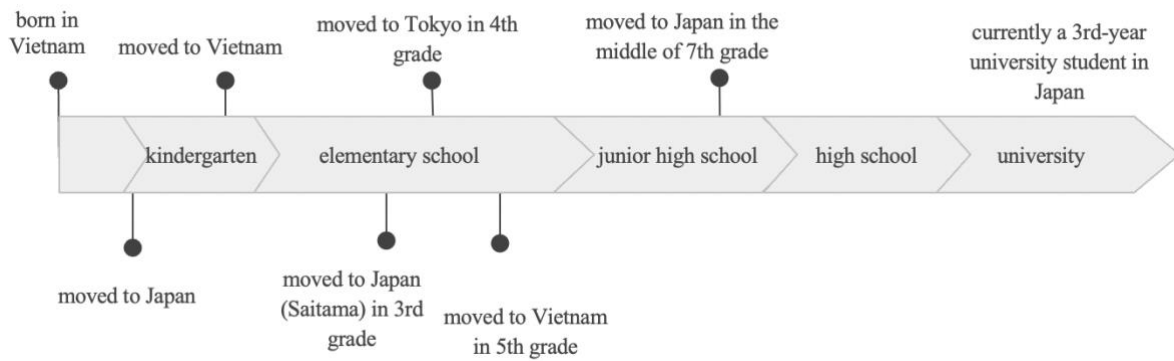
After living in Japan for about six years, she feels that she is most proficient in Japanese.

Interpretation:

During her university and job search, she realized that her strength was in her proficiency in different languages. This realization guided her decision-making for her future paths. She applied to several universities with programs related to English and passed the exam to a major university of foreign language studies.

5.2 Participant B

As with Participant A, Participant B's life story is provided, which is divided into segments by the countries he lived in. Interpretation of the narrative is given at the end of each segment, examining the language policy and language use in each country and the factors that affected them. Graph 3 shows the overview of B's trajectory of migration. The lines with dot ends point to the timing when he moved to a different country.



Graph 3: B's History of Migration

Vietnam (and a Short Period in Japan): Moving Between Each Parent

B was born in Vietnam to a Japanese father and a Vietnamese mother. During his childhood, his mother and father essentially lived in different countries due to their occupations—his mother lived in Vietnam while his father lived in Japan. His mother “sometimes came to visit [Japan], but she was in Vietnam most of the time.” Thus, B “went back and forth” between his mother and his father. During the first few years of his life, he lived with his mother. He then went to his father’s place in Japan and entered a Japanese kindergarten. After “learning some Japanese,” he returned to Vietnam and transferred to a Japanese kindergarten there.

B entered Japanese School in Vietnam for elementary school. When asked about his parents’ decision to put him in Japanese School, he replied, “My mother works at a Vietnamese

company, so she wanted me to study in Vietnam. [One of the parents or both⁴] thought that Japan's education is better [than Vietnam's], so they put me in Japanese School.”

Interpretation:

From kindergarten-age, B moved between his mother and father to live with them. While attending kindergarten in Japan, he learned Japanese, and he continued learning in a Japanese environment after returning to Vietnam. The factor that affected the decision for B to be educated in Japanese was the underlying perception that Japanese education is better than Vietnamese education. He later elaborated on this point, saying that “I think in Vietnam there is the perception that Japanese education is better. Japan as a country is more developed in the first place. If you didn't know [didn't have much knowledge about education], you'd choose Japan.” When faced with the options for B's education, his parents chose Japanese education, affected by this perception.

Japan: Living with Each Parent in One Country

In 3rd grade, B went to Japan because his father told him to “come home.” He lived

⁴ As the interview was conducted in Japanese, there was no clear indication of whether it was one parent or both. The participant was not questioned further in the interview.

with his father in Saitama prefecture and attended a public school there. The school used the same textbooks as in the Japanese School in Vietnam, so he did not have trouble adjusting to the new school.

During 4th grade, his mother came to Japan, and he lived together with his mother, a former classmate from Japanese School, and her mother in Tokyo. The former classmate also had a Japanese father and Vietnamese mother, and her mother “did not speak Japanese very well.” As “she [the classmate’s mother] was lonely and wanted to talk with other Vietnamese,” the mothers decided to live together with their children.

Interpretation:

During fourth grade, B’s home environment underwent a significant change. His mother came to Japan, and she and his former classmate’s mother arranged for them and their children to live together under one roof. Thus, this is B’s first environment in Japan where Vietnamese is used in the home.

Vietnam: Making His Own Decisions

After living with his classmate’s family for a year, B went back to Vietnam. “After the Earthquake [the Great East Japan Earthquake] I returned to Vietnam. I had a fun image of Vietnam.” B did not have a hard time switching back to Vietnamese because he “spoke

Vietnamese at home” with his mother.

He continued his studies at his former Japanese School until 9th grade. At the school, the conversation he had with his school friends “were all Japanese.” B assumed the teachers could only understand Japanese and did not speak Vietnamese. Some of the children who had mixed roots like him could speak Vietnamese, but B reflected that they “still used Japanese nevertheless” because it was the language everybody could understand. B summarized that he “used Japanese for Japanese people.”

When he was in 8th grade, he had a parent-teacher meeting at his school which resulted in his decision to transfer to a junior high school in Japan.

Excerpt 5

B: At the parent-teacher meeting ((meeting with B, his teacher, and his parent))- I did not have high grades at that Japanese School. The teacher said “What are you going to do with these grades? You won’t be able to go to a high school in Japan!” And that’s when I decided, “Oh...then I’ll go to Japan, I’ll go to Japan from now

IN: Oh, so you mean transfer to a school in Japan ((during 8th grade)) rather than taking an entrance exam.

B: I wanted to know, “What are the Japanese kids ((their academic level)) like?”

So I made a decision at the parent-teacher meeting—right at the spot.

Interpretation:

When the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, many foreign people living in Japan returned to their home countries. B also went back to Vietnam during this time.

B's language use in his school reflects his language policy. Using Japanese was not imposed on him by his teachers; the statement that he “used Japanese for Japanese people” shows that he had created his own language policy. B decided to go back to Japan when he was shown his grades and warned by his teacher. His words “that’s when I decided, ‘Oh...then I’ll go to Japan, I’ll go to Japan from now” show his independence to decide his future education. This same independence allowed him to create his own language policy.

Japan: Few Opportunities to Use Vietnamese

B transferred to a public junior high school, which he commuted to from his father’s house. This school, and all the schools in Japan that he attended before, had very few multilingual children. Thus, he only used Vietnamese to converse with his mother.

At the end of 9th grade, he took entrance exams to enter a high school in Japan. He was

qualified to take the special exam for returnees, which constitutes of a Japanese essay and an English test. However, he failed the specialty exam and instead passed the general admissions exam for a private high school.

B entered a university in Japan because he “mainly received Japanese education.” B studies law, and his studies at the university are all in Japanese. B stated that his Japanese level is the same as that of Japanese university students. He said that he has rarely had any opportunities to use Vietnamese during the years he has lived in Japan. Sometimes, he texts his Vietnamese friends, and occasionally (though very rare), he talks to a Vietnamese person he sees when riding the train. Now, he lives with his father, mother, and cousin (on his mother’s side) who is studying in a graduate program at a Japanese university. On his Vietnamese level, he stated, “I have no problems with conversations in Vietnamese, but I still can’t be the conversation facilitator.” He feels his Vietnamese is still not completely proficient in that he cannot actively use slang that young Vietnamese use. Because the language is quickly updated, he said he cannot catch up, unless he is in Vietnam. When he wants to de-stress, however, he uses Vietnamese, because “there are many words that describe emotions.”

Interpretation:

As with A, B also failed in the exam for returnees. B analyzes that his English skills were not

enough for the high-level English questions in the exam. This connects with Goodman (2012)'s statement that returnees are viewed as having high English proficiency, although for returnees who attended Japanese Schools like B, it is not necessarily true. When attending schools in Japan, B only used Japanese and did not have opportunities to use Vietnamese in society. However, he has "no problems with conversations in Vietnamese" and can freely use Vietnamese to describe his feelings, which indicates his proficiency despite having fewer opportunities to use them.

Now

B holds Vietnamese and Japanese dual nationality. However, he stated that if he were forced to choose only one, he would choose Japan. The reason is because he can continue to have a Japanese name⁵. He explained that "in Vietnam, you would likely be trusted in your job by using a Japanese name." On the other hand, he thinks that his Vietnamese name is not so useful: "Even though I have a [Vietnamese] name, I probably won't use it so much, and I don't see any benefits of using it. If I'm asked if I have a Vietnamese name, I would tell the person,

⁵ According to the Civil Code of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the name of a Vietnamese citizen must be in Vietnamese or other ethnic minority languages of Vietnam (<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/vn/vn079en.pdf>).

but I think my Japanese name would be more useful in the future.”

On his language use within the family, B stated that he “speak[s] Japanese to Japanese people.” He speaks Japanese with his father and speaks Vietnamese with the other members of his family. B considers his relatives as a part of his ‘family’: “My mom’s side—Vietnamese people—consider relatives as family too, so if I include my mom’s sister and her child, I would say that there are four people in my family.” His father “can’t speak [Vietnamese], he can’t even do everyday conversations...he does understand what people are saying, and he can speak a little bit.”

Interpretation:

In this narrative, B’s opinions on using his Japanese and Vietnamese names can be seen. Names are one form of language use, and B argues that his Japanese name would prove to be more useful than his Vietnamese name. This implies that Japanese names have a higher status than Vietnamese names in Vietnamese society.

B had formed his own family language policy: to use Japanese to Japanese people, and Vietnamese to Vietnamese people. He had decided to use one language for each parent based on their language abilities. Since his father cannot speak Vietnamese well, he converses with his father in Vietnamese. His mother “can speak Japanese to some extent” and “her Japanese

level is higher compared to his father's Vietnamese level"; thus, his parents talk in Japanese. B had decided his family language policy by observing his parents' linguistic abilities.

5.3 Findings from A and B's Analysis

This section explains the findings from the analysis and how they answer the research questions.

Agency and Language Choice

On the language policy, both participants in this study adopted an OPOL policy within their family based on their own reasoning. They used Japanese for their father and Vietnamese with their mother and separated their use of language for each parent. This shows that transnational children can decide the family language policy through their agency. In B's case, the situation of his parents living in different countries fostered B's agency. By observing his parents' language levels, B decided his family language policy for smooth and effective communication. A had less agency as her father was the primary policy maker for her education. His strong wish to raise his daughter "as a Japanese" influenced A's language policy, which was to use Japanese with her father. It also influenced her language use, as he put her in a Japanese kindergarten and Japanese School and took her to the Japan Club every weekend. A's father also invested in her English education by taking her to a study abroad program in the

Philippines, which hints toward his belief that having English abilities would be of advantage to her. A's statement that she didn't like her father and her crying when she was taken to the Philippines shows that she disagreed with her father's language policy.

Use of Japanese in Communities

Outside the family, B used Japanese to socialize with their classmates at Japanese School in Vietnam. Although he moved frequently between Japan and Vietnam, going to Japanese School kept his education consistent, and he was able to maintain his Japanese at a high level. When living in Southeast Asian countries, A socialized using Japanese at the Japan Club every weekend.

On the other hand, A and B had few opportunities to use Vietnamese in Japan. A went to Japan by herself for high school. She entered a strict hierarchical community in her dormitory, where she was socialized into using honorifics to the older students. Her school, which she entered through the general exam, had very few multicultural students, and she did not have the opportunity to utilize her linguistic repertoire. Therefore, the community of transnational children with mixed roots is an important factor that determines their language practices, which affects their proficiency.

Power Dynamics and Languages

B showed preference to use his Japanese name, considering it to be “more useful [than his Vietnamese name] in the future.” This points to his speculation that Japanese names are often associated with trust in Vietnamese society. His view that his Japanese name is more beneficial than his Vietnamese name indicates that power dynamics between languages impact transnational people’s language policies and language practices. Power dynamics also influenced his parents’ choice of sending him to Japanese School, who had the perception that Japan is a developed country and therefore the education must be advanced as well.

6 Discussion

In this section, I dive deeper into the factors that affect the language policy and language use of transnational children. At the same time, I return to address the gap presented in the literature review and discuss how the findings from the analysis fills the gap.

6.1 Children as Policymakers of FLP

This study showed how transnational children from multilingual families can be active policymakers of their family language policy. In previous FLP research, the parents decided the policy concerning language use within the home; however, in this study both Participant A and B had their own language policy regarding which language to use with each parent. This

may be due to the temporary absence of one of their parents, which can be seen in other Japanese transnational families as well. Even if the family moves together for a parent's post overseas, there are situations where the working parent goes to yet another country alone. In Participant A's case, the father was seen to be actively involved in A's education even while he was away from his family.

As Fogle and King (2013) argued, children negotiate with parents' linguistic practices and ideologies. In addition to the four processes proposed by Fogle and King (2013), a fifth process can be observed through B's data, that of children themselves directly deciding the language policy within the family. During the early stages of B's life, his parents consistently chose to enroll him in Japanese School while he was living in Vietnam, which indicates the existence of a parent-oriented FLP. As B grew up, the continuous absence of one parent caused B to become independent enough to create his own language policy. When he was older, he made his own decisions on what language to use with his family and friends. He also decided to go to Japan in the middle of junior high school, which was not suggested by his teacher or parents. Therefore, rather than resistance of a parent-oriented FLP, a shift to the child-oriented FLP can be seen within the family.

A's narrative also shows her negotiation with her parents' policies and ideologies. In A's case, although her father was often away from the family, he continued to have a strong influence on her education. Her statement that she didn't like her father so much and her

recollection of crying when he took her to an English study abroad program show her resistance to his policy. From high school, she lived by herself in Japan, and she was able to pursue her interest in languages and literature. Although both A and B did not grow up in an environment where both parents were always living together, their negotiation with their parents' policy played out differently.

6.2 Power Relations and Language Choice

This study also suggests that a significant factor influencing the transnational families' choice of education and children's language acquisition is the status of Japan and the Japanese language. Transnationalism is closely tied with globalism and power dynamics between countries. Many discourses on transnational children's language policy, education, and practice argue that English proficiency is seen by parents as the key to success in the globalized world. However, this study suggests that in Southeast Asian countries, Japanese proficiency can be considered advantageous as well. B's narratives about Japanese education being considered "better" in Vietnamese society and Japanese names carrying trust also points to assumptions that parents may have about Japan and Japanese education. Japanese language could be considered as more advantageous in the globalized society because of Japan's perceived

economic status. These can affect the transnational and multicultural families' choice of school, which affects the children's language practice.

The influence of English as a lingua franca on language policy and language practice of transnational students was seen in this study as well. In A's narrative, she stated that her father took her to short-term English study abroad programs. Although A could speak the language of each country she lived in and had a diverse linguistic repertoire, her father invested in her Japanese and English education, the languages with power in Southeast Asia according to the father's view.

Therefore, power relations between languages are a key factor in determining the language learning and language practice of transnational students. The ideology that proficiency in a powerful language leads to future success affects the parent's push for an educational system or a language policy. In turn, this influences language practice and children's policy language practice or adoption of language.

7 Implications

The data analysis showed that standardized national language policies also affect transnational students' language practices. In Japan, most 3rd year junior high students who are not enrolled in a combined junior and senior high school take entrance exams to enter the school

of their choice. Some high schools have adopted the *kikokusei* (returnee) exam made in consideration for these students. Types of returnee exams include 2 (English and Japanese)- or 3 (English, Japanese, and math)-subject exams, a combination of English and an interview, and interview only, as opposed to the 5-subject (English, Japanese, math, social studies, science) general exams. This shows that among those who received their education abroad, those with high English proficiency have more advantage in the exam. Both participants in this study first took returnee exams, being eligible for the *kikokusei* admissions. However, they did not pass the tests, and in the end, they entered high schools based on passing their general exams. This implies that although the *kikokusei* exam was established so the students who received schooling abroad would not be at a disadvantage in the Japanese educational system, those without high English proficiency or overall high academic level can be disadvantaged by the *kikokusei* admission system. In their studies on the *kikokusei* exam, Ida (2021) and Inada (2012) pointed out that the definition of the term *kikokusei* and the image associated with it causes inequity in the exam. Therefore, recognition of the diversity of transnational Japanese students and investigation of their education needs is necessary. To promote further equity, it is also important for students and their families to be able to recognize the advantaged or disadvantaged position they are placed in.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Findings

This research explored the trajectory of language policy and language use of transnational students with mixed roots. Using narrative inquiry, they were examined from the children's perspectives. I return to answer the research questions, which are:

- 1) What kind of language policy do transnational students with mixed roots have, and what are their language practices?
- 2) What factors influence them?

For the first research question, I found that both participants of this study decided to take a one-parent-one-language approach in their FLP. They had varying degrees of agency, and as they decided their own language policy, their negotiation with their parents' ideologies and language policies took place.

The main factors that influenced both A and B's language policy and language practices were their agency, their communities, and the power dynamics between languages. In the discussion, I argued that children utilize their agency to decide their language policy, and although A and B grew up with similar backgrounds, their negotiation played out differently. I also argued that the ideology that proficiency in a language with power leads to future success influenced parent's and children's preference for an educational system or a language policy, which in turn influences children's language practice. The analysis of participants' narratives implied the need to assess Japanese entrance exam systems for returnees, as the exam causes

some transnational students to be disadvantaged.

8.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

There is a certain limitation to interviewing participants about past recollections and experiences as they may lack accuracy. However, through the perception of the participants, it is possible to learn about their life trajectories from their specific point of view and what is important to them. A longitudinal study conducted from early childhood would give a more objective or precise understanding of the language situation of transnational children.

We have seen in past literature that the role of parents in family policy making has been explored. In my research, I have considered the point of view of children. In future research, interviews including all family members may reveal the whole picture of the dynamics presented in language education policies. However, in that case, it would also be necessary to consider the notion of "family" and its possibly restricted definitions as well the hierarchies and family power dynamics.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

- People with mixed roots like you tend to be called *hafu* in Japan, but how have you been called by people around you (for example, Japanese/Vietnamese/*hafu*)? What do you prefer to call yourself?
- What languages are you proficient in? What is your level of each language? Which language are you most comfortable with?
- What is your nationality?
- Please tell me about your family members. What are their occupations?
- What language do you use with each member of your family? Has that changed overtime? How?
- Please tell me about your childhood.
- When you moved to a different country, did you move with your parents each time?
- Why did you move to [a certain country]?
- Who did you live with in [a certain country]?
- How did you or your parents decide on your elementary/middle/high school?
- What language did you use in the class? With your friends?
- Were you involved in clubs (*bukatsu*) or extracurricular activities? Please tell me about

them.

- Did you face difficulties frequently transitioning schools? Why?
- Did your family have rules on what language to use, for example, what language to use with each parent?
- Was there a period where the relationship with your parents changed? Please tell me about it.
- Did your communication with your family and friends change during COVID? How?
- Who do you live with now? Where do your parents live now?
- What kind of occupation are you interested in?
- How do you reflect on your educational experience?