



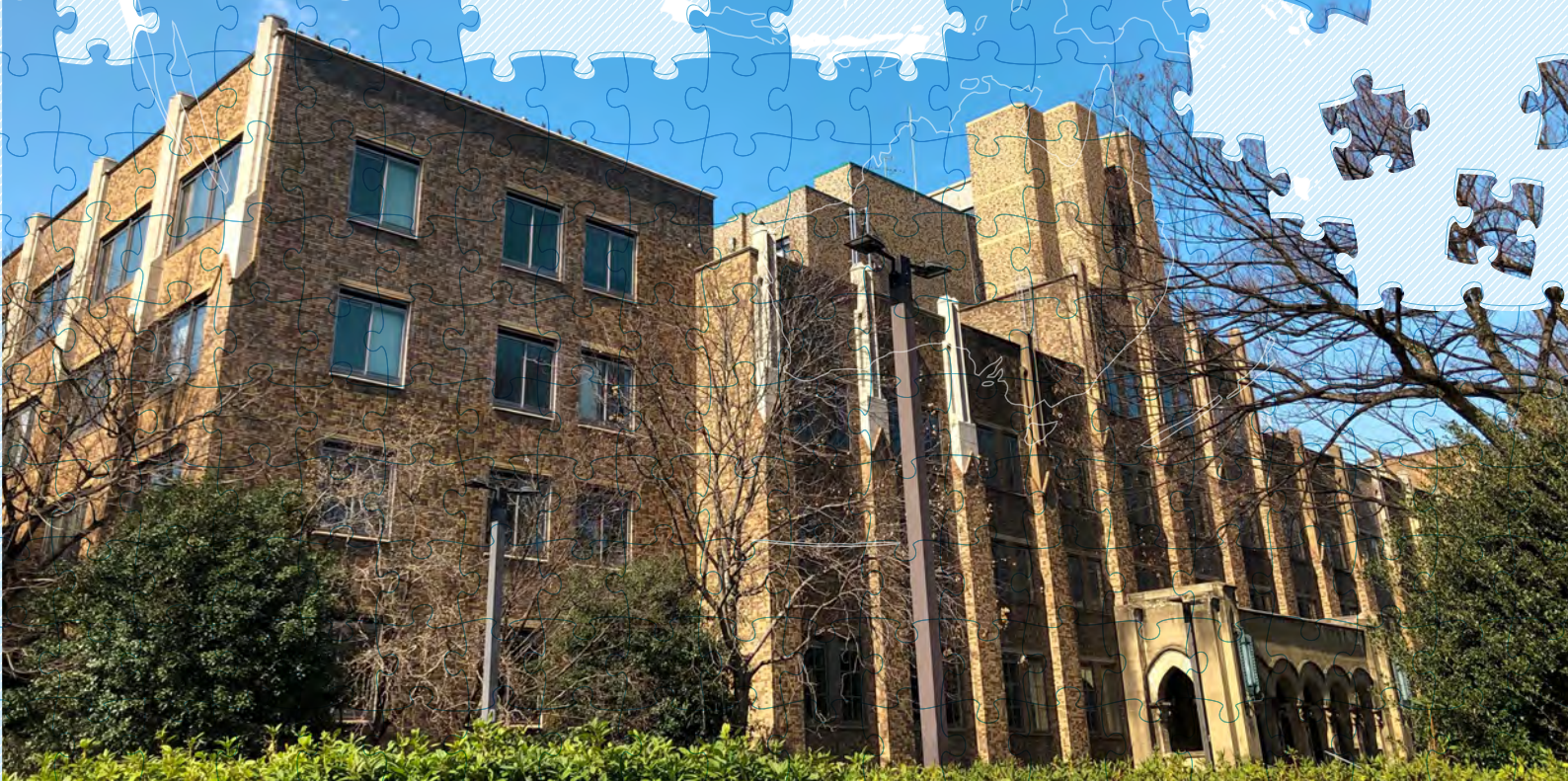
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School Belonging of Students with Immigration Background in Japan: Evidence from TIMSS 2015, 2019, and 2023



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School Belonging of Students with Immigration Background in Japan: Evidence from TIMSS 2015, 2019, and 2023

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Abstract

This study examines the sense of belonging at school of children with immigration background in Japan using data from 11,139 fourth-grade students who participated in TIMSS 2015, 2019, and 2023. Immigration background is operationalized through parents' birthplace, the child's birthplace, and language use at home. Ordered logit models analyze four outcomes: school enjoyment, school safety, school membership, and school pride. The results show generally limited associations: no clear differences were found for school enjoyment and pride. However, children with one foreign-born parent reported a weaker sense of safety, while those using a non-Japanese language at home reported weaker sense of membership at school. Interactions suggest that the association between home language and school pride varies by parental occupation, although this finding remains exploratory. The findings demonstrate that school belonging is multidimensional and underscore the need to distinguish migration background, children's own migration experiences, and home language environments when examining the experiences of migrant children.

Keywords

School belonging, school experiences, immigrant children, educational inequality, TIMSS

1. Background

As the immigrant population in Japan has grown and become increasingly settled, the educational experiences of immigrant children attending Japanese schools have emerged as an important issue not only in educational policy but also in the sociology of education. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the number of students requiring Japanese-language instruction has continued to increase, while their linguistic backgrounds have become increasingly diverse (MEXT 2024). Previous research in this field has primarily focused on issues as the need for Japanese-language instruction, academic achievement, progression to upper secondary education, and non-enrollment in school (Shimizu and Shimizu, eds. 2001; Sakuma 2006; Kojima 2006). These are essential issues in considering how educational opportunities can be guaranteed.

By contrast, insufficient attention has been paid to the subjective dimension of how migrant children experience school as a place. This dimension includes children's psychological evaluations of school and their adjustment to school life, such as their enjoyment of school, perceived security, their sense of membership, and pride in the school they attend. Although

these subjective perceptions are distinct from academic achievement itself, they provide an important foundation for participation in and continued engagement with school life, psychological well-being, and, ultimately, educational attainment.

Existing research has demonstrated that subjective perceptions of school experiences are associated with various dimensions of children's development and academic outcomes. One such perception is a sense school belonging, which refers to the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported within the school community (Goodenow and Grady 1993). School belonging is associated with academic motivation, socio-emotional adjustment, behavioral adjustment, and academic achievement, while a weak sense of belonging may also contribute to absenteeism and increase the risk of dropping out of school (Allen et al. 2018; Korpershoek et al. 2020). It has further been linked to mental health outcomes later in life (Allen et al. 2024). Perceived school safety, meanwhile, encompasses not only the absence of violence and bullying but also students' subjective perceptions that they can participate in school life without feeling threatened or anxious. Particularly among students with a migration background, perceptions of being safe at school have been shown to be closely associated with academic achievement (Katschnig and Hastedt 2017).

For immigrant children, linguistic difficulties, distance from school culture, peer relationships, and categorization by others may be related to these school experiences in different ways. Previous studies have pointed out that Japanese schools tend to expect immigrant children to adapt to the majority language and culture rather than actively recognizing cultural and linguistic differences among students (Shimizu and Shimizu, eds. 2001; Kojima 2006; Ito 2021). Research has also shown that immigrant children may be marginalized because of differences in language and cultural background and may consequently experience difficulty establishing a sense of place and belonging within school (Nukaga 2014).

Nevertheless, at least two issues remain insufficiently addressed in research on children with foreign roots in Japan. First, although a considerable body of case-studies and qualitative research has examined particular regions, schools, and nationality groups, few studies have used nationally representative data to investigate the relationship between immigration background and subjective school experiences. Previous qualitative studies have provided detailed accounts of the tensions immigrant children experience in relation to school culture, the circumstances under which they are unlikely to be recognized as requiring support, their relationships with teachers and peers, and their efforts to establish a place

for themselves within school (Shimizu 2006; Kojima 2006; Nukaga 2014; Ito 2021). However, it remains unclear to what extent these findings are broadly shared among immigrant children attending schools across Japan.

Second, previous studies have tended to treat these children as part of a single category defined by nationality or the need for Japanese-language instruction. However, the experiences of migrant children may differ according to their own and their parents' places of birth, the timing of migration, the language used at home, and the socioeconomic circumstances of their families (Shimizu 2006; Hernández et al. 2016). Having a foreign-born parent, being born outside Japan, and using a language other than Japanese at home may each carry distinct meanings. Unless these dimensions are distinguished, it is difficult to determine which background circumstances are associated with particular aspects of children's school belonging.

Accordingly, this study uses Japanese fourth-grade data from the 2015, 2019, and 2023 cycles of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study to capture the impact of children's immigration background through multiple indicators. It distinguishes four dimensions of subjective school belonging – school enjoyment, perceived school safety, sense of membership, and school pride – and examines how each is influenced by immigration background factors. Furthermore, the study investigates whether these

associations vary according to family socioeconomic background by examining interactions with parental educational attainment and occupational status.

2. Previous Research and Analytical Perspective

2.1 School Experiences of Immigrant Children

The difficulties experienced by children with an immigration background in Japanese schools have primarily been examined in relation to language, learning, educational pathways, peer relationships, bullying, and discrimination (Shimizu and Shimizu, eds. 2001; Sakuma 2006; Shimizu 2006; Kojima 2006). Regarding language in particular, difficulties in using Japanese can create problems in interpersonal relationships and learning, which may contribute to disadvantages in educational attainment, including school absenteeism and non-enrollment (Takenoshita 2005). Moreover, even when immigrant children can communicate in Japanese in everyday situations, they may not have sufficiently developed the language proficiency required for academic learning. This is because conversational proficiency differs from the language proficiency needed to understand abstract concepts and participate in subject-based learning (Cummins 2000). Consequently, even children who appear to have adapted to Japanese-language communication and school life may continue to experience linguistic and academic difficulties, while their need for support may remain unrecognized

by the school (Shimizu 2006; Ito 2021).

Furthermore, when Japanese schools operate on the implicit assumption of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, the languages and cultures that children with have developed within their families are unlikely to be recognized as resources that can support their school lives. In Japanese school culture, the belief that fairness requires treating all students in the same manner thus may lead schools to overlook the distinctive backgrounds and support needs of immigrant children (Shimizu and Shimizu, eds. 2001; Kojima 2006). Teachers have also been found to experience tension between “equal treatment” and “individualized consideration” when providing specialized support to newcomer students (Ito 2021). Under such a school culture, migrant children may be expected to adapt unilaterally to the Japanese language and Japanese school culture. When their home languages and cultural backgrounds are not recognized within the school, these characteristics may be treated as differences that must be overcome. Such experiences are likely to manifest as psychological distance from school and difficulty establishing a sense of place within it – dimensions that cannot be captured solely by academic achievement (Nukaga 2014).

Immigrant children may also experience difficulty forming friendships or may be subjected to teasing and exclusion because of differences in language

proficiency, cultural background, names, or physical appearance (Shimizu and Shimizu, eds. 2001; Shimizu 2006; Banstola et al. 2023). Analyzing data on Japanese fourth-grade students from TIMSS 2003 and 2007, Nakahara (2021) demonstrated that children with at least one foreign-born parent were more likely to experience multiple forms of bullying than children whose parents were both born in Japan. Even after accounting for factors such as the frequency of Japanese use at home and the timing of migration to Japan, migrant children remained more likely to experience teasing. This suggests that their exposure to bullying may arise not only from linguistic and cultural differences but also from the very fact of having an immigrant background. Moreover, the failure of schools to respect children's languages and cultures, as well as their categorization by others as "foreigners," may affect their self-perceptions and peer relationships (Kojima 2006; Nukaga 2014). Experiences of teasing, exclusion, and differentiation may undermine children's sense of safety at school and their perception of being accepted as members of the school community, independently of whether they generally like school.

Support for children with migrant backgrounds is also not necessarily shared consistently across the school organization. Teachers may differ in how they perceive students' support needs, while attention to social and cultural differences may not be recognized as an issue requiring a school-wide

response. These conditions make it difficult to provide systematic support (Ito 2023). As a result, when children appear on the surface to have adapted to school life, the linguistic and psychological difficulties underlying their apparent adaptation may be overlooked.

Nevertheless, having an immigrant background does not necessarily lead directly to negative school experiences. The school experiences of these children vary according to factors such as their own and their parents' places of birth, the timing of migration to Japan, Japanese-language proficiency, the family's anticipated length of residence, family socioeconomic circumstances, support provided by the school, and relationships with teachers and peers (Shimizu 2006; Nukaga 2014; Hernández et al. 2016). Migrant children may also establish multiple places of belonging across school, family, neighborhood, and ethnic communities, constructing their sense of belonging as they move between these different social contexts (Nukaga 2014).

Immigrant background should therefore not be treated as a fixed and homogeneous attribute. Instead, it is necessary to distinguish between children's own migration experiences, their parents' places of birth, language practices within the home, and the socioeconomic resources available to their families.

2.2 School Enjoyment, Safety, Membership, and Pride

Enjoying school, feeling safe at school, feeling like a member of the school, and taking pride in one's school are interrelated and can all be broadly understood as dimensions of school belonging. School belonging refers to the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, included, and supported within the school community (Goodenow and Grady 1993). Nevertheless, school belonging is a multifaceted concept (Alink et al. 2023), and these four dimensions do not necessarily represent the same aspects of students' school experiences.

School enjoyment or liking being at school is an affective evaluation of school life as a whole, encompassing classes, relationships with peers and teachers, school events, and other aspects of school life. It indicates the extent to which children regard being at school positively. Such evaluations have been identified as important factors that may influence students' approaches to learning and their academic achievement (Ladd and Dinella 2009).

School safety refers to the perception that one can spend time in their school environment without experiencing physical or psychological threats or anxiety. School safety encompasses not only the objective incidence of violence and bullying but also the subjective dimension of whether children themselves perceive school as a safe place. Among students with immigrant

backgrounds in particular, feeling safe at school is strongly associated with academic achievement, underscoring the educational importance of creating a safe school environment (Katschnig and Hastedt 2017).

Feeling like a member of the school can be regarded as a central element of school belonging, as defined above. What matters is not merely formal enrollment in a school but whether children position themselves as members of the school community and feel that they have a place within it. Meta-analyses have shown that school belonging, including this sense of membership, is associated with academic motivation, self-efficacy, socio-emotional adjustment, behavioral adjustment, and academic achievement (Allen et al. 2018; Korpershoek et al. 2020).

School pride appears tied more specifically to a student's own sense of academic competence, unlike a general enjoyment of school, which may stem from a range of sources such as friendships or everyday school life. It has been noted that academically successful students are likely to experience a sense of personal pride, which in turn contributes to a positive regard for school (Terrett et al., 2012).

These subjective perceptions are unlikely to be shaped uniformly. For example, a child may generally enjoy school while finding it difficult to feel like a member of the school community because of linguistic or cultural

differences. Similarly, a child may participate in classes and school events but remain unable to perceive school as fully safe because of concerns about teasing or exclusion. Even when a child has established a certain place within the school, the failure of the school to recognize the child's language or cultural background may make it difficult for the child to attach positive value to attending that school (Nukaga 2014).

Accordingly, an examination of the school experiences of migrant children must distinguish not only their general affective perception of school but also their sense of safety, sense of membership, and school pride. Analyzing these perceptions separately makes it possible to identify more specifically the dimensions of school life in which these children encounter difficulties.

2.3 Family Socioeconomic Resources

The association between immigration background and school experiences may also be conditioned by the socioeconomic resources available to the family. Families' economic and cultural resources are closely associated with children's educational experiences and attainment. Parental education and occupation are related not only to income but also to knowledge of the school system, familiarity with language and behavioral styles considered educationally advantageous, communication with teachers, and the capacity

to support children's learning (Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 2011). Parents with higher levels of education or professional occupations are likely to have greater access to information about the school system and to be better able to mobilize the resources needed to communicate with teachers and support their children's learning. When their children encounter difficulties at school, these parents may also be more able to request explanations or action from the school and to utilize educational and support resources outside the school. Such parental responses may affect children's adjustment to school. Indeed, previous research has reported that children from more socioeconomically advantaged families tend to hold more positive perceptions of their school experiences (Brinkmann et al. 2024).

The resources available to immigrant families are far from uniform though. The educational experiences and attainment of children with a migration background have been shown to vary not only by immigrant generation but also according to socioeconomic conditions such as parental education and household income (Hernández et al. 2016). It is therefore necessary to consider socioeconomic differences among migrant children rather than simply comparing children with and without a migration background.

At the same time, the use of a language other than Japanese at home is

itself a cultural and linguistic resource. The use of a non-Japanese language in the home should therefore not automatically be interpreted as indicating a lack of linguistic ability or cultural resources. Multilingualism may support family relationships, cultural identity, and the development of future language proficiency. Issues arise when a mismatch exists between home language practices and the monolingual institutions and culture of the school, while insufficient resources or support are available to bridge that gap. If a school recognizes Japanese as the only legitimate language and fails to acknowledge home languages as educational resources, linguistic diversity within the family may operate to the disadvantage of children's school participation and sense of belonging (Cummins 2000; Nukaga 2014). Conversely, when parents possess extensive knowledge of the school system as well as substantial cultural and economic resources, they may be better able to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps between the home and the school and alleviate the difficulties their children encounter in school life. The association between home language use and school belonging may therefore vary according to the family's socioeconomic position.

Accordingly, this study examines interactions with parental education and occupation in addition to the main effects of each immigration indicator. This analysis seeks to determine whether the association between migrant

background and school belonging varies according to the family's socioeconomic position. This study thus addresses the following three research questions: Firstly, how are parents' place of birth, children's own place of birth, and language use at home associated with enjoyment of school, feeling safe at school, feeling like a member of the school, and taking pride in one's school? Secondly, do the associations with their migrant background differ across these four dimensions of school belonging? And thirdly, do the associations between immigrant background and school belonging vary according to parental education and occupational status?

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Data

The analyses use data from Japanese fourth-grade students who participated in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 cycles of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). TIMSS is an international assessment conducted every four years. In addition to assessing students' achievement in mathematics and science, it collects information on their family backgrounds and learning environments through questionnaires administered to students, parents, teachers, and schools. This study pools the Japanese data from the 2015, 2019, and 2023 cycles and analyzes them as

repeated cross-sectional data. The analytical sample consists of fourth-grade students with valid responses for the dependent variables and the principal independent variables. The combined analytical sample across the three survey cycles comprises 11,139 students.

3.2 Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are the following four items from the student questionnaire: “I like being in school” (*school enjoyment*), “I feel safe when I am at school” (*school safety*), “I feel I belong at this school” (*school membership*), and “I am proud to go to this school” (*school pride*). Each item is measured on a four-point ordinal scale. For the analyses, all items were coded in the same direction so that higher values indicate greater enjoyment of school, a stronger sense of safety, a stronger sense of school membership, and greater school pride. Rather than combining these four items into a single composite school belonging index, this study treats each item as a separate dependent variable. This approach makes it possible to distinguish whether the children’s immigrant background and their parents’ socioeconomic position affect the various dimensions of school belonging differently.

3.3 Immigrant Background Variables

Three independent variables are used to capture the children’s immigrant

background: parents' place of birth, the child's place of birth, and language use at home. First, based on responses to the question in the parent questionnaire "Were the child's parents born in Japan?", parents' place of birth was classified into three categories: "both parents born in Japan", "one parent born outside Japan", and "both parents born outside Japan". This question identifies only whether the parents were born in Japan; it does not provide information on their nationality or specific country or region of birth. Second, based on responses to the question "Was your child born in Japan?", the child's place of birth was classified as either "born in Japan" or "born outside Japan". Lastly, language use at home was classified as either "Japanese only" or "including a language other than Japanese" based on responses to the question "What language do the child's parents use when speaking with the child at home?". TIMSS allows parents to report multiple languages used when speaking with their child. Among languages other than Japanese, the most frequently reported languages for both mothers and fathers were English, Chinese, other languages, Korean, and Portuguese, in that order. However, parents' nationality or country or region of origin cannot be uniquely determined from language use at home. Accordingly, this study does not use specific languages as proxies for nationality; they are presented only as descriptive information indicating linguistic diversity within the

home. Responses of “not applicable” to the questions concerning parents’ place of birth and language use at home were treated as missing.

Although these three variables are interrelated, each captures a distinct dimension of the children’s migrant background. Parents’ place of birth reflects the migration background of the parental generation, the child’s place of birth reflects the child’s own migration experience, and language use at home represents the child’s everyday linguistic environment. The three measures are therefore treated as distinct indicators rather than being combined into a single measure.

3.4 Control Variables

The control variables include the child’s gender, survey year, parental educational attainment, and parental occupation. Parental educational attainment was classified according to whether at least one parent had completed a university degree or higher. Parental occupation was classified according to whether at least one parent held a professional occupation. The interaction analyses include product terms between each principal indicator of immigrant background and parental educational attainment, as well as between each indicator and whether at least one parent held a professional occupation. Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented below in

Table 1.

Parental occupation is commonly used as an indicator of a family's socioeconomic position. In immigrant families, however, occupational status in Japan may be shaped not only by educational attainment and skills but also by country of origin, residence status, Japanese-language proficiency, the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, and occupational mobility associated with migration. Parental occupation should therefore not be interpreted uncritically as a straightforward measure of socioeconomic resources. In this study, interactions with parental education are used to examine whether socioeconomic resources moderate the associations of interest. By contrast, interactions with parental occupation are treated as an exploratory analysis of heterogeneity by social position among migrant families.

3.5 Analytical Strategy

Because the dependent variables are measured on four-point ordinal scales, an ordered logit model is estimated separately for each item. These models examine how the independent variables are associated with the probability of selecting a more positive response category on each dependent variable. The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, models are estimated to examine the

associations of each immigrant background indicator while controlling for the child's gender, survey year, parental education, parental occupation, and other relevant variables. Second, interaction terms involving parental education and occupation are included to examine whether the associations between immigrant background and school belonging vary according to the family's socioeconomic background.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Across all three immigrant background indicators, immigrant children accounted for approximately 1–2% of the total sample (Tab. 1). Thus, even in a large-scale survey representative of fourth-grade students in Japan, the absolute number of immigrant children was limited. In particular, the category of children whose parents were both born outside Japan was small, suggesting considerable uncertainty in the corresponding estimates. The following results are therefore interpreted cautiously in light of this limitation. Responses to the dependent variables (school enjoyment, school safety, school membership, and school pride) were slightly right-skewed with relatively small standard deviations. Moreover, the school-level intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were below 0.1 for all four outcomes, indicating that variation among students attending the same school was greater than

variation between schools.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Used in the Analyses

	Mean	SD	ICC		Mean	SD
Dependent variables				Survey year		
I like being in school (enjoyment)	3.210	0.769	0.087	2015	0.374	0.484
I feel safe when I am at school (safety)	3.301	0.761	0.061	2019	0.343	0.475
I feel I belong at this school (membership)	3.121	0.857	0.055	2023	0.283	0.450
I am proud to go to this school (pride)	3.069	0.843	0.075	Gender		
Parents' birthplace				Male	0.498	0.500
Both parents born in Japan	0.975	0.158		Female	0.502	0.500
One parent born outside Japan	0.019	0.136		Parental education		
Both parents born outside Japan	0.007	0.082		University degree or higher	0.456	0.498
Child's birthplace				Below university level	0.540	0.498
Born in Japan	0.990	0.098		Not applicable or no response	0.004	0.065
Born outside Japan	0.010	0.098		Parental occupation		
Language use at home				Professional occupation	0.358	0.479
Japanese only	0.980	0.139		Nonprofessional occupation	0.563	0.496
Includes other language than Japanese	0.020	0.139		Not applicable or no response	0.079	0.269

N = 11,139. SD = standard deviation; ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient. Note: For categorical variables, the mean represents the proportion of respondents in each category.

4.2 Associations Between Immigration Indicators and School Belonging

Table 2 presents the results of the ordered logit analyses for the four dependent variables. None of the three indicators were statistically significantly associated with school enjoyment. Similarly, no consistent main effects of the immigration background indicators were observed for school pride. These results provide no evidence that immigrant children evaluate school more negatively overall than children whose parents were both born in Japan or children who use only Japanese at home.

Regarding students' sense of safety at school, children with one foreign-born parent were less likely to select a more positive response category than children whose parents were both born in Japan (OR = 0.766, $p < .10$). This result suggests that children with one foreign-born parent may be less likely to experience school as a safe place than children whose parents were both born in Japan. However, because this result was significant only at the 10% level, it should be regarded as an exploratory finding requiring further examination rather than as conclusive evidence. No statistically significant association with school safety was observed among children whose parents were both born outside Japan. Given the small number of children in this category, however, the absence of a statistically significant result does not necessarily indicate the absence of an association.

For school membership, children who used a language other than Japanese at home tended to select less positive response categories (OR = 0.711, $p < .05$). This result indicates that children's everyday home language environment, rather than their own or their parents' place of birth, is associated with their sense of membership at school. In other words, unlike parents' or children's place of birth, the language environment that children experience in their everyday family lives may be related to their sense of belonging at school.

A comparison of models with and without controls for family socioeconomic background showed no substantial changes in the direction or magnitude of the coefficients for the immigration indicators. The associations described above therefore cannot be explained solely by compositional differences in family socioeconomic background between children with and without an immigrant background. Moreover, TIMSS data do not directly measure children's specific level of Japanese-language proficiency, peer relationships, or experiences of discrimination and bullying. Using a language other than Japanese at home does not necessarily indicate limited Japanese-language proficiency. It is therefore not possible to conclude that the use of a non-Japanese language at home reduces school belonging through lower Japanese-language proficiency

Table 2. Ordered Logit Analysis of Foreign Roots and School Belonging

	School enjoyment			School safety			School membership			School pride		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Parents' birthplace (Ref.: Both parents born in Japan)												
One parent born outside Japan	-0.137	0.153		-0.267	0.152	+	0.031	0.150		-0.037	0.148	
Both parents born outside Japan	-0.102	0.268		0.062	0.274		0.082	0.265		-0.030	0.271	
Child's birthplace (Ref.: Born in Japan)												
Born outside Japan	0.014	0.198		-0.089	0.195		-0.169	0.192		-0.010	0.193	
Language use at home (Ref.: Japanese only)												
Includes a language other than Japanese	0.180	0.176		0.131	0.174		-0.341	0.173	*	-0.117	0.172	
Survey year (Ref.: 2015)												
2019	-0.301	0.043	***	-0.082	0.043	+	-0.164	0.042	***	-0.117	0.042	**
2023	-0.265	0.046	***	-0.240	0.045	***	-0.249	0.045	***	-0.087	0.044	+
Gender (Ref.: Male)												
Female	0.334	0.036	***	0.104	0.036	**	0.023	0.035		0.346	0.035	***
Parental education (Ref.: Below university level)												
University degree or higher	0.123	0.038	**	-0.005	0.038		0.218	0.037	***	0.072	0.037	+
Not applicable or no response	-0.338	0.269		-0.303	0.270		-0.294	0.263		-0.344	0.262	
Parental occupation (Ref.: Nonprofessional occupation)												
Professional occupation	0.095	0.040	*	0.049	0.040		0.158	0.040	***	0.062	0.040	
Not applicable or no response	-0.047	0.069		-0.073	0.069		-0.189	0.067	**	-0.053	0.068	
Threshold 1 2	-3.255	0.062		-3.605	0.068		-2.812	0.054		-2.759	0.054	
Threshold 2 3	-1.742	0.044		-1.951	0.045		-1.375	0.042		-1.128	0.041	
Threshold 3 4	0.543	0.040		0.134	0.040		0.524	0.040		0.828	0.040	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.017			0.005			0.012			0.012		
N	11139			11139			11139			11139		

+p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Ref. = reference category. Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors.

4.3 Heterogeneity by Parental Education and Occupational Position

Finally, an exploratory we examine whether the association between language use at home and school belonging dimensions varied according to parental education and occupational position. We also examined interactions between each indicator of immigrant background and parental educational attainment. None was statistically significant for any of the four dimensions of school belonging, and these results are therefore not reported in the main analyses. Following, we examine interactions between each immigration indicator and parental occupation, and statistically significant interactions were observed only for language use at home. Specifically, as shown in Table 3, the interaction was statistically significant at the 5% level for school pride, while a marginally significant interaction at the 10% level was observed for school enjoyment. No significant interactions were found for school safety or school membership.

More specifically, the association between using a language other than Japanese at home and school pride was more positive when at least one parent held a professional occupation than when neither parent did. An association in the same direction was also observed for school enjoyment. These results suggest that the associations between home language use and both school enjoyment and pride may vary according to parental occupational

position. Nevertheless, the interaction for school enjoyment was only marginally significant at the 10% level, and the number of children in the relevant category was limited. These results should therefore be regarded as exploratory findings requiring further investigation rather than conclusive evidence.

Table 3. Interactions Between Foreign Roots and Parental Occupation

	School enjoyment		School safety			School membership		School pride	
	B	SE	B	SE		B	SE	B	SE
Parents' birthplace (Ref.: Both parents born in Japan)									
One parent born outside Japan	-0.103	0.154	-0.264	0.153	+	0.055	0.152	0.003	0.149
Both parents born outside Japan	-0.073	0.270	0.047	0.275		0.108	0.267	0.007	0.273
Child's birthplace (Ref.: Born in Japan)									
Born outside Japan	-0.005	0.199	-0.102	0.195		-0.178	0.192	-0.035	0.193
Language use at home (Ref.: Japanese only)									
Includes a language other than Japanese	-0.046	0.222	0.033	0.222		-0.449	0.218 *	-0.466	0.218 *
Survey year (Ref.: 2015)									
2019	-0.301	0.043 ***	-0.081	0.043	+	-0.164	0.042 ***	-0.116	0.042 **
2023	-0.265	0.046 ***	-0.239	0.045 ***		-0.250	0.045 ***	-0.087	0.044 +
Gender (Ref.: Male)									
Female	0.334	0.036 ***	0.104	0.036 **		0.022	0.035	0.345	0.035 ***
Parental education (Ref.: Below university level)									
University degree or higher	0.123	0.038 **	-0.004	0.038		0.217	0.037 ***	0.071	0.037 +
Not applicable or no response	-0.338	0.269	-0.298	0.270		-0.295	0.263	-0.342	0.262
Parental occupation (Ref.: Nonprofessional occupation)									
Professional occupation	0.086	0.041 *	0.047	0.041		0.153	0.040 ***	0.050	0.040
Not applicable or no response	-0.051	0.070	-0.087	0.070		-0.186	0.068 **	-0.065	0.069
Language use at home × parental occupation									
Includes a language other than Japanese × Professional occupation	0.491	0.285 +	0.109	0.285		0.269	0.276	0.683	0.279 *
Includes a language other than Japanese × Not applicable or no response	0.238	0.409	0.510	0.418		-0.082	0.415	0.575	0.417
Threshold 1 2	-3.259	0.062	-3.606	0.068		-2.814	0.054	-2.765	0.054
Threshold 2 3	-1.746	0.044	-1.952	0.045		-1.377	0.042	-1.134	0.041
Threshold 3 4	0.540	0.040	0.133	0.040		0.522	0.040	0.823	0.040
Nagelkerke R ²	0.017		0.005			0.012		0.012	
N	11139		11139			11139		11139	

+ p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Ref. = reference category. Note: Entries are ordered logit coefficients with standard errors.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the school experiences of immigrant children using data from Japanese fourth-grade students who participated in TIMSS 2015, 2019, and 2023. Immigrant background was measured in terms of parents' place of birth, the child's place of birth, and language use at home. The analysis examined the associations of these indicators with four dimensions of school belonging: school enjoyment, safety, feelings of membership, and pride.

The results indicate that migrant children do not necessarily have negative experiences across all aspects of school life. Overall, the associations between the immigration indicators and school belonging dimensions were limited, with few clear differences in enjoyment or pride. However, children with one foreign-born parent reported a weaker sense of safety at school, while children who used a language other than Japanese at home tended to report a weaker sense of membership at school. These findings suggest that the sense of belonging at school of migrant children cannot be adequately understood through a simple dichotomy between being “adjusted” and “not adjusted”. Even children who like school and attend it regularly may not feel entirely safe there or perceive themselves as members of the school community. Adjustment to school life is multidimensional, and externally visible attitudes toward school do not necessarily correspond to children's own

feelings of safety or sense of having a place within the school.

It is also important to note that parents' place of birth, the child's place of birth, and language use at home did not produce identical results. Parents' place of birth reflects the family's migration background, the child's place of birth reflects the child's own migration experience, and language use at home represents the child's everyday linguistic environment. Combining these distinct characteristics into a single "immigrant background" category may obscure the specific dimensions of school life in which children experience difficulties.

The weaker sense of safety among children with one foreign-born parent may reflect the limited visibility of their support needs, as well as a discrepancy between their self-perceptions and how they are categorized by others. Children who were born in Japan and experience no difficulty communicating in Japanese in everyday situations may be less likely to be recognized by schools as requiring support. At the same time, even when children themselves do not perceive substantial differences between themselves and their peers, they may be treated as "foreigners" because of their names, physical appearance, or family culture. Nakahara (2021) similarly found that children with at least one foreign-born parent experienced multiple forms of bullying victimization at higher rates and

remained more likely to experience teasing even after the frequency of Japanese use at home and the timing of migration to Japan were taken into account. Such categorization and teasing may undermine children's sense that they can spend time at school safely.

The association between using a language other than Japanese at home and school membership should not be interpreted simply as problems caused by an inability to speak Japanese. Language is not only a means of learning but also a condition for participating in conversations with peers and in group activities. When school life operates exclusively on the assumption that Japanese will be used, differences between home and school language environments may make participation in everyday interactions more difficult. Consequently, children may evaluate school life positively overall while still finding it difficult to feel accepted as members of the school community. Similarly, the use of a language other than Japanese at home should not itself be regarded as a problem attributable to the child or family. A child's home or heritage language is an important resource that supports family relationships and cultural identity. The relevant question is not the child's linguistic background but whether schools are organized on the assumption that children with diverse linguistic backgrounds will participate. The association between home language use and school belonging may reflect not a "deficit"

on the part of children or their families, but rather a mismatch between family language practices and the institutions and culture of the school.

The interactions with parental occupation suggest that the sense of school belonging of immigrant children may vary according to the combination of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the resources available to their families. The observed interaction between having a parent in a professional occupation and using a language other than Japanese at home suggests that the association between home language use and school belonging may differ according to parental occupational position. However, the number of children in the relevant categories was limited. Moreover, the occupations held by parents with immigrant backgrounds may also be related to their country or region of origin, residence status, and migration pathway. Indeed, Nagayoshi's (2021) analysis of immigrants' occupational status in Japan shows that higher educational attainment and employment in a professional occupation before migration increases the likelihood of holding a professional occupation after migration. Holding citizenship in a Western country was also associated with a greater likelihood of professional employment. In light of this diversity, the present results suggest heterogeneity among immigrant families.

An important practical implication of these findings is that children

cannot be assumed to be fully adjusted simply because they attend school or report enjoying it. Surveys and interviews concerning school life should assess children's sense of safety, school belonging, peer relationships, and experiences of teasing and exclusion separately. Attention should also extend beyond children identified as requiring Japanese-language instruction to include those with immigrant backgrounds, such as children with foreign-born parents, even when they experience no difficulty communicating in Japanese in everyday situations.

This study has several limitations. The number of children classified as having an immigrant background was small; the analysis cannot establish causal relationships; and the data provide no information on country or region of origin, Japanese-language proficiency, experiences of discrimination or bullying, or school support systems. Future research should combine quantitative data with interviews involving children themselves to examine the processes through which feelings of safety and school membership are formed. Understanding the experiences of immigrant children is not an issue that concerns only a particular group of students. It raises the broader question of how schools can create environments in which all children, regardless of their families' linguistic or cultural backgrounds, can feel safe and perceive themselves as members of the school community.

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