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Current status of community-based Japanese education in Hokkaido: A survey of actual practices

Abstract

While an increasing number of foreign laborers are spread widely across Hokkaido, no Japanese language education is available in over 90% of the municipalities. In response to this situation, the Hokkaido Government conducted “Training for Japanese Language Supporters” in seven locations in 2020, in an attempt to establish community Japanese language classes. In addition, as of October 2022, four municipalities in Hokkaido are working to establish Japanese language classes with the support of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) under the “Local-Level Japanese Language Start-Up Program”. Moreover, JICA Hokkaido Center held online Japanese language courses for residents in 2021 and 2022, drawing over 100 participants each year. Ongoing support for community-based Japanese language education can be expected from each of these initiatives, which all began in the 2020s.

This feature article presents detailed information about these new initiatives and highlights the educational support provided by an international exchange association that has been active since the 1990s. The Hokkaido Japanese Language Center has played a central role in the initiatives which the national and prefectural governments led. We begin with a report on their activities from 2020 to 2022. Next, we discuss a Japanese language class supported by the ACA's start-up program in Eniwa City. Then, we examine the details of another municipally-led project intended to promote intercultural cohesion in Tomakomai City. Finally, we report on the process by which an international exchange association created by residents of Ebetsu City in 1996 established a Japanese language class.

Through these four cases, this feature article aims to document the

present state of support for intercultural cohesion and community-based Japanese language education in Hokkaido, which is still in its infancy. We hope this report will be a useful reference for future initiatives.

【Keywords】 Hokkaido, Community-based Japanese education, Intercultural cohesion, Establishing community Japanese language classes, local government initiatives