

## Assessment of the Needs of Online Japanese Language Education and Learning Summary

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Needs Assessment Survey Study Committee

### **Background of the Survey**

The Council for the Creation of Future Education has declared that it aims to accept 400,000 international students by 2033 in their J-MIRAI initiative. Specific measures are creating opportunities to study in Japan, promoting internationalization of education, and improving the retention rate of international students and highly skilled international workers. In order to execute these measures, it is necessary to take comprehensive actions by uniting with everyone involved in Japan.

In particular, Japanese language education is an indispensable element in promoting study abroad to Japan and retaining international students. This survey was conducted not only to understand the needs of Japanese language learners and educators, which have changed with the development of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to understand how Japanese language education should progress from the viewpoint of promoting study abroad in Japan. We hope that this report will help institutions and universities involved in Japanese language education and the promotion of study abroad to cooperate in accepting and retaining international students.

### **Purpose of the Survey and Summary**

This survey is intended to gauge the current status, issues, and needs of Japanese language education for international students. The survey results will add to the existing Japanese language education content at universities and other institutions, and aid the development of new content. The goal is to effectively use future content and to increase the number of students studying in Japan in the future.

This survey was focused on education related to studying abroad in Japan at universities and graduate schools among the diverse facets of Japanese language education.

The survey was carried out online in August-September 2023. The questionnaire included 16 questions for instructors in charge of Japanese language education at overseas institutions of higher education (“overseas Japanese language instructors”) and students at Japanese institutions of higher education (“international students”), and 15 questions for students affiliated with overseas institutions of higher education (“overseas students”). Respondents included 90 overseas Japanese language instructors, 341 overseas students, and 109 international students. In parallel with the questionnaire, an interview was conducted in July-September 2023. The target institutions were: (1) 13 domestic institutions and overseas offices of the Japan Foundation (JF) and the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), (2) seven overseas higher education institutions where Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) has Global Japan Offices and Desks as a base for Japanese language education overseas, and (3) representatives from the TUFS Japanese Language Center for International Students.

The target institutions for the interview were selected from regions where the importance of the regional strategies was mentioned in the “Summary of Strategic Promotion of International Student Exchange,” announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

Technology (MEXT) in May 2023. Each institution's business, the use and diffusion of online Japanese language education and learning materials in each country, and regional balances were also taken into consideration. The same criteria were used for the online survey. A wide range of responses were obtained from regions where Japan is willing to accept more international students in the future. Europe was the most common region where respondents were located.

## Survey Results

### 1. Needs and Challenges of Studying in Japan

- ◆ **Students who wish to study abroad in Japan need to be provided with detailed information on Japanese language, daily life, and career information in the early stages of their study.**
- ◆ **Specific information and support is necessary, such as how to learn kanji and vocabulary efficiently, career guidance, and how to approach academic advisors to enter graduate schools are necessary.**
- ◆ **Students studying Japanese at universities in any country or region generally have a high motivation to study abroad in Japan.**
- ◆ **The lack of an environment and opportunities to interact with Japanese speakers (Japanese people) outside of Japanese language studies is a major issue.**

Interest in Japanese culture is a common motivation for studying abroad, but “wanting to develop Japanese language skills” and “wanting to experience life abroad and cross-cultural exchange” were more popular answers. It is said that many students who wish to study abroad find value in the experience itself. Few have a pragmatic interest such as study, research, or employment that is unique to Japan. Yet, according to interviews with persons in overseas bases, students studying Japanese at universities from any country or region generally have a higher motivation to study in Japan, and are interested in pursuing higher education and building a career in the country.

Some international students had opinions on how to learn kanji and vocabulary efficiently, information on careers, and how to approach academic advisors to enter graduate school. Many international students stated that they should have studied kanji more before coming to Japan. Some also commented that they wanted to learn about the Japanese language or have basic knowledge relevant to the early stages of studying abroad in advance.

One of the challenges in Japanese language education in Japan and abroad is that many people who intend to study abroad as regular undergraduate international students have difficulty in preparing for and taking the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU). It is very difficult to learn both the Japanese language and basic subjects in a short period of time, and there isn't a wide range of content to support the preparation, making it difficult to prepare for the EJU before leaving for Japan. Moreover, there are difficulties in understanding the complex Japanese used in application procedures. In addition, university students outside of Japan lack a suitable environment to apply the knowledge learned in Japanese classes, or opportunities to interact with Japanese people outside of school. Many teachers also pointed out the lack of learning materials and the fact that paper-based materials are expensive and difficult to obtain.

## 2. Online Learning Abroad

- ◆ **University students studying abroad have some experience with online classes.**
- ◆ **It is not common to have free online Japanese Language Education outside of school.**
- ◆ **Learning materials and tools used by overseas Japanese language instructors are used as a supplement for face-to-face classes.**
- ◆ **Reliable learning materials from sources such as NHK and JF are the main materials used by overseas Japanese language instructors, and game-like applications are used as tools.**

The survey found that most foreign universities have some experience in conducting online classes. The most common online learning materials and tools used by overseas Japanese language instructors are “learning support websites” and “video sites such as YouTube channels.” However, they also use a wide range of other materials. In particular, reliable teaching materials from sources such as NHK and JF are very popular, and some institutions also use game-like applications. The most common purpose for using these materials is to supplement face-to-face classes. In some cases, they were introduced for independent learning or assigned for class preparation and revision, indicating that they are used for a variety of purposes.

Regarding students’ experiences with online learning, more than 70% of both international and overseas students have used free online content. However, only about 20% used paid content. Many students use apps for dictionaries and YouTube videos for grammar study, and in some regions, videos created by local YouTubers are also influential. Overseas Japanese language instructors also feel that the number of students who prefer to learn Japanese through videos rather than text is increasing, especially among the younger generation, regardless of which country they are from. However, many students have never experienced online Japanese language classes outside of university classes. Even though taking online classes outside of university classes is free of charge, it is still uncommon.

Regarding the future of online classes, more than 70% of overseas Japanese language instructors answered that they would adopt online classes as needed. While many overseas universities are returning to face-to-face classes, some are partially incorporating online classes or continuing to utilize the Learning Management System (LMS). Of both international and overseas students, 50% answered that the most effective way of learning Japanese is by mainly face-to-face classes with some online classes. At just under 40%, the second most common answer in both groups was face-to-face classes only. Most students believe that language classes should mainly be conducted face to face, and that interactions with instructors and classmates in the classroom are important. Nevertheless, there were many references to the advantages of online classes, and many students believe that online classes are effective enough, depending on the content and how they are taught. It is expected that online classes, and online learning materials and tools will become even more common in the future.

## Suggestions for the Future

### 1. Considerations and Reference Information for the Development of Online Learning Materials and Tools

- ◆ Elementary to intermediate Japanese language levels are mainly needed.
- ◆ Instructors and students have a high need for kanji educational materials.
- ◆ Video materials should be less than 10 minutes long.
- ◆ Students are interested in topics related to Japanese people from the same generation, current trends of Japan, and cooperative learning with native Japanese speakers.
- ◆ There is high demand among Japanese language instructors for online learning materials, tools, and up-to-date information on new teaching methods.

According to the results of the survey for overseas Japanese language instructors, the Japanese language levels needed are mostly “Elementary,” “Pre-intermediate,” and “Intermediate,” and less so for levels higher than “Upper-Intermediate.” In Europe, demand ranges from “Elementary” to “Intermediate,” while in Southeast Asia, demand for “Intermediate” to “Upper-Intermediate” is relatively high.

Regarding content (by skill), many overseas Japanese language instructors demand “Listening” and “Speaking,” while students demand “Vocabulary” and “Listening.” As for specific examples of desired content, both Japanese language instructors and students were likely to request kanji learning materials and tools. Japanese language instructors also have many requests for content that introduces Japanese culture and trends. However, many students focus on the format of learning materials and tools such as videos, apps, etc. At the same time, there are many requests for reading materials in the form of e-books. Some students want tools that serve as learning supplements, such as various types of tests, and tools that allow them to create their own learning materials. From the functional aspect, some students request interactive features such as role-playing and chatting, as well as game-like features.

For the requirements for online learning materials and tools, the most desired length for video materials is up to 10 minutes long. Regarding cost, the most common answer was “Will not pay for online learning materials and tools,” but even if the number of students who selected “Outright purchase (download)” and “Flat rate” were combined, still more respondents chose “Will not pay for online learning materials and tools.” When comparing paid content, more respondents prefer “Outright purchase (download)” over “Flat rate.” When offering paid content, it may be necessary to consider a free-trial system, etc. Other than the cost aspect, many overseas Japanese language instructors prefer having quizzes, assignments, and final exams when using online teaching materials.

Although the topics of interest are diverse among overseas students, it can be said that they are highly interested in current Japan such as meeting Japanese university students of the same generation. Although there are various learning styles, many students insist on the importance of interaction when learning Japanese, and a relatively large number of students seems to prefer collaborative learning.

Moreover, demand is high for online Japanese language learning materials and tools among

Japanese language instructors. Many respondents want up-to-date information on new teaching methods and classroom practices.

## 2. New Online Japanese Language Education Content that Universities Should Create

- ◆ **Content focused on academic, business, and other fields is desired, and for language levels, intermediate level or above is preferred.**
- ◆ **Learning materials are desired that include videos of specialized lectures in easy Japanese, materials that include vocabulary unique to universities, and content that incorporates the opinions of current university and international students.**
- ◆ **When developing and promoting educational materials and tools, it is important to ensure that content can be easily updated, devices can be selected based on the characteristics of each country, and to have an image of a sufficient post-development operation and maintenance system.**

As for Japanese language levels, the elementary to intermediate level is popular, but since existing learning materials are sufficient for introductory to elementary level, universities should create materials for intermediate level and above. As for content, materials focused on academic, business, and other fields that deeply study a specific field are in demand. Moreover, self-study content with challenging questions, and content that has a certain number of questions being posted on a regular basis is preferred. According to overseas Japanese language instructors, content on literature, linguistics, and culture is lacking in both online and print media, so educational materials that allow students to study these topics in easy Japanese are also an option to consider.

As for educational materials that only universities can produce, videos of specialized lectures in easy Japanese, teaching materials dealing with university-specific vocabularies such as course registration, compulsory and elective courses, etc., and content including opinions of current university and international students would be helpful for students. In particular, videos introducing current university life and video messages from students in school could be a tool for promoting study abroad to Japan.

Finally, for the dissemination of educational materials and tools, points to keep in mind are to have an image of a sufficient post-development operation and a maintenance system. At the same time, it will be necessary to set up a system that enables real-time updating of content. In order to promote content to areas where Internet access is limited, preparation of downloadable education materials and deciding whether it should be provided via a browser or apps should be considered from the development stage.

### 3. Promotion to Overseas Students and Institutions

- ◆ **It is important to reflect on the perspectives of both instructors and students.**
- ◆ **It is important to utilize social media for promotion and to disseminate information by word of mouth in local languages.**
- ◆ **It is necessary to distinguish the characteristics of existing learning materials and tools, and to coordinate learning materials within Japan.**

First, it is necessary to devise ways to present learning materials from both instructors' and students' perspectives. In terms of PR tools, word-of-mouth and active social media promotion using local languages is important. Also, disseminating information by word of mouth between students or from senior students, and through instructors' associations, mailing lists, as well as through face-to-face events are effective.

One of the most common comments from overseas was that it is difficult to distinguish the characteristics of each of the many existing online learning materials and tools. Therefore, it is important to develop individual content and to coordinate educational materials within Japan. It is also necessary to organize the characteristics of each material in an easy to understand way, and then to promote them to the world.

### 4. Possibilities for Collaboration to Promote Study Abroad to Japan

- ◆ **Financial and Educational support is necessary, before and after arriving in Japan.**
- ◆ **In-depth cooperation and collaboration among relevant ministries, universities, and institutions is important.**

In order to promote study abroad in Japan, requests for financial support are particularly high from overseas. There are also other opinions that support for learning terminologies of students' majors is necessary. In some overseas areas where JASSO offices are not located, students did not have access to basic information about studying abroad.

To be in line with J-MIRAI measures, the following five main categories should be implemented: (1) Creation of opportunities to study abroad to Japan, (2) Publicity and information dissemination (websites and other media) (3) Publicity and information dissemination (local activities) (4) Flexibility in requirements and procedures at the admission stage (5) Support during study abroad and cooperation among universities. In order to implement the above, in-depth cooperation and collaboration among relevant ministries, JF, JASSO, and their respective overseas offices as well as universities is important. Also, if we can further provide content that meets the needs of overseas applicants for studying Japanese and the institutions of Japanese language education throughout Japan, we can expect an increase in the number of applicants for studying in Japan in the future, as well as more effective use of content.

Due to the timing of the survey, the results only cover prioritized countries. We hope that this survey will provide an opportunity to identify the needs in specific countries, and to raise the issue of how to further identify specific needs individually.