

Malaysian Undergraduates' Beliefs and Motivation for Learning Japanese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is not a unique phenomenon in today's globalised world. A survey by Japan Foundation indicates that Japanese language is one of the most popular foreign languages with approximately 2.98 million students studying Japanese language in over 133 countries around the globe. Despite ranking at number 10 in Southeast Asia, studies on Japanese language learning with a focus on Malaysian learners is scarce. This study explored the beliefs and motivation of Malaysian undergraduates taking Japanese as a foreign language. The study involved 150 undergraduates who were studying Japanese as a third language at a Malaysian university. The study employed a survey design using questionnaire which consisted of four sections focusing on participants' demographic information, beliefs about language skills, self-efficacy beliefs related to the language skills, and reasons for learning the Japanese language. The findings indicate that most of the students are of the belief that listening and speaking are more difficult to learn compared to reading and writing skills. Similarly, most of the students are not confident with their ability to speak in Japanese. As for reasons for choosing to learn Japanese language, although a mix of integrative and instrumental reasons were mentioned, integrative motives seem to take priority among the students. The paper also discusses the pedagogical implications of the findings on the teaching and learning of Japanese as a foreign language at tertiary level.

Keywords: Japanese as a foreign language, instrumental motivation, integrative, foreign language learning, students' belief

1. Introduction

The Japanese language education in Malaysia can be divided into four major phases. The first phase is from 1941-1945 during the Japanese army occupation in Malaya. During this phase, Japanese language started to be taught as the main language. The second phase refers to the time from the Japanese army departure from Malaya until 1960s. During this time frame, the expansion of Japanese language halted for a while. The third phase started in mid 60s until 1981. During the third phase, Japanese language started to be taught in local universities with University Malaya being the first to offer the language in 1966. The fourth phase started in 1982 after the launching of the 'Look East' policy and it continues until the present time (Watanabe 2008).