

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 20 Japanese language education in Australia: Fostering Japan-Australia exchange and cooperation

27 July 2020

One of the first things I noticed after coming to Australia is that there are many people who will come up and talk to you in Japanese. It is not just aimed at tourists in souvenir shops and restaurants. I have met people in unexpected places who speak to me in Japanese and talk to me about their relationship with Japan.

This is no mere coincidence; rather it is because there are many students of Japanese language here in Australia. There are around 400,000 people studying Japanese in Australia, which places Australia fourth behind China (approx. 1 million), Indonesia (approx. 710,000), and South Korea (approx. 530,000). However, if we consider the number of learners per 100,000 people, then Australia is by far number one in the world with 1,708 learners (the next two in the top ten are South Korea with 1,040 learners and Taiwan with 721 learners per 100,000). This means that around 1 in 60 people in Australia are studying Japanese.

One of my important jobs as Consul-General is supporting Japanese language education here in NSW and the NT. Since arriving in Sydney, I have had discussions with people involved in promoting Japanese language education, and I have also had the opportunity to observe several classes in schools. In the course of doing so, I came to realise that Japanese language education has deep roots in Australian society and it acts as a contact point with Japan, increasing the level of interest, familiarity and understanding that Australians have for Japanese culture. Japanese language education plays an important role in creating promoters of exchange and cooperation between Japan and Australia. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in Japanese language education here in NSW and the NT.

In this issue of my newsletter, as I introduce some of my observations regarding Japanese language education, I invite you to consider with me the role that Japanese language education plays in exchange and cooperation between Japan and Australia.



A Japanese language class at Darwin High School
(21 February 2020)

● **Japanese language education at the primary and secondary level in Australia**

The main reason there are so many students of Japanese language is because there are many schools which teach Japanese, either as a compulsory or as an elective course in foreign language study. Ninety-six per cent of those studying Japanese in Australia are primary and secondary students.

In the second half of the 1990s, against the backdrop of significant progress in Australia-Japan relations, there was such a boom in Japanese language education that it was even called a “tsunami” here in Australia. Today after the boom has calmed, Japanese is still one of the most widely studied languages in Australia due to the great interest in Japanese culture.

When I visited Darwin in February this year, I observed a Japanese language class for the first time. The students were actively taking part and talking, and it seemed to be a very enjoyable lesson. When I asked them why they chose to study Japanese, many students replied that that it was because they liked Japanese pop-culture or they became interested in the language when they went to Japan on a ski trip. I really felt that an appreciation for Japanese culture was the driving force behind their choice.



**Observing a Japanese lesson at St Philip's College
(13 March 2020)**

In March this year, I observed a Japanese class at St Philip's College in Alice Springs. During the lesson, video clips were used and students competed against each other using practical Japanese as though they were playing a game. As you can see in the photo above, the classroom itself was decorated with many posters and banners displaying Japanese culture.

The Australian Government's objective in teaching foreign languages in schools is clearly outlined as having three points: for students to be able to 1) communicate in the target language, 2) understand language, culture, and learning and the relationship between these, and thereby develop an intercultural capability in communication, and 3) understand themselves as communicators.

Language learning is not just a matter of learning words. Emphasis is also placed on developing communication and understanding among different cultures, and for this reason, Japanese language education is an important opportunity to enable an understanding of Japanese culture from childhood.



**Japanese studies presentation
at the University of New South Wales (2019)**

● **Japanese language education at the tertiary level in Australia**

Many Australian universities also offer Japanese language courses. I have not yet had the chance to observe any classes myself, but I have had discussions with experts in the area.

When you think of Japanese language students at university level, you probably imagine that many students are aiming for advanced Japanese language skills or they have practical goals of acquiring a certain number of units or skills for future employment. However, in reality, many university classes are for beginners, catering to students who enjoy Japanese pop-culture and ‘cool Japan’, and at some universities, science students make up the majority of Japanese language students.

I have also heard that many of the students who are studying Japanese as a foreign language at universities in Australia are international students from Asia. I am glad to know that multicultural Australia is not only providing international students from Asia with the opportunity to study English, but also the chance to experience Japanese language.

However, the current COVID-19 situation is presenting new challenges that must be addressed, such as the reduction of staff due to financial pressures at universities and the impact on the quality of foreign language instruction caused by the shift to online learning. Furthermore, there is a great discrepancy between the number of learners of Japanese at the primary and secondary levels, and the number of learners at the tertiary level and in adult education. This means that there is a challenge of how to maintain continuing learners and engage potential learners. I would like to encourage Japanese language education at universities and in the private sector as much as possible while cooperating with stakeholders.



The 50th National Japanese Language Speech Contest
(12 October 2019)

[Photo: courtesy The Japan Foundation Sydney]

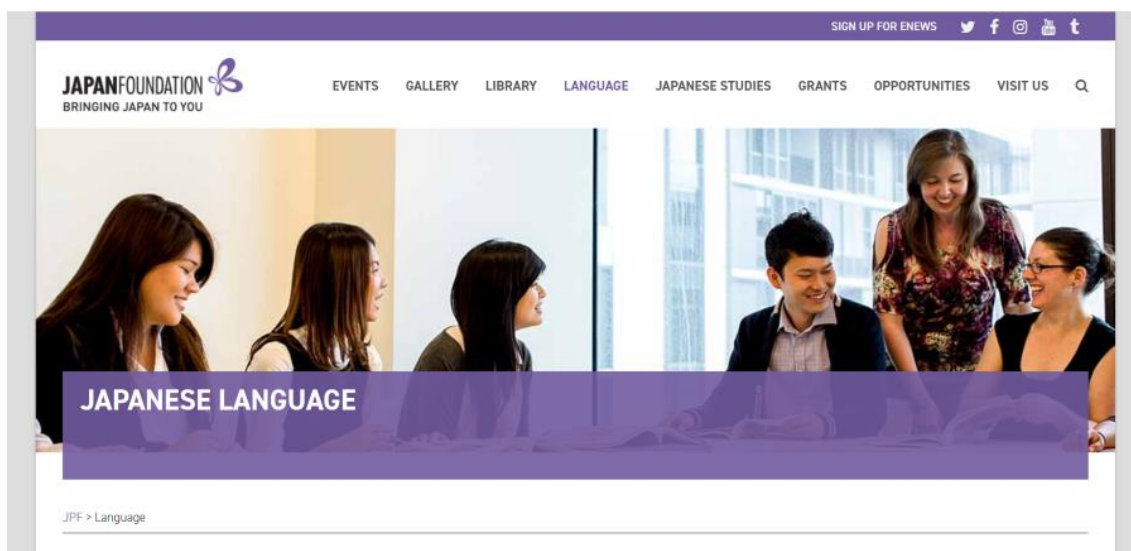
- **The Japan Foundation Sydney**

In Sydney, the Japan Foundation Sydney is promoting Japanese language education. The Foundation is located close to Central Station, on level 4 of the Central Park mall opposite the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

In October last year, the 50th National Japanese Language Speech Contest was held at the Foundation. The contest was streamed live as winners representing the various state and territory finals competed with passion. The contest has a long history and contributes to raising the level of Japanese language education nationally.

The Foundation also presents an annual student film contest called Video Matsuri. Students enter short videos using Japanese language and prizes are awarded in each category. I watched last year's top prize winners – each video showed Australian children acting out skits in Japanese, and they were all strong efforts. This year the deadline for entries is 1 September and I look forward to seeing new works.

For Japanese language teachers, the Japan Foundation Sydney conducts various training (professional development) and provides teaching materials. Given the large number of Japanese language learners, it is all the more important to ensure the quality of Japanese language teachers. According to Japanese language education experts at the Japan Foundation, the Australian curriculum is well devised and of very high quality. This is also reflected in foreign language teaching -- I believe it is the result of many years of effort by the people involved in Japanese language education and what we see on the ground in the classroom is the outcome.



The Japan Foundation Sydney's "Japanese language" website

<https://jpf.org.au/language/>

The Japan Foundation Sydney also offers Japanese language courses to the general public for adult learners. Due to measures against COVID-19, classes are currently being conducted online, but thanks to the move online, people in regional areas are also able to participate. The Japan Foundation operates an online Japanese language learning platform called "Minato", and in addition to the self-study courses, it has increased the number of online courses with tutor support. I hope that many people will make use of these resources.



**Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Nakayama Norihiro observing
a class at the Sydney Saturday School of Japanese (SSSJ)
(22 February 2020)**

• Japanese language community schools and Japanese language education as heritage language

In addition to the Japanese language education situations mentioned above, there are also Japanese language community schools (or supplementary schools) which enable children with Japanese parentage to attend regular schools and study Japanese on the weekend or weekday evenings. In NSW, there are 12 such schools in total. The schools are basically operated by parents of the students, and if the schools meet certain conditions, they are also supported by the NSW state government and the Government of Japan.

When Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Nakayama Norihiro visited Sydney in February this year, I accompanied him as he observed a class at the Sydney Saturday School of Japanese in Cammeray located in the northern part of Sydney. The students' parents are not only Japanese expatriates living here for a few years; many are permanent residents who have married Australians or who are employed locally or have started their own businesses here. Not all students at the school are aiming to study at a school in Japan in the future. There is a growing demand for Japanese language education to meet the needs of heritage language learners among second and even third generation Japanese in Australia. I realized that the issue is how we should respond to the diverse needs of Japanese language education.

In Japan, the basic policy regarding the promotion of Japanese language education was decided by the Cabinet in June this year, based on a Japanese language education promotion bill enacted in 2019. The policy included the following statement: “The descendants of Japanese who migrated overseas can be expected to play a role in expanding exchange between Japan and their country of residence and to create a group of people with positive feelings towards Japan, and in addition to this, they can be expected to be active as members of a global pool of talent with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. Recognising that these people have Japanese roots, we will take the necessary measures to support Japanese language education for these people in order to promote a better understanding of Japan.” Based on this, I would like to consider how to provide the appropriate support to meet the various needs of Japanese language community schools here in NSW.



**At the Sydney Japanese International School (SJIS) International Division
Graduation Ceremony
(17 December 2019)**

- **Sydney Japanese International School (SJIS)**

Here in Sydney, there is also a school providing full-time education in Japanese language for the children of Japanese – the Sydney Japanese International School in Terrey Hills in the north of Sydney. It was the first Japanese school to be established in a developed

country and opened in 1969. In 1971, the school grounds were completed and the school moved to its current location. In fact, the method used by the Japanese Government to support the building of the school grounds was named the “Sydney method” and has since been used to build other Japanese schools around the world. The Sydney Japanese International School is now a school with its own traditions and history, and last year celebrated its 50th anniversary.

The special characteristic of this school is that there are two streams or divisions – a Japanese division and an international division – and there is thorough bilingual and bicultural education at the school. The Japanese division receives education in accordance with the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sport and Technology curriculum, while receiving English lessons 4 or 5 times a week. The international division follows the NSW Department of Education curriculum and has a Japanese lesson every day. Furthermore, for physical education, music and art, students from both divisions come together for lessons and sit next to each other to ensure the students have the opportunity to become friends.

In December last year, I attended and gave a speech at the graduation ceremony for the international division. Student representatives from the Japanese and international divisions came together to give a message to the graduating students in both English and Japanese, and I was impressed to hear them speak in this way. My message to the graduating students was to remind them how fortunate they were to have been able to learn the good points of both Japan and Australia and I expressed my hope that they would use this valuable experience in the future.



**Sydney Anime Festival
(7 March 2020)**

- **Japanese language education fostering Japan-Australia exchange and cooperation**

As for my own experience, I was brought up in Japan and first went overseas after graduating from university for work and study. During my more than 30 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I have felt the importance of studying foreign languages. “Language” is “power”. I am genuinely pleased to know that on a per capita basis more people in Australia study Japanese language than anywhere else in the world.

Japanese language education creates individuals who promote Japan-Australia exchange and cooperation across a wide range of fields. Over many years, Japanese language education has produced countless promoters of Japan-Australia exchange and cooperation. This precious achievement and tradition must not be lost. We should continue to develop them and pass them on to the next generation, and I would like to make further efforts to this end.

In Australia, people young and old have a wide range of interests in Japan, such as anime, Japanese food and ski trips. If we can use these interests as a guide and increase the number of people who study Japanese, we will deepen understanding of Japan and develop greater exchange between us.

I hope that all of you will either learn some Japanese yourself or teach some to those around you.

Hello! - こんにちは！ (Kon-nichi wa)

Yes, we can, with Japan-Australia cooperation! - 日豪で協力すれば、できる！

(Nichi-Gō de kyō-ryoku sureba, dekiru!)

The Japan Foundation Survey on Japanese-Language Education Abroad (2018)
(Japanese)

<https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/survey18.html>

United Nations Population and Vital Statistics Report (2019) (Used to calculate the number of Japanese language learners per 100,000)

https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/vitstats/sets/Series_A_2019.pdf

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

The Shape of Australian Curriculum: Languages (2011)

https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Languages_-_Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum_new.pdf

The Japan Foundation, Sydney

<https://jpf.org.au/>

The National Japanese Language Speech Contest

<https://jpf.org.au/language/for-learners/contests/speech-contest/>

Video Matsuri

<https://jpf.org.au/language/for-learners/contests/video-matsuri/>

JF Japanese e-Learning Minato (Japanese language learning platform)

<https://minato-jf.jp/>

List of Japanese community language schools (Japanese)

<https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/document/japanese/consul/school.pdf>

Sydney Saturday School of Japanese

<https://www.sssj.org.au/en-AU/>

Basic policy regarding the promotion of Japanese language education (Cabinet decision in June 2020) (Japanese)

https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/2020/mext_00250.html

Sydney Japanese International School

<https://www.sjis.nsw.edu.au/>

Kinoshita Thomson, Chihiro (2020) "Why introductory Japanese? An Australian case study", in David Chapman and Carol Hayes eds. *Japan in Australia: Culture, Context and Connections*, Routledge.

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