

JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6653544>

Chiharu Tsurutani

PhD, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

ABSTRACT

The structure of language education system varies from country to country, due to the differences in cultural backgrounds, demands from society and government policy. Inevitably transferring credits or conducting research collaboration across countries are affected by these factors. This short report maps out how Japanese language education is situated in the Australian tertiary education system and discusses its advantages and disadvantages in the event of exchanging credits with Uzbek universities. Useful ideas and pedagogical suggestions for the future development of Uzbek tertiary education will be provided at the end of the report.

Keywords: *language education, Japanese language, exchange program*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Australia is a multicultural society.” They proudly call themselves after abolishing the notorious white Australian policy in 1966. By fully embracing the geographical location adjacent to Asia, Australian universities began to accept many international students not only from Asia, but also from all over the world into their degree programs. The contribution of international education ranges from economy, diplomacy to cross-cultural understanding and international relationships (Adams, Banks & Olsen:2011). In order to carry out this task, their education system has employed a standardized format of syllabi and course description across universities in Australia. The efficiency of this exercise and its practicality which will benefit both Uzbek educators and students are addressed in this paper in the following order:

- Australian tertiary education system
- Japanese language education
- Teaching and assessment methods
- Suggestions to Uzbek educators

2. Australian tertiary education

Students generally spend three years of tertiary education except students in medicine, law and architecture degrees, after completing 6 years of primary and 6 years of secondary education.

6 years of secondary education.

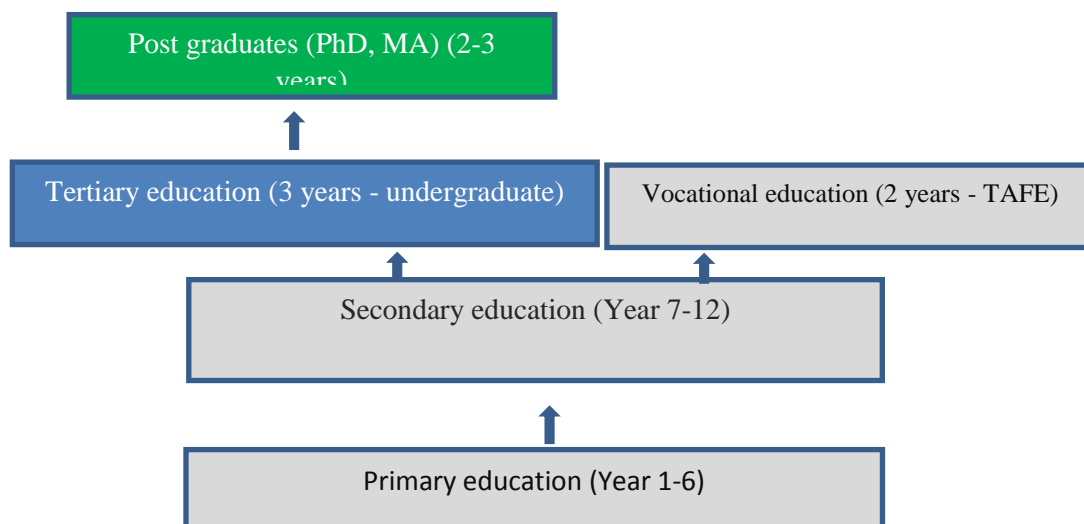


Figure 1: Australian education system

The work load in university degree programs is measured by credit points. In general, students have to complete 240 credit points during their three years of study. This means that they need to have 40 credit points per semester. Most subjects have 10 credit points which requires 4 contact hours per week, that makes average workload for students 16 hours per week. The rest of the week is used for self-study. This credit point system is widely accepted in the world and adapted to calculate credit transfer in the case of accommodating international students through exchange programs. The table below compares the degree requirements in Australian and Uzbekistan universities (*Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages as an example).

Table 1: Comparison of degree requirements in Australian and Uzbek universities

	Australian universities (average)	*SSIFL
Contact hours per week	16 hours	24 hours
Duration of	13 weeks	15 weeks

semester		
Duration of degree	3 years	4 years
Degree requirement	Credit points	Number of hours

Students have the freedom to choose their elective subjects as part of their 240 credit points. A breakdown of 240 credit points is:

- Compulsory subjects: 160 credit points
- Elective subjects: 80 credit points

This allows students to take subjects from other disciplines, such as international business, politics, or intercultural communication as long as they satisfy prerequisite conditions, even if they choose a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Japanese language.

Student autonomy is respected in every aspect of university life from learning style to their time management. There are various student presentations and projects as class activities and every assessment is clearly listed in the teaching schedule so that individual student does not need to approach instructors when, and what they will be tested on. Instructors are not allowed to change the teaching and assessment schedule unless they have a justifiable reason to do so. The beginning and end of the semester are indicated in the academic calendar which is available from the university website. Without the calendar, it is not possible to plan any academic activities between universities.

3. Japanese language education

The number of Japanese language learners in Australia is the fourth highest following China, Indonesia and South Korea (Japan Foundation :2018). However, more than 90% of learners are in primary and secondary schools.

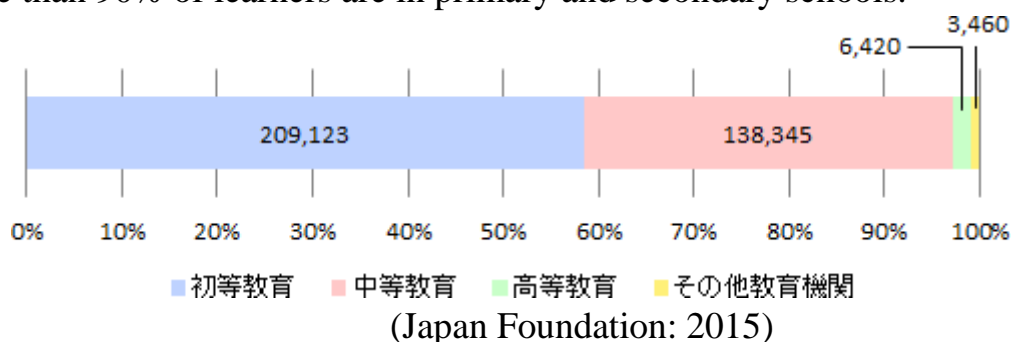


Figure 2: Number of Japanese language learners in Australia

In recent years, the number of Japanese language courses offered at university has declined due to financial reasons through restructuring and downsizing of faculties. The decline in enrolment numbers to a straight arts degree majoring in Japanese language apparently reflects the decline of Japan’s economic power in the

global scene (Ishimi:2017). On the other hand, the popularity of Japanese pop culture such as Anime, J-pop has attracted a new group of learners. There are no longer courses in which students undertake just language courses. Instead, students who major in Japanese normally take another major (double major) in disciplines such as cultural studies, international business, law, or sociology. It is clear to everyone that just studying a language limits their job opportunities. Despite the shift in the global market, Japanese still remains the most popular language chosen by Year 12 students in Queensland, Australia as you see below.

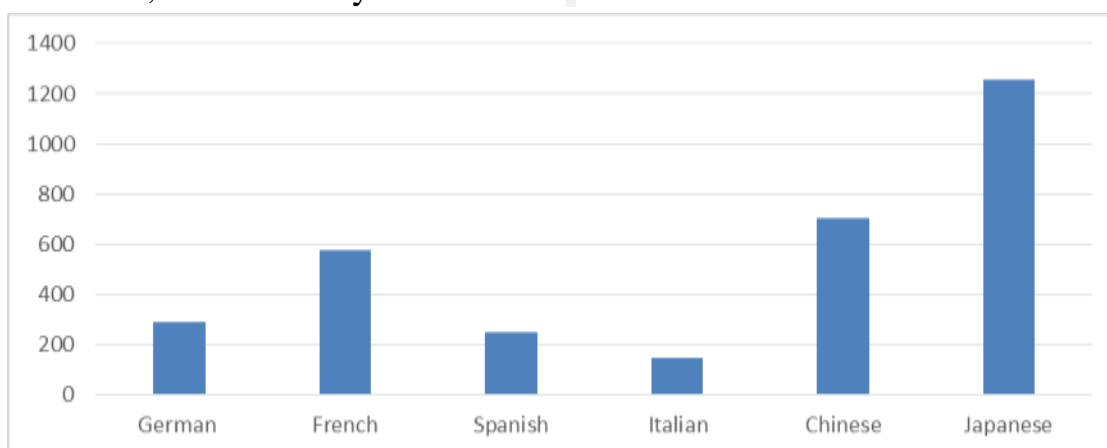


Figure 3: Number of students who take language subjects in Year 12 (calculated using data taken from Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority March 2022)

Students who begin studying Japanese language at university cannot reach a high level of proficiency that is equivalent to N1 or N2 in JLPT1 due to the linguistic differences between their native tongue, English and Japanese. Therefore, it is vital to recruit this cohort of students to Japanese programs for Australian universities.

3-1. Team teaching

In a large course which has more than 70 students, it is common to take the form of team teaching. When one course is taught by several teachers, we have to ensure that the same contents are taught at the same speed and tested using the same exam questions. To achieve this goal, the contents taught in each session are explained in detail in the teaching schedule to make sure that there is no miscommunication among instructors. It also enables students to prepare for the test and cover the contents in case they miss a class. More importantly, one subject convenor is appointed and becomes responsible for planning and monitoring the organization of the subject.

Table 2: Teaching schedule (Sample: Weeks1-7)

Groups	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
A	Mon 9:00	Mon 10:00	Tue 1:00	Wed 10:00	Fri 9:00	Fri 10:00
B	Mon 10:00	Mon 11:00	Tue 10:00	Tue: 12:00	Fri 10:00	Fri 11:00
C	Mon 11:00	Mon 12:00	Tue 11:00	Tue 1:00	Fri 12:00	Fri 1:00
D	Tue 9:00	Tue 10:00	Tue 2:00	Wed 11:00	Fri 1:00	Fri 2:00
Week 1	Introduction	Revision (L1-4)	Revision (L5-6)	Revision (L7-8)	Revision L9-10	Revision kanji
Week 2	L13 Potential form	Potential form /Lab instruction	L13 ~し	L13 ~てみる	VTR/Instruction for composition	L13 Kanji
Week 3	L13 ~そうです	L13 ~に~回	Dialogue まとめB	L13 Listening	L13 reading (p 247)	L14 Kanji
Week 4	--	--	--	--	--	--
Week 5	--	--	--	--	--	--
Week 6	L15 ~う、よう	L15 ~うと思う	Role Play (10%)	L15 ~ておく	Eater Friday	Easter Friday
Week 7	Mid semester break					

Needless to say, all holidays and breaks are taken into consideration when the teaching schedule is finalized.

3-2. Assessment methods

Similar to the teaching schedule, the information on assessment is provided to students in the syllabus. The sample of assessment items and assessment methods is presented below:

Items

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 1. Written tests | 40% |
| 2. Oral/Aural skills | 20% |

3. Continuing Assessments 40%

ASSESSMENT RATIONAL

1. Written tests

Mid semester test (Week 7: 50 minutes) 15%

End semester test (Exam week: 2 hours) 25%

2. Oral/Aural test (Week 13) 20%

Duration: Approximately 10 minutes

Students are individually interviewed by an examiner about familiar topics dealt with in class. Students will be given information with regard to the content and criteria on in Session 1, Week 10 and are required to sign up by the end of Week 11.

3. Continuous assessments

* Quizzes (4%x5) 20%

Kanji characters are tested in Session 5 as indicated on the timetable.

* Role Play – Week 7 10%

Duration -5~7 minutes per group

Students are required to form a group of two (preferable) or three, and to perform a scenario which they have written. They are encouraged to use the new functions introduced in class.

* Composition assignments (5%x2) 10%

- Composition topics (tentative) -

1) My favourite thing 私の好きなもの (200 characters)

2) Why I study Japanese 日本語を勉強する理由 (300 characters)

(Tsurutani:2007)

All the details appear in the syllabus (called a course outline) published on the website at the beginning of the semester so that there is no room for excuse from students e.g., “I did not know. I was not told”.

It is noteworthy, that aural/oral examination takes up 20 % of the assessment. Although it is time consuming to test an individual student’s oral skill, it will give them a good reason to study and practice for the final oral test. This test also assesses their aural skill by having a form of interview session, and there is no need to have another listening test.

As known in pedagogy on motivation (Deci and Ryan:1985), an examination gives extrinsic motivation (a reason to study) as opposed to intrinsic motivation

(desire to study). Mid/final exams in education have to be an achievement test which assesses students' understanding of the course content. Exams play a role as extrinsic motivation for study and make all types of students go through the teaching material. Studying for the test and revising what students learnt in fact consolidates their knowledge. A proficiency test does not work in this way, as students do not know what kind of questions they will be given, and they cannot really prepare for the test.

3-3. Proficiency based entry

It is not always the case that first year students take a first-year language subject. Some of them may have studied Japanese at high school, by themselves or by working/studying in Japan before entering university. For those students, universities allow them to enrol in second year courses or even higher level if students can cope with the contents of the course. It is obviously a waste of time for students with a high level of proficiency to take an introductory course. They can reach a higher level or even complete the course in a Masters' program at the end of their study if they are given a choice for their course enrolment.

4. Suggestions from a Western perspective

Having taught in the Uzbek education system for one semester, many practices were new to me and made me think about the reasons behind them. While the dedication of teachers impressed me, some practices clearly need change by adapting to the Western system. It will be particularly important when Uzbek universities have academic activities with universities outside of Uzbekistan. I will list the points which need to be considered urgently below:

1. Team teaching and the appointment of a subject convenor
2. Proficiency based entry to language subjects
3. Uniform assessment items and methods within a subject
4. Strict regulation and guidelines to follow a set syllabus

Uzbek students live in a multilingual environment where Russian and Tajik are widely spoken besides their native tongue, which is a great advantage for language learning. In addition, both Japanese and Uzbek belong to the Ural-Altai language group and share many linguistic features. If Uzbek students are given the better learning environment, they should be able to achieve their linguistic goal more quickly, to a more advanced level.

Note

1. Japanese Language Proficiency Test organized by Japan Foundation. There are five levels from the highest to the lowest, N1, N2, N3, N4 and N5.

REFERENCES

1. Adams, T., Banks, M. & Olsen, A. (2011). International education in Australia: From Aid to Trade to Internationalization, In Bhandari, R., Blumenthal, P. (eds) *International Students and Global Mobility in Higher Education*. International and Development Education. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230117143_6
2. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
3. Iwami, T. (2017.) 衰退する日本 - より大きな政府しかない (Japan in decline) *流通経済大学論集* 23-30.
4. Japan Foundation (2015). [国際交流基金 - オーストラリア \(2016 年度\)](http://www.jpf.go.jp) ([jpf.go.jp](http://www.jpf.go.jp))
 - a. Accessed on 22 May 2022.
5. Japan Foundation (2020) .[国際交流基金 - 2018 年度 海外日本語教育機関調査](http://www.jpf.go.jp) ([jpf.go.jp](http://www.jpf.go.jp))
 - a. Accessed on 24 May 2022.
6. Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2022).
 - a. [Year 12 certification summary: 2021 cohort \(qcaa.qld.edu.au\)](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au) Accessed on 22 May 2022.
7. Tsurutani, C. (2007). Japanese Introductory Level 3 course outline. School of Languages and Linguistics. Griffith University.