

Japanese Language Education in Focus: A Systematic Literature Review of Learner Motivation, Technology-Assisted Learning, Pedagogical Practices, and Research Trends

Rina Azlin Abdul Rahman^{1*}, Zaiton Md Isa², Ayesya Azreena Mohd Azhar³, Nadiah Zubbir⁴, Nur 'Adilah Hanim Che Hashim⁵, Syafiah 'Adilah Zainuddin⁶

^{1,2,3,4}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia,

⁵Japan University Programme, UniKL Malaysia France Institute, Bangi, Malaysia,

⁶Cakap Jepun Academy, Shah Alam, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Japanese language education has attracted increasing scholarly attention in response to growing demands for multilingual competence, intercultural communication, and global engagement. However, recent research remains dispersed across areas including learner motivation, technology-assisted learning, pedagogical practices, and theoretical development. This systematic literature review synthesizes recent evidence and identifies emerging patterns in Japanese language education. Guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework and the PICO framework, the review analysed 15 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025, retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science through a search conducted in July 2026. Studies were included only when they were substantively focused on Japanese language learning or education and aligned with the review questions. Quality appraisal was conducted using six criteria adapted from Abouzahra et al. (2020). Four analytical themes were identified: (1) Learner Motivation, (2) Technology-Assisted Learning, (3) Pedagogical Practices, and (4) Research Trends and Theories. Learner motivation was the most prominent theme, with studies emphasizing self-concept, identity, emotions, motivational regulation, and future aspirations. Technology-assisted studies highlighted the potential of digital tools, multimedia, artificial intelligence, and online learning environments to support engagement and language development, while pedagogical research emphasized communicative, task-based, and learner-centred approaches. Evidence concerning broader research trends was comparatively limited but indicated increasing attention to sociocultural, affective, and interdisciplinary perspectives. The review provides a focused synthesis of recent research and identifies areas requiring further investigation, particularly technology integration, longitudinal development, and broader theoretical analysis in Japanese language education.

Keywords: Japanese Language Education, Learner Motivation, Technology-Assisted Learning, Pedagogical Practices

INTRODUCTION

Japanese language education has gained increasing global attention due to the growing importance of multilingual competence, intercultural communication, and international collaboration. As Japanese language programs continue to expand in universities and language institutions worldwide, researchers have explored various factors that influence learners' success, engagement, and language proficiency. Among these factors, learner motivation has consistently been identified as a critical determinant of language learning outcomes. In recent years, technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), multimedia applications, online learning platforms, and digital learning resources have further transformed Japanese language teaching and

learning. At the same time, innovative pedagogical approaches, including Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and communicative learning strategies, have been widely adopted to enhance learners' communicative competence and language use. These developments demonstrate that Japanese language education has evolved into a multifaceted field that encompasses psychological, technological, pedagogical, and theoretical dimensions.

Despite the growing volume of research on Japanese language education, the literature remains fragmented across different areas of investigation. Numerous studies have examined learner motivation, technology-assisted learning, pedagogical approaches, and theoretical perspectives independently. However, few studies have considered these factors collectively to provide a holistic understanding of Japanese language learning. Existing research often focuses on specific learner populations, instructional interventions, or technological innovations, resulting in isolated findings that are difficult to integrate into a broader framework. Consequently, educators and researchers may face challenges in identifying the key factors that contribute to successful Japanese language learning and understanding how these factors interact within contemporary educational contexts.

Although individual studies have contributed valuable insights into motivation, technology integration, teaching practices, and language learning theories, recent research remains distributed across separate strands of inquiry, with limited synthesis across motivation, technology, pedagogy, and theoretical developments within Japanese language education. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of learner motivation, emerging technologies, and effective pedagogical strategies, yet the relationships among these themes remain insufficiently explored.

Furthermore, limited attention has been given to identifying overarching research trends and theoretical developments that shape the field. Therefore, there is a need for a systematic literature review that consolidates findings from recent studies and examines Japanese language education through the lenses of learner motivation, technology-assisted learning, pedagogical practices, and research trends. Addressing this gap will provide a more comprehensive understanding of current knowledge, identify areas requiring further investigation, and offer evidence-based recommendations for future research and educational practice.

A well-defined research question ensures that the literature search is exhaustive and systematic, covering all relevant studies that address key aspects of the topic (Kitchenham, 2007). The research questions in this SLR are formulated based on the PICO framework. This framework is a mnemonic style used to formulate research questions, particularly in qualitative research, proposed by Lockwood et al. (2015). PICO stands for Population, Interest, and Context. This SLR is done to answer the four research questions below;

RQ1

What motivational factors influence learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement in Japanese language learning contexts?

RQ2

How does technology-assisted learning contribute to motivation, engagement, and language proficiency among Japanese language learners?

RQ3

What pedagogical practices have been employed in Japanese language education, and how do they influence learners' language development and communicative competence?

RQ4

What are the major research trends, theoretical perspectives, and emerging directions in Japanese language education research?

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by four complementary theoretical and pedagogical perspectives: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of learner motivation, technology use, communicative learning, and socially mediated language development in Japanese language education.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), explains human motivation through the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In language learning, autonomy refers to learners' sense of choice and control over their learning, competence concerns their perceived ability to perform language-learning tasks successfully, and relatedness reflects their sense of connection with teachers, peers, and the learning community. When these psychological needs are adequately supported, learners are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, sustain their engagement, and demonstrate greater persistence in language learning. In Japanese language education, SDT is therefore useful for examining how instructional practices, learning environments, and learner experiences influence motivation and continued participation.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis (1989), explains users' willingness to adopt and use technology primarily through two constructs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which learners believe that a technology enhances their learning performance, while perceived ease of use concerns the degree to which the technology is perceived as simple and effortless to operate. In contemporary Japanese language education, where learning management systems, mobile applications, multimedia resources, artificial intelligence, and online communication platforms are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning, TAM provides a relevant framework for understanding learners' acceptance of technology-assisted learning. The model is particularly useful for examining how learners' perceptions of educational technologies influence their intention to use and continued engagement with such tools.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an instructional approach grounded in the concept of communicative competence introduced by Hymes (1972) and further developed by Canale and Swain (1980). CLT emphasizes meaningful communication and the functional use of language rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical accuracy. Learners are encouraged to develop their language abilities through authentic and interactive activities such as discussions, role-plays, information-gap tasks, and problem-solving activities. In Japanese language education, CLT provides an important pedagogical foundation for promoting learners' ability to use Japanese appropriately and effectively in real-life communicative contexts. Its emphasis on interaction, participation, and authentic communication is particularly relevant to contemporary learner-centred language teaching practices.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), introduced by Vygotsky (1978), conceptualizes learning as a socially situated and mediated process in which knowledge develops through interaction with others, participation in cultural activities, and the use of mediational tools. A central concept within SCT is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with appropriate guidance or support from more knowledgeable others. In language education, such support may be provided through teachers, peers, collaborative activities, instructional resources, and

technological tools. SCT is therefore particularly relevant to Japanese language learning because it highlights the role of social interaction, scaffolding, learner participation, and contextual factors in the development of linguistic competence. It also provides a useful perspective for understanding technology as a mediational tool that can facilitate interaction, collaboration, and access to meaningful language-learning experiences.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

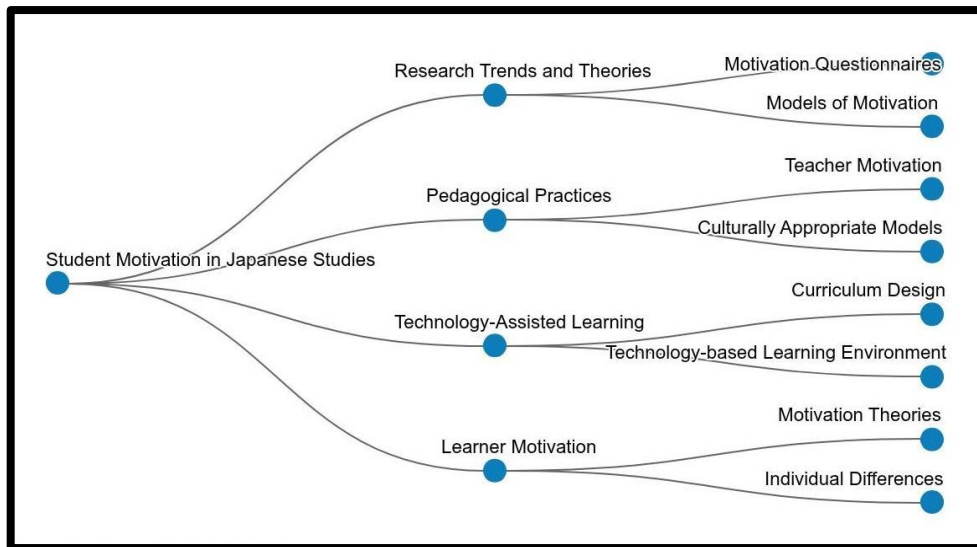


FIGURE 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

Figure 1 organizes the review around four analytical domains corresponding to the research questions: Learner Motivation, Technology-Assisted Learning, Pedagogical Practices, and Research Trends and Theories. Rather than treating these domains as independent variables, the framework is used to structure the synthesis of evidence and to examine how psychological, technological, instructional, and sociocultural dimensions intersect within Japanese language learning.

Learner Motivation represents the central analytical domain because motivational factors recur across the reviewed literature and may interact with both learning environments and instructional practices. Technology-Assisted Learning captures research concerning digital tools, multimedia, artificial intelligence, and technology-supported environments, whereas Pedagogical Practices encompasses instructional approaches that facilitate language development and communicative competence. Research Trends and Theories provides a broader lens for identifying shifts in research priorities and theoretical orientations within Japanese language education.

The framework therefore serves primarily as an analytical map for evidence synthesis. SDT, TAM, CLT, and SCT inform the interpretation of findings within and across these domains, but the framework does not assume causal relationships among the four themes. Instead, it enables similarities, intersections, and gaps in the recent literature to be systematically identified.

METHODOLOGY

Material and Methods

For conducting systematic literature reviews, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach is a widely accepted standard that guarantees transparency, completeness, and consistency throughout the procedure by Page et al. (2021). guide how to systematically identify, screen, and include studies in their review. In the context of this SLR, the writers involved in this article act as researchers and work together to analyse the articles deemed relevant for the title. Two important databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were used in this analysis because of their wide coverage and robustness.

The PRISMA approach is organized into four key stages: (i) identification, (ii) screening, (iii) eligibility, and (iv) data abstraction. In the identification phase, databases are searched to locate all relevant studies. The screening phase then involves evaluating these studies against predefined criteria to eliminate irrelevant or low-quality research. During the eligibility phase, the remaining studies are thoroughly assessed to confirm they meet the inclusion criteria. Finally, data abstraction focuses on extracting and synthesizing data from the included studies, which is essential for deriving meaningful and reliable conclusions. This structured method ensures that the systematic review is conducted with rigor, leading to trustworthy results that can guide future research and practice. The PRISMA framework lists three main stages for analysis: (i) identification, (ii) screening, (iii) eligibility, (iv) data abstraction and analysis, as well as (v) quality of appraisal.

Identification

In accordance with the PRISMA framework, the identification phase represents a critical starting point in the systematic literature review process, as it is designed to ensure exhaustive coverage of relevant studies while reducing the risk of selection bias. The literature search was conducted in July 2026 using Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). In this study, a structured and comprehensive search was conducted using the keywords “Japanese studies,” “motivation,” and “student.” Table 1 below shows the search string. Database-specific search fields were applied using equivalent combinations of terms relating to Japanese language learning, motivation, and learners. The initial search retrieved 122 records from Scopus and 100 records from Web of Science, producing a total of 222 records before screening.

The publication window was restricted to studies published between 2021 and 2025 to capture recent developments while ensuring that all included publication years were complete at the time of the search. The search date of July 2026 refers only to the date on which database retrieval was conducted and does not extend the publication eligibility period to 2026.

The higher number of results obtained from Scopus can be attributed to its broader inclusion of journals and stronger coverage in the social sciences, whereas WoS contributed a more targeted collection of highly cited and methodologically rigorous studies. As shown in Table 1, the identification of 222 records reflects the growing academic interest in Japanese language education within higher education and highlights the conceptual diversity of research spanning linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological perspectives. Employing multiple databases enhances the methodological robustness of the review by minimizing database-specific bias and increasing the likelihood of capturing diverse research traditions and geographical contexts.

Additionally, the use of carefully designed search terms ensured sensitivity to terminological variation while maintaining alignment with the review’s objectives. Overall, this transparent and systematic identification process establishes a strong foundation for subsequent screening and eligibility stages, consistent with PRISMA standards and expectations for rigorous, replicable research.

Table 1 The search string

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Japanese studies" OR "Japanese language" OR "Japanese culture" OR "Japan studies") AND (motivation OR "student motivation" OR "academic motivation" OR "learning motivation") AND (student* OR learner* OR pupil* OR "academic performance"))
Web of Science	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Japanese studies" OR "Japanese language" OR "Japanese culture" OR "Japan studies") AND (motivation OR "student motivation" OR "academic motivation" OR "learning motivation") AND (student* OR learner* OR pupil* OR "academic performance")) Extracted July 2026

Screening

During the screening stage, the 222 identified records were assessed against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following title and abstract screening, 160 records were excluded because they did not meet the review scope, publication-type, language, timeframe, or subject-focus requirements. This resulted in 62

(Scopus=25; Wos; 37) articles being retained for full-text eligibility assessment as outlined in Figure 2. No duplicate records were identified across the final retrieved dataset. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2021 and 2025 and substantively focused on Japanese language learning or education were considered eligible for inclusion. This systematic and criteria-driven screening process enhanced the focus and quality of the evidence base, ensuring that only the most relevant and methodologically sound studies progressed to the subsequent stages of analysis.

Eligibility

The full texts of 62 articles were assessed against the eligibility criteria and the four research questions. Forty-seven articles were subsequently excluded because they did not sufficiently address Japanese language learning or education, did not align with the review questions, or failed to satisfy one or more of the predefined inclusion criteria. Consequently, 15 studies were retained for quality appraisal and thematic synthesis (see Table 3).

The relatively small final corpus reflects the specificity of the review rather than limited retrieval effort. The search initially identified 222 records across two major databases; however, the application of a recent five-year publication window, English-language restriction, peer-reviewed journal requirement, and direct relevance to Japanese language learning considerably narrowed the eligible evidence base. This focused selection was considered appropriate for answering the four research questions while maintaining thematic coherence.

Table 2 :The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2021 – 2025	< 2021
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject Area	Japanese language learning or Japanese language education	Studies not substantively focused on Japanese language learning or education

Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analysis was used as one of the assessment strategies in this study to examine and synthesize a variety of research designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods). To develop themes, the authors carefully analysed 15 publications for relevant material related to the study's topics. They examined the methodology and research results of significant studies on Japanese language and research trends. The authors collaborated to develop themes based on the evidence presented throughout the study. They kept a log of their data analysis process to document relevant perspectives, analyses, or ideas. The authors ensured consistency in theme design by comparing the results and discussing disagreements between themselves. This expert review phase established the validity of each subtheme by ensuring clarity, importance, and suitability (Refer to Appendix 1).

Quality of Appraisal

According to Kitchenham and Charters (Kitchenham, 2007), the researchers need to assess the quality of the research chosen. The next stage is applying quality assessment suggested by Abouzahra et al., (2020), which consist of six questions complying to a scoring procedure for evaluating each criteria. The possible ratings are

"Yes" (Y) with a score of 1 if the criterion is fully met, "Partly" (P) with a score of 0.5 if the criterion is somewhat met but contains some gaps or shortcomings, and "No" (N) with a score of 0 if the criterion is not met at all.

Table 3: Possible ratings for 6 question by Abouzahra et al., (2020),

No	Question
QA1	Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
QA2	Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
QA3	Is the study methodology clearly established?
QA4	Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
QA5	Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
QA6	Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

Each writer independently assesses the study according to these criteria, and the scores are then totalled across all experts to determine the overall mark. For a study to be accepted for the next process, the total mark, derived from summing the scores from all three experts, must exceed 3.0. This threshold ensures that only studies meeting a certain quality standard proceed further. The results are shown in Table 4.

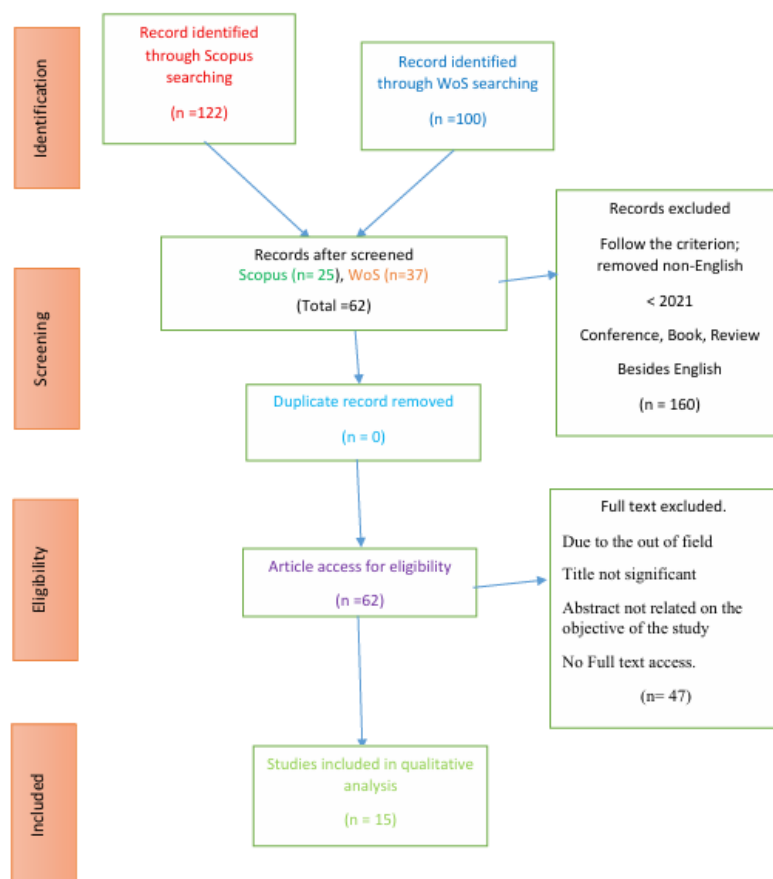


FIGURE 2. Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, 2009)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quality of Assessment

Table 4 shows the result of the assessment performance for selected primary studies. The overall quality of the articles is as follows;

High quality ($\geq 80\%$): Majority of studies

Moderate quality (60–79%): Conceptual or descriptive studies

Lower quality (<60%): Primarily survey-only or exploratory abstracts

TABLE 4 Quality of Assessment for the selected 15 articles

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title	QA1	QA 2	QA 3	QA 4	QA 5	QA 6	Total Mark	(%)
PS1	Risda et al. (2025)	The Impact of Intercultural Japanese Language Teaching Based on Gen-AI and Multimedia on Intercultural Communication Adaptation, Learning Motivation (L2), and Japanese Language Proficiency	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.67
PS2	Nakamura (2021)	Motivation, Imagined Self, and Speech Genres: Bakhtinian Considerations	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4.0	66.67
PS3	Shintaku (2022)	Self-Directed Learning with Anime: A Case of Japanese Language and Culture	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.00
PS4	Mori, Hasegawa & Mori (2021)	The Trends and Developments of L2 Japanese Research in the 2010s	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS5	Anh (2025)	Enhancing First-Year Students' Japanese Speaking Skills Through Task-Based Language Teaching: A Case Study at Hanoi University	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS6	Ward, Nakamura & Clark (2024)	What Motivates Students to Study Intermediate and Advanced Level Japanese at Australian Universities?	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.00
PS7	Nakamura (2023)	Dialogic Investigations: Motivation in Japanese Language Learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.00
PS8	Mao & Kurata (2024)	Japanese Language Learners' Motivational Types and Trajectory: Accounts from University Students in Australia	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS9	Wang, Wynn, Mendori & Hwang (2024)	A Topic Map Based Learning Management System to Facilitate Meaningful Grammar Learning: The Case of Japanese Grammar Learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.00
PS10	Yoshida (2024)	Emotions of Japanese Language Learners in and Out of Class	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS11	Tran,	Exploring Perceived	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.00

	Marinova & Nghiem (2023)	Speaking Skills, Motives, and Communication Needs of Undergraduate Students Studying Japanese Language								
PS12	Abdullah & Kadir (2021)	The Influence of Motivation and Learning Strategies on Academic Performance in Learning Japanese Language among Malay Students: A Conceptual Framework	Y	Y	P	Y	N	N	3.5	58.33
PS13	Yamashita (2023)	Development of a Motivational Regulatory Strategy Scale for Indonesian Learners of Japanese	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS14	Wang, Zhang & Li (2023)	Does Nationalism Motivate or Demotivate? Unpacking Complex Identity-Motivation Nexus in the Context of Chinese Learners of Japanese	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33
PS15	Tanaka (2024)	Motivation and Growth in Kanji Proficiency: A Longitudinal Study Using Latent Growth Curve Modeling	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.33

The quality assessment indicates that the 15 included studies generally demonstrate moderate to high methodological quality. Seven articles (PS4, PS5, PS8, PS10, PS13, PS14, PS15) achieved a score of 5.0 (83.33%), indicating clearly stated objectives, relevant research contributions, well-defined methodologies, and clearly articulated concepts. Five studies scored 4.5 (75.00%), while two studies (PS1, PS2) obtained 4.0 (66.67%). The lowest-rated study (PS12), Abdullah and Kadir (2021), received 3.5 (58.33%), largely because of its conceptual nature and more limited methodological and evaluative detail. Across the corpus, QA1–QA4 were generally well addressed, whereas QA5 and QA6 received comparatively weaker ratings, particularly in relation to comparison with related work and explicit reporting of study limitations. Overall, the appraisal suggests that the included studies provide a sufficiently credible evidence base for thematic synthesis, while variation in methodological quality should be considered when interpreting the findings

Themes

Table 5 :Analysis for Themes

Theme	Number of Articles
Theme 1: Learner Motivation	8
Theme 2: Technology-Assisted Learning	3
Theme 3: Pedagogical Practices	3
Theme 4: Research Trends and Theories	1
Total	15

The thematic distribution presented in Table 5 indicates that Learner Motivation is the most extensively investigated area in the selected literature, accounting for 8 out of 15 studies. This finding reflects the central role of motivation in Japanese language learning, with researchers focusing on factors such as learners' self-concept, identity, emotions, motivational regulation, and engagement in the learning process. The prominence of this theme suggests that sustaining learner motivation remains a critical concern in Japanese language education. In contrast, Technology-Assisted Learning, Pedagogical Practices, and Research Trends and

Theories each comprise 3 studies, highlighting a growing but comparatively smaller body of research in these areas. Studies under Technology-Assisted Learning emphasize the use of digital technologies, multimedia platforms, anime-based learning, and artificial intelligence to enhance learning outcomes and motivation. Meanwhile, the Pedagogical Practices theme focuses on instructional approaches, language skill development, and teaching strategies that promote communicative competence. The Research Trends and Theories theme provides broader theoretical and conceptual perspectives that guide current and future directions in Japanese language education research. Overall, the distribution of studies demonstrates that while learner motivation remains the dominant research focus, increasing attention is being directed toward technology integration, innovative pedagogical approaches, and theoretical advancements to support effective Japanese language learning.

Theme 1 (T1): Learner Motivation

Table 6 : Motivation, Identity, and Psychological Factors in Japanese Language Learning

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title
PS2	Nakamura (2021)	Motivation, Imagined Self, and Speech Genres: Bakhtinian Considerations
PS6	Ward, Nakamura & Clark (2024)	What Motivates Students to Study Intermediate and Advanced Level Japanese at Australian Universities?
PS7	Nakamura (2023)	Dialogic Investigations: Motivation in Japanese Language Learning
PS8	Mao & Kurata (2024)	Japanese Language Learners' Motivational Types and Trajectory: Accounts from University Students in Australia
PS10	Yoshida (2024)	Emotions of Japanese Language Learners in and Out of Class
PS13	Yamashita (2023)	Development of a Motivational Regulatory Strategy Scale for Indonesian Learners of Japanese
PS14	Wang, Zhang & Li (2023)	Does Nationalism Motivate or Demotivate? Unpacking Complex Identity-Motivation Nexus in the Context of Chinese Learners of Japanese
PS15	Tanaka (2024)	Motivation and Growth in Kanji Proficiency: A Longitudinal Study Using Latent Growth Curve Modeling

The studies grouped under Theme 1: Learner Motivation demonstrate the significant role of motivational, emotional, and identity-related factors in shaping Japanese language learning experiences. The eight studies collectively examine motivation from multiple perspectives, including learners imagined future selves (Nakamura, 2021; Nakamura, 2023), motivational trajectories and types (Mao & Kurata, 2024), emotional experiences (Yoshida, 2024), motivational regulation strategies (Yamashita, 2023), and the influence of identity and nationalism (Wang et al., 2023). Several studies draw upon established motivational frameworks such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory to explain how learners sustain their engagement in Japanese language learning.

The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation, positive self-perceptions, and opportunities for meaningful communication are important drivers of learning persistence and achievement. Ward et al. (2024) further reveal that students are motivated by future career aspirations, personal interests, and cultural engagement with Japan, while Tanaka (2024) highlights the positive relationship between motivation and proficiency development, particularly in kanji learning. Additionally, Yoshida (2024) emphasizes the influence of emotions on learning outcomes, suggesting that positive emotional experiences strengthen motivation and engagement. Overall, the studies indicate that learner motivation is a multidimensional construct influenced by psychological, social, cultural, and contextual factors, making it a central determinant of success in Japanese language education.

Theme 2 (T2): Technology-Assisted Learning

Table 7 : Technology-Enhanced and Media-Based Japanese Language Learning

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title
PS1	Risda et al. (2025)	The Impact of Intercultural Japanese Language Teaching Based on Gen-AI and Multimedia on Intercultural Communication Adaptation, Learning Motivation (L2), and Japanese Language Proficiency
PS3	Shintaku (2022)	Self-Directed Learning with Anime: A Case of Japanese Language and Culture
PS9	Wang, Wynn, Mendori & Hwang (2024)	A Topic Map Based Learning Management System to Facilitate Meaningful Grammar Learning: The Case of Japanese Grammar Learning

The studies categorized under Theme 2: Technology-Assisted Learning highlight the growing role of digital technologies and media resources in enhancing Japanese language learning. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how technology can support learner engagement, motivation, intercultural understanding, and language proficiency. Risda et al. (2025) investigated the integration of Gen-AI and multimedia in Japanese language instruction and found that technology-enhanced learning significantly improved learners' intercultural communication competence, motivation, and Japanese language proficiency. This suggests that digital tools can create more interactive and culturally relevant learning environments. Similarly, Shintaku (2022) examined the use of anime as a self-directed learning resource and reported that anime provides learners with authentic linguistic and cultural exposure while promoting independent learning beyond the classroom. The study highlights the potential of popular media to connect formal and informal learning experiences. In addition, Wang et al. (2024) developed a topic map-based learning management system to support Japanese grammar learning and found that the system positively influenced learners' motivation, learning attitudes, and achievement. Together, these studies indicate that technology serves as a powerful mediational tool that enhances language learning experiences through interactive content, authentic communication opportunities, and personalized learning support. The findings suggest that effective integration of technology can significantly contribute to improving both learner motivation and Japanese language proficiency.

Theme 3 (T3): Pedagogical Practices

Table 8 : Pedagogical Approaches and Japanese Language Skill Development

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title
PS5	Anh (2025)	Enhancing First-Year Students' Japanese Speaking Skills Through Task-Based Language Teaching: A Case Study at Hanoi University
PS11	Tran, Marinova & Nghiem (2023)	Exploring Perceived Speaking Skills, Motives, and Communication Needs of Undergraduate Students Studying Japanese Language
PS12	Abdullah & Kadir (2021)	The Influence of Motivation and Learning Strategies on Academic Performance in Learning Japanese Language among Malay Students: A Conceptual Framework

The studies under Theme 3: Pedagogical Practices focus on instructional approaches, learning strategies, and communicative skill development in Japanese language education. Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of learner-centered teaching methods in enhancing language proficiency and fostering meaningful communication. Anh (2025) examined the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) among first-year university students and found significant improvements in Japanese speaking performance, confidence, and learner engagement. The findings support the effectiveness of authentic communication tasks in promoting real-world language use and communicative competence. Similarly, Tran, Marinova, and Nghiem (2023) explored undergraduate students' perceived speaking skills, motives for studying Japanese, and communication needs with native speakers. The study revealed that speaking skills were generally perceived as weaker than other language skills, emphasizing the need for pedagogical interventions that provide greater opportunities for oral interaction and communicative practice. Meanwhile, Abdullah and Kadir (2021)

proposed a conceptual framework linking motivation and learning strategies to academic performance among Malay students learning Japanese. Their work suggests that effective learning strategies, combined with strong motivational support, can positively influence language achievement. Overall, the studies in this theme demonstrate that pedagogical practices play a critical role in shaping learners' language development, communicative competence, and academic success. The findings further indicate that interactive, task-based, and strategy-oriented instructional approaches are essential for improving learning outcomes in Japanese language education.

Theme 4 (T4): Research Trends and Theories

Table 9 : Perspectives on L2 Motivation and Japanese Language Education

Study	Author(s) & Year	Article Title
PS4	Mori, Hasegawa & Mori (2021)	The Trends and Developments of L2 Japanese Research in the 2010s

The study categorized under Theme 4 provides a broader perspective on the development of L2 Japanese research. Mori, Hasegawa, and Mori (2021) reviewed major trends in L2 Japanese research during the 2010s and identified developments across cognitive, sociocultural, affective, and pedagogical dimensions. Their analysis demonstrates that Japanese language research has increasingly incorporated learner-centred, sociocultural, and interdisciplinary perspectives alongside more established linguistic and cognitive approaches. The study also highlights growing scholarly attention to learner motivation, identity, classroom interaction, and technology-supported learning. However, because only one study in the final corpus directly examined broad research trends, conclusions concerning theoretical developments should be interpreted cautiously. This limited representation itself indicates a need for further review studies examining how theoretical and methodological orientations in Japanese language education have evolved in recent years.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This systematic literature review synthesized 15 studies published between 2021 and 2025 to examine selected recent developments in Japanese language education. Four analytical themes were identified: Learner Motivation, Technology-Assisted Learning, Pedagogical Practices, and Research Trends and Theories. Learner motivation was the most prominent theme, highlighting the roles of self-concept, identity, emotions, motivational regulation, career aspirations, and meaningful communication in learner engagement and achievement.

Technology-assisted studies demonstrated the potential of Gen-AI, multimedia resources, anime, and digital learning environments to support motivation, intercultural awareness, grammar learning, and language proficiency. Research on pedagogical practices highlighted the value of task-based, communicative, and strategy-oriented approaches in supporting speaking development and learner engagement. Evidence concerning broader research trends was more limited, with one included study highlighting the increasing relevance of cognitive, sociocultural, affective, and learner-centred perspectives in L2 Japanese research. These findings should therefore be interpreted as patterns within the selected recent literature rather than as an exhaustive representation of the field.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this review have important implications for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers. First, the prominence of learner motivation suggests that Japanese language programs should incorporate instructional strategies that promote autonomy, competence, and meaningful engagement to sustain learners' motivation. Second, the positive outcomes associated with technology-assisted learning indicate that educational institutions should continue integrating digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and multimedia resources into Japanese language instruction to create interactive and authentic learning experiences. Third, the effectiveness of communicative and task-based pedagogical approaches underscores the need for learner-

centered curricula that emphasize real-world communication and active participation. Collectively, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing Japanese language learning and provide evidence-based guidance for improving teaching and learning practices.

Future research should expand beyond the current focus on learner motivation by examining the interactions among motivation, technology use, pedagogical practices, and learning outcomes in diverse educational settings. More longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are needed to investigate how motivational factors and language proficiency evolve over time among different learner populations. Additionally, given the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and digital learning technologies, future studies should explore the effectiveness of emerging technologies in supporting Japanese language acquisition, intercultural competence, and personalized learning. Researchers are also encouraged to adopt mixed-method and multidisciplinary approaches to better capture the complexity of language learning processes. Furthermore, additional theoretical investigations that integrate motivational, sociocultural, and technological perspectives would contribute to the development of a more comprehensive framework for understanding contemporary Japanese language education. Such efforts will help advance the field and inform future educational policies, curriculum design, and instructional innovation.

LIMITATIONS

This review has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the final synthesis comprised only 15 studies, which limits the breadth of evidence available for generalizing research trends across the wider field of Japanese language education. Although the modest sample resulted from the application of focused inclusion criteria, some relevant perspectives may not have been represented. Second, the search was restricted to Scopus and Web of Science, creating the possibility of database bias because relevant studies indexed in other databases, regional repositories, Japanese-language journals, or specialist sources may have been omitted. The inclusion of English-language publications only may further underrepresent research published in Japanese and other languages.

Third, the review was limited to publications from 2021 to 2025. This five-year window was selected to capture recent developments, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence and technology-assisted language learning, but it provides only a relatively narrow temporal perspective and may overlook earlier theoretical and pedagogical developments that continue to shape current practice. Finally, the four themes were derived from a relatively small and heterogeneous body of studies employing different research designs, populations, and educational contexts. The thematic findings should therefore be interpreted as an indication of patterns within the selected literature rather than as an exhaustive representation of Japanese language education research worldwide

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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