

## **Title**

Navigating Educational Success: Institutional Resources and Family Strategies among Korean Newcomer Second-Generation Youth in Japan

## **Research Overview**

This study examines how Korean newcomer second-generation youth in Japan achieve high educational attainment despite challenges commonly associated with immigrant backgrounds. Drawing on segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou, 1993) and semi-structured interviews, the study explores how institutional pathways, family strategies, and ethnic educational resources shape educational mobility beyond identity-based explanations.

## **Purpose of Study**

Across many societies, immigrant second-generation experience lots of difficulties but researchers often concerned about their educational disparity. Research on immigrant educational attainment has therefore expanded globally, particularly in relation to questions of assimilation and identity formation. Within this literature, segmented assimilation theory has been influential in explaining how immigrant youth experience different pathways of assimilation.

In Japan, research on immigrant-background youth has also increased. However, Korean newcomer second-generation youth remain relatively understudied despite their population and notable educational achievement. One reason is that they are often statistically and socially obscured by the larger population of long-established ethnic Koreans in Japan, “Zanichi Koreans.” In addition, they are frequently regarded as “successfully integrated” in Japan.

Previous studies in Japan, which are strongly influenced to segmented assimilation theory, have suggested that host-society-oriented or hybrid identity formation tends to facilitate upward educational mobility among immigrant-background youth. Yet this study indicate that Korean newcomer youth often achieve high academic outcomes regardless of identity orientation. This raises an important question for global discussions on immigrant incorporation: how do immigrant-background youth achieve educational attainment even when existing theories centered on identity and assimilation cannot fully explain their success?

This study examines how Korean newcomer second-generation youth navigate educational pathways toward higher education in Japan. It focuses on how family educational strategies, school choice, ethnic educational resources, and institutional pathways lead to the university admission. By analyzing educational trajectories among a relatively “successful” immigrant group, this study seeks to contribute to broader international discussions on immigrant education and the institutional conditions that support minority achievement.

## **Research Methods**

This study draws on qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted between June 2023 and March 2026 with 35 Korean newcomer second-generation individuals aged between 18 and 40 in Japan. Participants include graduates of Japanese public and private schools, Korean ethnic schools (not included Chosen-gakko, where are related to North Korea), and international schools. Several participants are currently enrolled in or graduated from highly selective universities in Japan and South Korea.

The interviews explored educational experiences across childhood, secondary education, and university transition processes. A particular attention was paid to parental expectations, school environments, identity formation, educational aspirations, and university admission strategies. The study also examined how participants utilized ethnic educational resources, including Korean language education and institutional networks connected to ethnic schools and nations.

The data were analyzed qualitatively with a focus on identifying recurring patterns in educational trajectories, school selection practices, and institutional resources.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings suggest that high educational attainment among Korean newcomer second-generation youth cannot be explained solely by parental educational background or identity orientation. Although some participants came from highly educated families,

others achieved upward educational mobility despite their parents having relatively low levels of formal education.

The study found that educational trajectories were strongly shaped by institutional pathways and strategic school selection. Participants adopted different university admission strategies depending on the characteristics of the schools they attended, including academically competitive schools, schools emphasizing recommendation-based admissions, Korean ethnic schools, and international schools. These institutional environments provided not only academic preparation but also accumulated knowledge regarding entrance examinations, language learnings, transnational educational opportunities, and comfortable environments.

Contrary to some previous studies, educational outcomes did not significantly differ according to identity orientation. Instead, participants and their families strategically selected educational environments that offered safety, emotional stability, linguistic resources, and access to established university pathways. Some participants attended schools with relatively diverse student populations or selective educational environments where they could avoid bullying and concentrate on academic achievement.

The findings further indicate that ethnic educational resources functioned not simply as mechanisms of cultural retention, but also as strategic resources for educational mobility. Korean language education, ethnic school networks, and transnational university information enabled some participants to pursue higher education opportunities in both Japan and South Korea (sometimes another countries). In this

sense, educational mobility was facilitated through forms of institutional mediation that extended beyond assimilation into mainstream society.

These findings contribute to global discussions on immigrant education by suggesting that educational success among immigrant-background youth may depend not only on patterns of assimilation or identity formation, but also on strategic access to supportive institutional pathways and ethnic educational infrastructures. The Japanese case therefore complicates conventional understandings of segmented assimilation and highlights the importance of examining how educational institutions mediate minority educational mobility across different national contexts.

**Keywords**

Immigrant second generation; Segmented assimilation theory; Korean newcomers; Institutional resources.