

Title

Transnational Adult Education Strategies among Brazilian Immigrants in Japan: Rethinking Higher Education through Lifelong Learning Pathways in Global Era

Research Overview

This study examines the experiences of Brazilian adult immigrants in Japan as they navigate disrupted educational pathways and re-engage with learning across borders. By examining life-course and structural constraints, the study explores how Brazilian transmigrant experiences higher education and lifelong learning in the context of mobility, discontinuity, and everyday realities.

Purpose

This research examines the educational experiences of Brazilian immigrants in Japan, many of whom faced challenges such as limited access to higher education in their home countries or disrupted schooling due to migration. Their educational pathways are often characterized by obstacles and discontinuities. Some individuals encountered language barriers that prevented them from enrolling in school. Others struggled to maintain academic progress and ultimately dropped out. Additionally, many experienced disruptions in their education due to their frequent movement between countries.

Despite these challenges, a growing number of Brazilian adults are re-engaging in education. Some enroll in Japanese universities later in life, while others enroll in Brazilian distance-learning universities while residing in Japan. Additionally, some individuals return to Brazil and enroll in local institutions. Beyond formal education, many also participate in lifelong learning programs to enhance their adaptability to life in Japan and expand their social networks. Therefore, this study aims to identify the educational experiences of adult immigrants. It seeks to address challenges that influence their educational trajectories as well as the role higher education play in their lives.

Methods

This study draws on qualitative data collected from Brazilian adult immigrants living in Japan, including some who have since returned to Brazil. The data consists of in-depth interviews that explore their educational histories, migration experiences, and current engagement with learning. The analysis focuses on three key dimensions. First, it looks at structural factors, such as institutional barriers and opportunity structures that shape access to education. Second, it examines experiential dimensions, including personal struggles, motivations, and turning points. Third, it adopts a life-course perspective to understand how learning decisions are made across different stages of life.

The study uses an analytical framework that brings together life-course analysis, andragogy, and the concept of opportunity structures. Life-course analysis helps situate learning within broader trajectories shaped by migration and work. Andragogy focuses on adult learning as self-directed and experience-based. Opportunity structures highlight how access to education is enabled or constrained by social and institutional contexts.

At the center of the analysis is the concept of *transnational adult education strategies*. While previous research often uses “transnational educational strategies” to describe how parents support their children’s education across borders, this study shifts the focus to adults themselves.

Results and Discussion

The findings show that the educational pathways of Brazilian adult immigrants are shaped by a combination of structural constraints and personal agency. On the structural side, participants face multiple barriers. These include limited access to information about educational options, financial constraints, rigid institutional systems, and language challenges. The assumption in Japan that higher education follows immediately after high school makes it difficult for adults with non-linear trajectories to re-enter the system.

At the same time, the study highlights the active role that immigrants play in navigating these constraints. Participants do not passively accept their situations. Instead, they develop strategies to re-engage with learning in ways that fit their lives. For example, enrolling in Brazilian distance-learning universities allows them to study in their native language while continuing to work in Japan. Rather than relying solely on a single national system, Brazilian immigrants strategically integrate educational opportunities across borders. This covers formal institutions, online platforms, and informal learning environments. By doing so, they broaden their educational horizons beyond the limitations of their local context.

The study also raises important questions about the role of higher education. For these learners, higher education is not only about credentials. It is also a space for rebuilding confidence, expanding social networks, and gaining a sense of direction. However, current systems are not designed with these transmigrant learners in mind. There is a need to rethink higher education so that it becomes more flexible and responsive to diverse life trajectories.

In summary, this study argues that adult immigrants should not be perceived as “late” or “non-traditional” learners. Their educational trajectories reflect broader shifts in the nature of learning within a global context. By acknowledging their experiences, we can advance towards a more inclusive comprehension of education, one that acknowledges mobility, discontinuity, and lifelong learning as fundamental, rather than exceptional.