

On JaLL – Online Japanese Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism confers many benefits. Chief among the benefits are observable ones like improved communication skills and greater career opportunities and the subtler ones like enhanced cognitive abilities and deeper cultural understanding. In the increasingly globalized world, mastering a third language is becoming more mandatory than ever. The pursuit of a third language learning is made easier with the advent of technology since the lessons can be conducted online, which does not necessitate the instructor and learners to be present in the same physical space. Online Japanese Language Learning (OnJaLL) brings together the students from different faculties in UiTM Kedah and a non-native Japanese instructor of Indian origin who lives and works in Osaka, Japan. It gives the students the chance to experience global learning as the instructor resides in the country of the target language origin. Another unique opportunity of learning offered to the students is to learn Japanese from another third speaker of the language, who may have similar learning experiences. Among the perceived benefits of OnJaLL are students are able to learn a third language outside the formal curriculum, they have the chance to learn from a third speaker of the target language who can better empathize with the challenges faced in learning a third language and the opportunity to gain insight into the target culture via the observation of non-native Japanese speaker who currently resides in the country. OnJaLL can serve as a module for third language learning for the benefits of students' empowerment.

Keywords: Multilingualism, third language, Japanese Language, non-native speaker.

INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and metalinguistic awareness while fostering cross-cultural competence and empathy. Learners benefit academically and socially through improved communication strategies and global engagement. Research shows multilingual individuals develop stronger executive control and adaptability, which positively influence additional language learning, including Japanese.

Learning Japanese as a third language broadens access to Japan's rich cultural, technological, and economic landscape. It strengthens multilingual learners' cognitive skills and enhances employability in global industries. Learning Japanese also deepens intercultural understanding, offering insights into non-Western worldviews and enriching linguistic repertoires through unique scripts and communicative styles.

Learning Japanese from a native speaker poses distinct challenges for learners, particularly in multilingual contexts. Research highlights that native instructors may emphasize natural fluency and implicit knowledge rather than explicit grammar explanations, which can confuse learners unfamiliar with Japanese linguistic structures ((Hiratsuka, 2025a). Additionally, Japanese's complex writing systems and sociolinguistic norms, such as honorific speech, create barriers for learners who may not share cultural reference points (Sakamoto, 2024). Native-speakerism can also discourage students, as the expectation of imitating native-like pronunciation and cultural authenticity may heighten anxiety rather than promote effective communication (Hiratsuka, 2025b; Nagashima & Lawrence, 2025). Thus, while native speakers provide cultural authenticity, pedagogical mismatches often complicate the learning process

Non-native Japanese instructors (NNIs) bring unique advantages to language education, particularly for multilingual learners. Because they have personally acquired Japanese as a foreign language, they often employ explicit teaching strategies and can empathize with learners' struggles, making grammar and script learning more accessible (Rivers, 2011). NNIs also serve as role models, demonstrating that high proficiency is attainable without being a native speaker, which can motivate students (Sato & Doerr, 2021). However, they may face challenges related to native-speakerism, where students or institutions undervalue their expertise compared to native instructors (Kubota, 2020). In online platforms, where accents and cultural markers are more salient, NNIs may encounter additional legitimacy issues

Problem Statement

Although Japanese language learning has gained global traction, challenges persist in ensuring effective instruction and learner engagement in online settings. Existing research has largely focused on native instructors, leaving the role of non-native instructors (NNIs) teaching Japanese online underexplored. Moreover, most studies privilege bilingual or monolingual learner perspectives, overlooking the complex experiences of multilingual learners who may approach Japanese with unique linguistic repertoires and affective orientations. In addition, there is a dearth of studies on learning the Japanese language from a non-native speaker online in the Malaysian context. This gap in empirical and theoretical understanding presents a significant barrier to developing inclusive pedagogical strategies that address diverse learner needs in the context of global Japanese language education.

Online Japanese Language Learning (OnJaLL) is a project that is unique in its approach and implementation. Due to this, the experiences that can be compiled from this project will be able to provide more empirical data to the study of multilingualism and teaching and learning of Japanese online by non-native speaker instructor.

Objectives

- 1.To devise an international online Japanese language learning experience for university students with a homogenous background.
- 2.To provide a platform for local university students to learn from non-native Japanese speaker instructor.
- 3.To investigate the benefits gained by university students in learning Japanese as a third language from non-native Japanese speaker instructor at the international level.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY

Realising the benefits of multilingualism to university students' learning experience, an online Japanese language learning programme has been planned with this aim in mind. This project prepares a platform on which local university students are given the chance to learn Japanese as a third language from international non-native speaker instructor who resides in Japan.

The table below summarises the implementation of this project:

NO	ACTIVITY
1.	Choosing online Japanese Language Class as a collaborative effort between Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kedah and Japan Daawah Centre (JDC), Osaka Japan
2.	Meeting between representatives of ALS UiTM Kedah and representatives of JDC in Osaka Japan.
3.	Signing of Memorandum of Understanding between UiTM and Japan Daawah Centre.
4.	First cycle of OnJaLL started (June 2025 – July 2025, 6 online classes with the duration of 1 1/2 hour per class weekly).Online classes with 57 students were taught by a Japanese non-native speaker who has learned the language for 8 years and obtained JLPT N2 Certified (Advanced Level of Proficiency). The instructor currently resides in Osaka, Japan.
5.	Survey was conducted among the students and reflective entries were written by the students. The feedback will be used in preparing for the second cycle of the language class
6.	Second cycle of OnJaLL will start in October 2025

Potential Findings and Commercialisation

Table 2 below shows the result from Descriptive statistics of Online Japanese Language Learning (OnJaLL) Survey that consisted of 20 items. The highest mean score was observed in item 8 “The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher can correct me immediately when I make mistakes or errors in my learning process.” with ($M = 4.58$), ($SD = 0.602$) indicating a strong level of agreement among respondent this was followed by question 4 “The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher has great ability to translate texts, which helps me understand the materials better.” and question 11 “My international non-native Japanese speaker teacher always provides more information about the materials taught.” both with ($M = 4.55$), and the deviations for question 4 was ($SD = 0.607$) while for question 10 it was ($SD = 0.574$) showing slightly less variability in responses and in contrast question 2 “I am sure that an international non-native Japanese speaker teacher can teach more effective learning strategies. (i.e.: Guessing meaning from context, repetition and drills)”.

Other items indicate that the learners have high confidence that the non-native Japanese speaker teacher provides motivation, serves as the best model of a successful language learner, and has great ability as an instructor, similar to Sato and Doerr’s (2021) findings. The findings also affirm Matsumoto’s (2021) argument that non-native speaker teachers can empathize with learners’ struggles. Students also attest that the non-native speaker teacher is able to anticipate the difficulties they may face in learning the language and that they know how to learn the language through a conscious process (Miyazato, 2022; Hiratsuka, Nall, & Castellano, 2023).

Table 1: Findings from the questionnaire survey

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The language used by the international non-native Japanese speaker teacher gives me motivation to learn Japanese language and culture.	53	4.47	.639
I am sure that an international non-native Japanese speaker teacher can teach more effective learning strategies. (i.e.: Guessing meaning from context, repetition and drills)	53	4.32	.827
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher possesses a wide range of communicative competence that helps me promote my language skills.	53	4.42	.719
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher has great ability to translate texts, which helps me understand the materials better.	53	4.55	.607
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher teaches spontaneous conversation / discourse that enhances communication skills.	53	4.49	.697
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher pronounces words clearly and accurately, which I need for my learning.	53	4.51	.639
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher understands my utterances.	53	4.34	.732
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher can correct me immediately when I make mistakes or errors in my learning process.	53	4.58	.602
The international non-native Japanese speaker teacher shows empathy towards my learning problems and needs.	53	4.43	.636
My international non-native Japanese speaker teacher always provides more information about the materials taught.	53	4.55	.574
My international non-native Japanese speaker teacher tends to be sensitive and understanding.	53	4.43	.636
My international non-native Japanese speaker teacher is capable of anticipating my difficulties in learning.	53	4.45	.667

My international non-native Japanese speaker teacher is capable of anticipating my misconceptions of Japanese language.	53	4.40	.599
There is no doubt the international non-native Japanese speaker teacher knows how to learn the language through a conscious process.	53	4.49	.608
I believe that my international non-native Japanese speaker teacher is the best model of successful language learners.	53	4.51	.608

The students were also asked to write a reflective essay about the experience gained from OnJaLL. Some of the responses are recorded in the table below

Participant	Comment	Emerging theme
Students 1	Learning Japanese online last semester was both exciting and challenging. I enjoyed discovering new vocabulary and expressions, especially when we practiced speaking during live sessions. At first, it felt difficult to remember hiragana and katakana, but with consistent practice I gained confidence. I appreciated the interactive activities and clear explanations, which made lessons more engaging despite the virtual format.	Exciting, challenging & engaging lesson
Student 2	Learning Japanese online last semester was a valuable experience for me. I enjoyed the flexibility of attending classes from home, and I benefited from the interactive materials such as slides, videos, and online quizzes that made learning more engaging. I also liked being able to review the lessons at my own pace, which helped me understand better.	Flexibility, Interactivity

Contribution/Impact

On JaLL is a high-impact project because of the reasons below:

1. It helps to achieve the Key Performance Indicators for UiTM, in particular. PI074 (activities with MoU/MoA with international industries)
2. It enables university students with a homogenous background like UiTM to experience international online intercultural learning.
3. It offers a platform for local university students to interact more closely with international Japanese non-native speaker with whom many of them have never communicated before in classroom environment.
4. It provides insights into the opportunities gained by university students in learning Japanese online from non-native speaker teacher.
5. The MoU signed between the universities helps to ensure the continuity of the project for more than one cycle, allowing more students to benefit from the project.

Commercialisation Potential

This project has significant commercialisation potential because it is easily replicable by any third language instructors at various levels who aspire to provide an international teaching and learning experience of third language for the students.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations are given to improve On JaLL to provide more meaningful third language learning experience for students. Firstly, On JaLL should foreground task-based, intercultural learning—using role-plays, brief “culture capsules,” mini-projects, and virtual fieldnotes that promote language use in real contexts. Other than that, the quality of the teaching and learning process will also improve when third-speaker instructors receive targeted training in online pedagogy, feedback literacy, and intercultural mediation,

complemented by occasional native-speaker guest sessions. Furthermore, peer structures such as conversation circles, exchanges with Japan-based students, and clear peer-feedback protocols can deepen practice and motivation among the learners. In addition, Impact should also be monitored through pre/post proficiency checks, brief affect measures (e.g., motivation, confidence), and learning analytics to gain more insights into the effectiveness of the project. Future partnerships with Osaka-based organisations can further enable virtual site visits and authentic tasks that strengthen cultural insights.

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