

National Symposium on Japanese Language Education 2024

Summary of Panel Discussion

Exploring, Understanding and Discussing All Aspects of Japanese Language Education

Moderator:

Ms. Anne de Kretser, Director, Monash Japanese Language Education Centre

Panelists:

1. **Mr. Andrew Scrimgeour** – Adjunct Research Fellow, University of South Australia
 2. **Ms. Sherryl Saunders** – Former Treasurer, The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)
 3. **Dr. Gary Bonar** – Senior Lecturer in Languages & TESOL, Monash University
 4. **Ms. Katherine Brownlee** – President, Japanese Teachers Association of NSW (JTAN), Japanese Teacher, Gosford High School
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Abstract (Pre-discussion)

This comprehensive panel session will feature five expert speakers who will delve into the multifaceted world of Japanese language education. This session aims to provide a thorough exploration of the current landscape, challenges, and opportunities faced by educators in this field. It will explain latest research into the Japanese language educator community and explore the current situation for teachers, new teachers and pre-service teachers.

Our distinguished panellists will cover a wide array of topics, ensuring a holistic view of Japanese language education:

Each expert will deliver a presentation, providing valuable perspectives and actionable insights. Following the presentations, there will be an interactive Q&A session, offering the audience an opportunity to engage with the speakers, ask questions, and participate in meaningful discussions.

Objectives

- To highlight and address the key challenges and opportunities in Japanese language education.
- To disseminate the latest research findings and their practical implications.
- To share experiences and strategies from experienced, new and pre-service teachers.
- To foster an interactive and collaborative environment for educators to discuss and exchange ideas.

This panel session promises to be a rich, informative, and engaging experience for all attendees, equipping educators with the knowledge and tools to enhance their teaching practices and better support their colleagues and their students.

Summary of Panel Presentations

Introduction from moderator

The objective of this panel session is to exchange ideas from multiple perspectives and create a space for more interactive exploration of topics that matter to all of us. The teaching landscape is becoming more challenging, and although there are so many positive things about teaching and our teaching community, there are also things that are beyond our control which is affecting us. As educators we know that knowledge and understanding is a powerful tool, and staying informed empowers us to face the challenges, gain insights that inform our work, inspire us to innovate and adapt with resilience.

Presentation 1: Trends in Japanese Language Education (*Mr. Andrew Scrimgeour*)

Current Landscape:

- Japanese is the most widely taught language in Australian schools, accounting for 23% of students in government schools. This is largely due to long-standing government investment, student interest in Japanese culture, and strong educational infrastructure. Historically, this strong participation has been sustained by policies put in place such as in Queensland during the 1980s, which have maintained a high level of engagement with the Japanese language in the state.
- After Japanese, Chinese is the second most commonly taught language, followed by Italian, French, and Indonesian. While Japanese remains the most popular overall, there are notable differences across states. For example, Queensland has a strong engagement with Japanese, while New South Wales (NSW) has seen a low engagement rate despite its larger population density. This reflects earlier state policy decisions and the varying levels of commitment to language education in different regions.

Key Challenges:

- Retention rates for Japanese language learners significantly decline after the primary school years. Many students drop the subject when they move into secondary education, despite the early introduction of these languages in primary schools. This trend is seen across many languages, not just Japanese. For example, languages like Italian and Indonesian have experienced a marked decline in secondary enrollment. Data from the Government schools report (2021) shows that while languages like Chinese maintain relatively high retention rates (in part due to a significant number of native speakers), languages like Italian, German, and Indonesian show much lower retention rates.

- Regional disparities in access to Japanese language education are also a significant challenge. While Queensland continues to lead in Japanese language education, NSW has fewer students enrolled in Japanese, with most learners falling into the categories of beginners and continuers, with few background learners. In contrast, Chinese has a significantly higher proportion of native speakers (over 50%) in NSW. These disparities in engagement suggest that state policies have a profound impact on the uptake of language education, and the resources and opportunities available to students can vary significantly across states.

Policy Recommendations:

- Shift the focus of language learning from utility-based motivations (e.g., trade, national strategic interests) towards more intrinsic, personal, and cultural reasons for language acquisition. The rationale for learning a language should move beyond the national good and focus more on the benefits of engaging with a language's culture, society, and people. This aligns with the belief that language learning should be driven by an interest in the culture, not merely economic or political motives.
- Better articulation between primary and secondary education is necessary to improve retention and student commitment. In primary school, students may be introduced to Japanese or other languages, but there are significant gaps in the transition to secondary education, where students are often not given enough opportunities or support to continue their language studies. This gap in language education can be addressed by making primary school experiences more meaningful and ensuring that junior secondary education is a better pathway to continued language study in higher years.
- Align national policies with student-centered learning approaches. Language education should not be dictated by top-down policies aimed solely at national or strategic objectives. Instead, there needs to be more focus on the personal and educative value of learning a language, making sure the curriculum is tailored to fit real classroom needs. For instance, the current Australian Curriculum's demands might not be feasible with only 50 minutes of language instruction per week, making it essential to develop a more realistic curriculum that works within this time constraint. This involves setting more achievable, student-focused learning objectives and creating classroom realities that reflect the time and resources available.
- Curriculum innovations should aim to make the primary school experience more meaningful, enhancing language retention in secondary school. As part of the multilingual turn in language policy, schools should embrace a more holistic view of multilingualism in education, recognizing that many languages are spoken within the classroom and acknowledging **the** linguistic diversity that exists. This approach would better reflect the linguistic and cultural identities present in the classroom, which is essential for both personal engagement with languages and the effective implementation of language policies at the local level.

Presentation 2: National Languages Plan and Strategy (*Ms. Sherryl Saunders*)

- **The National Languages Plan and Strategy vision statement:**

The National Languages Plan and Strategy vision statement acknowledges the national interest-the utilitarian purpose for learning a language but also starts to build on human reasons which are intimately personal connections between people. It includes languages learned in all sorts of contexts; from the early years of learning to the tertiary level, and in both formal and non-formal school settings and in the community. It considers what would be the vision for all language learners with their own multilingual contexts.

- **Four Core Recommendations:**
- Two high level recommendations
 - Ensuring all language programs adhere to a high-quality standard. A high quality model means that each program in any level of education is valued, recognised, is of substance, and it has meaning and impact.

The below chart is the articulation of what a student will experience in a high quality language education across various programs and stages.

Program Type	Pre-school and primary school	Years 7-10	Years 11-12
Language as subject	3 x 45 minute lessons per week i.e. 135 minutes across at least 3 lessons/week	3 x 60 minute lesson per week i.e. 180 minutes across at least 3 lessons/week	240 minutes/week minimum
Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)	135 minutes language study across at least 3 lessons/week, or 200 minutes across 4-5 lessons/week for more complex literacy languages (e.g. Chinese) plus teaching time for the content area/s being taught through the language	180 minutes language study across at least 3 lessons/week, or 240 minutes across 4-5 lessons/week for more complex literacy languages (e.g. Chinese) plus teaching time for the content area/s being taught through the language	
Bilingual	A minimum of 50% of teaching time in additional language	A minimum of 50% of teaching time in additional language	

- Introducing a “home language +1+1+” model, where students learn an additional language from primary school and another in secondary school, and + continuation. There is a human commitment that we should support home language, which could be English, but could be another language. An additional language for primary, secondary, and onward.

- The below chart is the model.

Home Language(s) Languages spoken in the home	+1 An additional language	+1 A further additional language	+ Senior secondary, university, higher education, adult life
Phase 1 Birth/arrival in Australia through to the early years of schooling	Phase 2 Pre-school and primary school years	Phase 3 Years 7–10	Phase 4 Years 11–12 university and higher education adult education
Home Language learning and maintenance support	+ 1 additional language and English for all	+ 1 additional language and English for all	Continued or new languages and English for all in the school years
English Home languages	English Australian First Languages Community languages Additional languages	English Australian First Languages Community languages Additional languages	English (Years 11/12 and adult migrant programs) Australian First Languages Community languages Additional languages

- Two implementation recommendations
 - Creating a National Institute for Languages Education to provide expert support and guidance for language policy in each school.
 - Forming a National Working Group to coordinate efforts across jurisdictions. Language education is disparate since there are 24 different authorities and jurisdictions (states and territories' government schools, Catholics and Independent sectors, plus federal government support).
- **Implementation Challenges:**
 - The fragmented education system across states makes cohesive national implementation difficult.
 - Need for local adaptation of policies while maintaining national standards.

**Both Charts were shown as slides in the presentation, which are from:*

[AFMLTA | Plan & Strategy](#)

Presentation 3: Preparing Pre-Service Teachers in Japanese Language Education (Dr. Gary Bonar)

The speaker is in charge of the language preparation program for future language teachers at Monash University, and talked about what the program covered in content, and shared some of the voices of preservice teachers.

- **Pathways for Becoming a Pre-service Language Teacher:**
 - Bachelor of Education (double degree), where students experience the course in their fourth year or:
 - Master of Teaching programs, which has their language methods in their first year of the two years of their Masters.
 - The class consist of a mixture of language. Chinese is the largest number, followed by Japanese. French, German Italian and Indonesian are steady, and Spanish is rising in numbers with more schools offering that language.
 - Many pre-service teachers are multilingual, especially in Japanese as a second or third language.
 - The course deals with content such as pre-service teachers' expectation of their placements, practical-lesson planning, managing a class, and understanding curriculum and post placement reflections.
 - Pre-placement sessions cover topics such as;
 - Planning innovative lesson planning and thinking of creative ways to engage students
 - Acquiring practical teaching skills and knowledge
 - Integrating language and cultural education
 - -Enhancing student interaction and communication, including how to engage students beyond compulsory years
- **Challenges in Teacher Training:**
 - Occasional limited availability of school placements in Japanese language classrooms.
 - Confidence issues among L2 speakers of Japanese regarding language proficiency. The pre-service teachers have uncertainties and concerns such as whether they can retain student engagement and interests, handle classroom management and behaviour, differentiate and manage mixed language proficiency levels of their students, being uncertain of their own language proficiency, and feel that Languages as a subject are positioned in school and society as less important than other subjects, which may affect students' engagement.
 - A need for modern teaching strategies that go beyond traditional textbook methods.
- Pre-service teachers may also experience challenges with their mentor during their placement.
 - Qualities of a good mentor are:
 - To give constructive feedback and encouragement however small
 - In the current situation with the shortage of language teachers, early career teachers are leaving the career in large numbers. Boosting their confidence will help this too.

- Support and empathy
- Sharing resources
- Be open and invite them into the school community
- **Less helpful things from mentors include:**
 - Lack of support and appropriate resources
 - Poor communication and feedback
 - Authoritarian and unapproachable attitude
 - Inflexibility and micromanagement
- **Recommendations for Improvement:**
 - Encouraging mentorship and peer support.
 - Providing more exposure to real-world classroom experiences.
 - Integrating technology and contemporary teaching approaches to increase student engagement.

Presentation 4: Strengthening Professional Networks & Teacher Retention (Ms. Katherine Brownlee)

- **Current Challenges for Japanese Language Teachers:**
 - Many teachers work in isolation as the only language educators in their schools.
 - Professional development opportunities can be limited, particularly in regional areas.
 - These two factors make it hard for teachers to build professional network compared to other subject teachers with larger numbers. There are limited opportunities to observe classes for stages 5 and 6 (which does not help increase the number of teachers who are able to teach this stage) and there is also a need for professional support for teachers at all stages of their career.
 - “We are stronger together, think what can you give back, because Language is in decline in the bigger picture.”
 - We should have students think it was worth the time learning a language. We can’t control everything—who walks in our classroom, how much time we have (even if we raise voices). However, the influence of the teachers makes up 30%, and that is something we can control.
- **Role of Professional Associations:**
 - JTAN supports teachers by providing resources, training, and networking opportunities.
 - Encouraging small, incremental teaching improvements through Teaching Sprints.
- **Retention Strategies:**
 - Enhancing support networks for teachers.
 - Advocating for systemic changes to improve language education pathways.
 - Ensuring students see the long-term value in continuing language studies.

Teaching Sprints (Dr. Simon Breakspear) method of changing: Prepare-sprint-review

Small changes in a short span of time, accumulatively make a big difference over time.

The speaker has been trying to;

- Enhance student engagement and achieve an increase of students across all languages.
- Focus on consistent high expectations and incremental skill development of language skills as Y11-12 students experience cognitive overload and discontinue the language.

The system should be sustainable for teachers as well.

Evidence: Statistics, surveys, attendance and continuity data shows increased percentage of students continuing to Y12. This resulted in introducing an addition of a new language.

Who can you work with? Other schools, more broadly if possible. Share your journey-spark others

Q&A Session Summary

Q1: (To Katherine) Has shifting mandatory language hours from Year 7 to Year 8 increased elective uptake in Year 9?

- **Response:** Schools that start language study in Year 8 tend to see better retention rates into the elective years, particularly into Year 9. Historically, some schools offered a Year 7 taster course for languages, which was later replaced by other programs in many schools as it is over the mandatory entitlement that schools are willing to timetable. In our case, we have always had the mandatory language hours in Year 8. I've advocated for a 10-hour taster course in Year 7 to give students more information before making their choices.

Personally, I believe Year 8 is a better starting point because it aligns more naturally with the transition into Year 9. Many schools begin in Year 7 due to behavior management concerns, as Year 7 students are typically easier to manage. However, Year 8 flows more smoothly into the electives and the subsequent years of study.

Q2: How can pre-service teachers gain more exposure to Japanese language classrooms, given that there seems to be a disconnect between placement and their teaching subject?

Response: There is a significant challenge in providing pre-service teachers with enough exposure to language classrooms. Larger subject areas like maths and science are prioritized, leaving language placements to the last, which limits opportunities for aspiring language teachers.

Networking with university staff and fostering communication with schools about language teaching placements is essential. Ensuring that placement systems are more responsive to the needs of language teacher trainees will ultimately provide them with the practical experience they need.

Practicing teachers can also play a key role by advocating for more Japanese language teaching placements within their school, in communicating with their counterpart University(ies).

Q3: How do pre-service teachers perceive the gap between theoretical training and real classrooms?

Response: Many struggle with classroom management and the transition from theoretical learning to practical teaching. The placement does not allow the trainee to observe every aspect and background of the situation, nor understand the changes that had been implemented due to any restrictions to evolve into the current system. It is important to turn this into a learning experience, and to pursue one's aspired goals of teaching.

Q4: Can Japanese teachers be recruited from Japan, particularly English language teachers with second-language teaching experience in terms of procedures?

- **Response:** Complex visa and registration requirements makes it challenging, but necessary.

Q5: Is ATAR scaling discouraging students from studying Japanese at Year 12?

- **Response:**

Sherryl mentioned that ATAR is still the main way of measuring educational success, but it's clear that students will find their own paths after school, regardless of ATAR.

Languages have been marginalized in the current system as an elective. That is why our Recommendation is to enhance every learning experience so that it is more meaningful, and of substance.

Andrew added that it's not proven that removing ATAR would directly increase language uptake. It's clear that many students choose languages because they think it will boost their ATAR, even though this focus on exam preparation in Years 11 and 12 does not necessarily serve students' broader needs or life experiences.

Anne also added parents also seem to be fixated on how scaling impacts their child's ATAR score, often asking, "What will help me get the best mark?" This shows that the current system isn't meeting the needs of all students.