



EVOLUTION

AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL REFLECTIONS OF MALAYSIA'S

LOOK EAST POLICY

edited by
MD NASRUDIN MD AKHIR
MOHD IKBAL MOHD HUDA
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Chapter 8

The Role of Non-profit Organizations in Empowering Japanese Language Education in Malaysia

Rokiah Pae & Roswati Abdul Rashid

Introduction

The Japan Foundation conducted 12 surveys on Japanese language education abroad from 1979 to 2018. The surveys show that the number of institutions offering Japanese language education increased 16.3 times from 1,145 to 18,661 institutions, the number of teachers rose 18.9 times from 4,097 to 77,323, and the number of students increased 30.3 times from 127,167 to 3,851,774. The three countries with the greatest number of Japanese language learners are China, Indonesia, and Korea, accounting for 58.3% of all Japanese language learners worldwide. There were 212 academic and non-academic institutions in Malaysia offering Japanese language courses to 39,247 students (1.0% of the world's Japanese language learners), placing Malaysia in 10th position among countries having Japanese language learners (The Japan Foundation 2018). The number of learners increased 18.1% compared to the 2015 survey of 33,224 (The Japan Foundation 2015) to 39,247 of which 19,417 (49.5%) are from secondary schools, 14,720 (37.5%) from higher learning institutions, 5,065 (12.9%) from non-academic private institutions, and 45 (0.1%) from primary schools. Overall, compared to the 2015 survey, the 2018 survey showed a general increasing trend of 10% to 20% in the number of institutions, teachers, and learners of the Japanese language (The Japan Foundation, 2018) This increase indicates the evolving development of Japanese language education in Malaysia. However, the actual number of

Japanese language learners is most likely higher than the given figures as it is not inclusive of learners studying Japanese on their own using audio, visual materials such as books or magazines, radio and television, online via the internet, or even other learning avenues such as lessons or courses aimed to promote international goodwill or intercultural exchange where Japanese is not taught as a language.

The chronology of Japanese language education in Malaysia can be divided into four major phases (Watanabe 2008). The first was during the World War II (1941–1945) where the Japanese army occupied the then Malaya and made Japanese the main language replacing the native Malay language. The second phase was when the Japanese army departed from Malaya following their defeat in the war. During this period, the expansion of the Japanese language was temporarily halted. The third phase started in the mid-60s until 1981. During this phase, the Japanese language was taught in local universities with the University of Malaya being the first to offer it in 1966. The fourth phase started in 1982 after the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad launched the Look East Policy (LEP) in February 1982. The LEP identified technical training and education as core components underlying cooperation between Malaysia and Japan. The policy generated many educational initiatives and programs involving both government bodies and the private sector in Malaysia and Japan. These programs aim to produce well-rounded students and teachers who are not only proficient in Japanese but also in human capital development and bilateral relationship enhancement. The LEP further expanded the learning of the Japanese language and culture throughout Malaysia in both academic and non-academic settings. For instance, Japanese classes are offered from primary school up to and including higher learning institutions and non-academic private institutions. These institutions are supported by various organizations, such as government-related agencies, companies, individuals, and non-profit organizations. Among the non-profit organizations contributing to strengthening Japanese language education in Malaysia are the Japanese Language Society of Malaysia (JLSM), the Malaysian Japanese Language Instructors Society (MAJLIS), and the ALEPS.

Japanese Language Society of Malaysia

The Japanese Language Society of Malaysia (JLSM) was established in 1968 and is the oldest non-profit organization promoting Japanese language education in Malaysia. It aims to foster a deeper understanding and meaningful relationships between Malaysians and Japanese through international cultural exchange. This aim is achieved by actively promoting Japanese language and culture learning in Malaysia. JLSM believes that only through the mastery of the Japanese language can a more meaningful and lasting relationship with the Japanese be achieved. This is because language is the direct embodiment of a society's culture, values, and thoughts. However, JLSM does not view proficiency in the Japanese language as the end goal but rather as a tool that provides a deeper look into Japanese culture. Hence, it places greater emphasis on creating spaces that promote intercultural interaction between Japanese and Malaysians. Highlighting Japanese culture is not the goal of these intercultural interactions. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a common platform for bringing people of the same interest together, bound by a common language, to work for peace and the betterment of the world. It is also an effective and efficient tool and means to acquire interest, knowledge, and skills in Japanese culture, arts, business management, and technology which not only enhances personal and organizational learning and development but also facilitate meaningful interactions between the people of the two nations. To achieve that, JLSM has been actively involved in organizing Japanese language activities and events such as the Japanese Language Festival (JLfest), conducting Japanese language courses, and administering the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).

JLSM is a member of the Japan Foundation Nihongo Network (Sakura Network). The Sakura Network is a network comprised of Japanese language education institutions worldwide. Currently there are six institutions in Malaysia (JFKL 2022) that have joined the network, including JLSM since 2015. In 2021, JLSM received a "FY 2021 Support Grant for Sakura Network Members." The grant facilitates Japanese language education in certain regions or countries by utilizing various programs provided by the Japan Foundation in a particular country or region. JLSM has made use of the grant to design and develop the JLSM website and to publish a mini novel by Edward Lee entitled *Kaze Kari Borrowing the Wind*. *Kaze Kari* is a compilation of six short stories written

for young adult Nihongo-jin. Nihongo-jin refers to individuals who are primarily interested in the Japanese language and is further defined by the Japan Foundation in *Wochi Kochi* magazine as those who desire to use Japanese to achieve some purpose in the international community and communicate in Japanese to reach that goal. The aim of this publication is to cultivate a reading culture among Japanese language learners as well as promote the Japanese Choral Speaking Competition organized annually by JLSM during the JLfest. This mini novel is also aimed at promoting active reading, in which learners are encouraged to proactively get involved in the reading of a text as the engagement of learners is paramount to optimize learning resulting in a better understanding of a text's meaning. The font colours used for the texts are red and blue to differentiate them from textbooks that generally use black font. This book is also available at JLSM library. JLSM will also be donating a set of 15 copies of this storybook to over 40 educational institutions in Malaysia that offer Japanese as a school subject or a regular school activity.

Membership in JLSM is open to anyone interested in learning and promoting the Japanese language and culture through cultural exchange programs, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee. Currently, JLSM has fewer than 100 members and the number has declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue is crucial since most of the activities conducted are based on voluntary participation. There are two types of individual memberships: Associate Member and Ordinary Member. An Associate Member may take part in JLSM activities, including regular Japanese language courses, Language and Culture Clubs, use of the JLSM Learner's Resource Library as well as its WIFI facilities and be given priority to join JLSM's public events such as the JLfest. An application can be submitted online. For those below 18 years of age, a guardian's consent is required. Accepted applicants are required to pay the fees online within a week. An Ordinary Member is entitled to vote in general meetings and may be elected as a member of the Executive Committee, in addition to the privileges enjoyed by an Associate Member. Those who have been an Associate Member for two years or more and reside in Malaysia qualify as eligible for application. Interested applicants may submit a letter of application (proposed and seconded by two existing Ordinary Members) to the Executive Committee. JLSM was awarded the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation in 2010 and 2019 while Edward Lee, JLSM Chairman for several terms, was conferred the Order of the Rising Sun,

Gold and Silver Rays in Autumn 2021 for his outstanding contribution in promoting Japanese language education and mutual understanding between Japan and Malaysia. The conferment ceremony was held on 17 March 2022, at the Ambassador's residence.

The Japanese Language Festival, or the JLfest, is an annual event that started in 2006 and is the main JLSM activity. It is a platform for students to interact in Japanese and to deepen their understanding of the Japanese language as well as Japanese culture through various events and activities. Interestingly, all of these activities are carried out by volunteers. Edward Lee, the current JLSM Chairman, used to visit secondary schools that offered Japanese language courses before the JLfest started in 2006. During his visits, many Japanese language instructors claimed that their work was not viewed as important as other subject instructors. They were frequently asked to do menial tasks at schools and to cancel classes to give way to other programs. They were also not given enough of a budget for Japanese language teaching and learning materials and had to use their own pocket money. All these affected the motivation of Japanese language teachers in their work. To address these issues, Edward Lee conducted the "Minna no Nihongo" seminar for learners. The seminar was divided into several sessions and conducted by 22 teachers. The first seminar was attended by more than 100 participants. Each participant was required to join three sessions in order to get a certificate. However, this seminar ended after the second attempt. The reason was because the participants were doing more or less the same activities at their school. Therefore, to fill this void, cultural activities were introduced, and the seminar name was changed to Festival. In the beginning, there were only one or two contests and few schools participated. However, due to the requests from Japanese language teachers, more contests were introduced, and it has since been opened nationally. Participating and winning in the contests in this festival helped the Japanese language program and their teachers receive due recognition in their schools.

The JLfest 2022 (which is the 15th JLfest) was organized with cooperation from The Embassy of Japan in Malaysia and The Ministry of Education Malaysia, as well as with support from The Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur, the 3A Corporation, and the Sadowara International Exchange Association, Miyazaki, while the advisors for KOBANASHI included Prof. Hatasa Kazumi from Purdue University, USA, Kokusai Kobanashi Godo Happyokai from Europe, and Japan Foundation, London.

This festival has four objectives as listed below and in order to achieve each objective, various activities have been planned.

1. Enhancing understanding and interest regarding Japanese culture and language through hands-on experience
2. Enhancing cultural understanding and language proficiency/skills while cultivating teamwork & 21st century skills.
3. Raising awareness concerning the merit of learning Japanese.
4. Enhancing learning motivation through interaction and networking.

For Objective 1, workshops on various aspects of knowledge and skills related to the Japanese language and culture for both learners and instructors have been planned. This has included four workshops for learners: 4-Koma Shibai Impromptu Speaking, SUGOROKU Game Design Using Scratch, Introduction to KANJI Map, and Let's Learn Japanese through Children Song; two workshops for instructors: Introducing ACTIVE READING in Student Activities, and Kanji learning strategies. As for both learners and instructors, there are three workshops: Let's Try Kobanashi, a traditional Japanese way of telling short comical stories, Let's Try Ikebana, and Let's Enjoy Onoresho, Fun with Japanese Writings.

For Objective 2, 13 individual and team competitions under the following genres have been planned:

1. Literary Works: GO SHICHI GO 詩 (poem writing), Japanese Photo Caption, Manga Dialogue
2. Story telling: Japanese Comedy Story Telling, 4-Koma Shibai Impromptu Speaking, E KAMISHIBAI, KOBANASHI, E-poster Presentation
3. Visual and Performing Arts: Kanji Map Poster, 2-min Japanese Documentary
4. Quiz and Game: SUGOROKU Language Boardgame, Nippon Quiz Bento Challenge, KATAKANA ATTACK! (Quiz)

Most of the competitions are to be open to the public, while some are planned to be via invitation only such as an E-poster presentation. The E-poster presentation is an oral presentation using digital poster (PDF). This competition aims to enhance the process of information gathering, analytical thinking and presentation skills among learners through e-poster presentation in Japanese while raising public awareness on the lesser-known side of Japan. The participants are required to find out what are the

'lesser-known' points about Japan that young people might find interesting and useful such as various inventions, systems, tools, practices, ingredients, food, concepts, places, recreation, nature and even occupations.

For Objective 3, talks and interviews such as The Thursday Talk Show have been planned. This talk show is based on the theme "WHY JAPANESE" where invited guests share their personal journey with the language and its impact on them. As for Objective 4, online interactions such as the Online Café and the Online Reading Club have been planned. Both platforms allow participants to share, learn and exchange their thoughts and opinions in Japanese while making friends. Interested parties may register online for this event. The registration fee is planned to be RM15 per person. Details and latest information on the event can be found on <https://www.jlfest.my/>. The JLfest for 2022 was held from May 28 to July 31, 2022. Registered participants were able to sign up for the competitions, workshops, and online interactions such as the JLfest Online Cafe and the JLfest Reading Club, subject to their respective Rules & Regulations. The participants also received an e-certificate of participation at the end of the festival.

JLSM has conducted courses ranging from introductory to advanced levels of both long and short duration for its members since 1968. JLSM's philosophy in language learning is: Through the mastery of the Japanese Language, we would gain a deeper understanding of the Japanese people, their culture, values, and beliefs that could lead us to meaningful and gainful interactions with them. In the process, we come to know more about ourselves, our roots, diverse society, and country that we took for granted over the years.

Currently, JLSM offers the General Proficiency Course in Basic Japanese and a Short Course in Japanese for Specific Purposes. The former aims at providing a solid foundation in basic Japanese grammar and furnishes participants with four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as familiarizing participants with some aspects of Japanese culture and customs. The Short Course in Japanese for Specific Purposes is function- or topic-based course aimed at equipping participants with the required knowledge and skills in Japanese for a specific purpose. All classes are conducted in the evenings during the week or on weekends, depending on request.

JLSM is also the administrator of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) which is held worldwide to evaluate and certify Japanese proficiency of non-native speakers by evaluating their reading and

listening ability. The JLPT is conducted through five venues in Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Johor Bahru, and Kota Kinabalu in which the JLSM is the host for Kuala Lumpur. Since JLSM is the administrator of the JLPT, its library is equipped with materials for the JLPT. However, all JLPT materials are for reference purposes only and are not available to borrow. JLSM library is open daily except Friday. JLSM, in collaboration with MAJLIS, conducted a national survey on the current state of Japanese Language Education in Malaysia (2021). The research team consisted of Edward Lee, Dr. Zoraida Mustafa (MAJLIS), Hasparina Abdul Ghafar (MAJLIS) and Dr Ang Chooi Kean (IPG-KBA). The findings are yet to be published.

Malaysian Japanese Language Teachers Association

The Malaysian Japanese Language Teachers Association (MAJLIS) was officially established on 28 October 2015. Compared to JLSM, MAJLIS is more focused on the development of Japanese language instructors in terms of enriching their knowledge in the Japanese language and its culture mainly through seminars, workshops, conferences, and publications. According to the Japan Foundation report in 2018, there were 485 Japanese language instructors teaching 39,247 students at 212 academic and non-academic institutions in Malaysia. This sets the ratio of learner to instructor at 80.9 which is considerably higher compared to the optimum ratio of 49.8 laid down by the Japan Foundation. This high ratio, together with the low instructor-to-institution ratio of 2.3 signals a lack of Japanese language instructors. This prevents many institutions from providing or sustaining good quality Japanese language and cultural education instructors as they lack the opportunity to enhance their proficiency since they mostly interact in Japanese with their students who have a lower level of proficiency. This in turn directly affects the level of mastery of instructors. This issue is one of the challenges for Japanese language education in Malaysia and MAJLIS is trying to assist in this matter.

In general, this association focuses on the sharing of knowledge related to the teaching and learning (T&L) of language that encompasses Japanese culture. The following are the objectives of the association:

1. Building a network of cooperation among language and Japanese cultural teachers in Malaysia
2. Organizing academic activities for the development of the Japanese language and culture in Malaysia
3. Producing scholarly publications related to the field of the Japanese language and culture in Malaysia

Based on these objectives, the Publications Bureau, the Training and Workshop Bureau, the Media Bureau, the ICT and Promotion Bureau, the International Relations Bureau and the Conference Bureau were formed to better plan and facilitate relevant programs. Some programs have been organized in collaboration with other institutions while others have been organized with support and assistance in terms of finance or knowledge with other institutions. This is also one of the association's efforts to establish bilateral relations and further act as an intermediary between the bodies involved in the development of Japanese language education and Japanese language teaching practitioners and learning in general. Through this opportunity, they could interact directly on current issues in the development of Japanese language education.

In empowering the T&L of the Japanese language, MAJLIS assisted the Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur (JFKL) in organizing the Malaysian Japanese Education Seminar and the International Conference on Japanese Language Education in Malaysia since 2017. For example, the topic for the 2020/2021 seminar was **"Towards Japanese Language Education Beyond Language Learning: The significance of Incorporating 'Culture' into the Field of Language Education Outside Japan"** and featured Ms. Ofune Chisato from the Japan Foundation, **Japanese Language Institute, Urawa**. This seminar was held online in the **Japanese language and open to those in the Japanese language education field from South-east Asian countries**. Both events are held annually and **open to all interested participants**. The Malaysian Japanese Education Seminar is conducted entirely in the Japanese language. The International Conference on Japanese Language Education in Malaysia is co-organized with the JFKL alongside **Ambang Asuhan Jepun (AAJ), University of Malaya**. It serves as a platform for Japanese language instructors, particularly in Malaysia, to present the findings of their research and reports with their peers.

In 2020, two series of webinars entitled "Online Japanese Teaching: Issues and Challenges" were conducted. A total of six one-hour webinars dedicated to the sharing of experiences in conducting online Japanese T&L due to the COVID-19 outbreak were held by six Japanese language instructors. This T&L workshop also included hands-on exercises with the participants so that they could easily obtain a more detailed and in-depth understanding on conducting online T&L. In 2021, MAJLIS conducted a series of three workshops: The Japanese Language Teaching Methods Training Program, the Japanese Language Teaching Workshop and the Benkyoukai. In cooperation with the JFKL, MAJLIS conducted the Japanese Language Teaching Methods Training Program for elementary levels for Malaysians who would like to learn and improve Japanese language teaching methods or who were interested in becoming a Japanese language instructor. Participants must be holders of a JLPT level N3 and above. These 10 two-hour classes were conducted by staff from the JFKL and MAJLIS members in each class. This training program emphasized the aspect of T&L content such as the Japanese writing system, conversations, assessments, class activities, and other related topics. Classes were conducted mainly in the Japanese language.

A series of Japanese Language Teaching Workshops were also co-organized by MAJLIS along with Cakap Jepun, a private Japanese Language Academy. The workshops reviewed tips on designing a course, Kanji T&L, tips on motivating oneself to start and keep speaking in the Japanese language fluently, and tips on teaching online. This workshop was conducted mainly using the Malay language. A "Benkyoukai" workshop, also co-organized by MAJLIS alongside the JFKL, emphasized the aspects of Japanese grammar such as the use of politeness in the Japanese language, particles as facilitators, the continuous and instant action, and the expression of Japanese conditional sentences. This series of T&L workshops featured speakers from members of MAJLIS who have had more than ten years of experience in teaching Japanese. These workshops were also the first program organized by the association. As of 2022, MAJLIS has conducted a series of Japanese Language Study workshops consisting of three topics: "Let's use the Japanese Proverbs" by Associate Prof. Ir. Dr. Nazrul Anuar Nayan from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), "Knocking on Door: Is it TONTON or DONDON" by Celica Tengan from the JFKL, and "The Story of Adjectives" by Assistant Prof. Dr. Izzat Suffian from the International Islamic University Malaysia

(IIUM). Apart from that, MAJLIS also organized three “Sharing is Caring” sessions: “Online and Distance Learning (ODL) via Telegram” by Noor Aizah Abas, “How to publish a book and to create an interactive website” by Dr. Normalis Amzah, Aznur Aisyah Abdullah, and Faiz Al-Shahab and, “Assessing Speaking Skill” by Dr. Rokiah Paee.

In addition to these workshops, sharing sessions with speakers from outside of the language field were conducted. For instance, in January 2022, a speaker from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Dayang Nor Ashikin Harun was invited to share career information as a Japanese language instructor at school, requirements to become one, issues, and challenges in Japanese language education, particularly at the school level. Moreover, due to requests mainly from ex-Japanese university graduates, a seminar on how to become a translator or interpreter was conducted in April 2022. Three experts in the industry, Dr. Hasuria Che Omar, Vice President of The Malaysian Translators Association, Siti Rafiah Sulaiman from Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia, and Nor Ashraf Wahab, a professional freelance interpreter, were invited as panellists. They shared information on courses and training needed to become a qualified translator or interpreter. They also shared their experiences, the do’s and don’ts, and tips on becoming a good translator or interpreter.

The association does not limit the sharing of knowledge through workshops, seminars, and conferences only but also via different platforms such as books and e-books. This is in line with the association’s objective to produce scholarly publications related to the field of the Japanese language and culture in Malaysia. The publication will also includes documentation from workshops that have been conducted. Similar to JLSM, MAJLIS is also a member of the Japan Foundation Nihongo Network (Sakura Network) since 2021 where MAJLIS also received an FY 2021 Support Grant for Sakura Network members. Utilizing the grant, MAJLIS has succeeded in publishing its very first book entitled *Perkembangan Pendidikan Bahasa Jepun di Malaysia* (2022). This book contains 17 chapters written by 26 contributors and the contents are categorized into three main themes: The history, issues and challenges in Japanese language education in Malaysia, Research on the Japanese language, and The teaching and learning of the Japanese language. The Publication Bureau has also collected several articles on the application used to enhance online T&L, and these articles are yet to be published. On top of that, MAJLIS is also working on publishing its own journal focusing on Japanese language education and Japanese culture.

Majlis is also involved with international programs such as Nihongo Talk Program, organized by Ho Chi Minh University of Education, Vietnam which has been implemented since 2015. In 2022, Majlis has interviewed three students and has sent one candidate, Muhammad Paris Bin Hanafiah from Multimedia University to represent Malaysia in the speech competition. Two MAJLIS members also involved in a research collaboration related to Japanese Language Education in Southeast Asia countries organized by the same university. Meanwhile, MAJLIS Chairman, Associate Prof. Dr. Zoraida Mustafa has represented Malaysia as a panelist in The 4th International Conference on Japanese Studies, Language, and Education (ICJLSE) with the theme of “Japanese Language and Culture Education in the Post Pandemic Period of Covid-19” on 22 October 2022, organized by the Indonesia Association of Japanese Language Education Studies (ASPBJI) and The Japan Foundation Jakarta, Indonesia.

MAJLIS is open to all Malaysians, permanent residents and foreign nationals engaged in Japanese teaching and learning, or who are professionally interested in areas pertaining to Japanese Language education. It is also open to Malaysians who are not directly involved in teaching or research in the Japanese Language but interested in participating in Japanese language and cultural activities. There are three types of membership: ordinary member, lifetime member, and associate member. The ordinary member and lifetime member categories are open to Malaysians only while the associate member option is open to permanent residents and foreigners. The ordinary member and associate member registration fee is RM10 initially, with a recurring annual fee of RM30 per year while for the lifetime membership, a RM10 registration fee must be paid along with a RM300 annual fee in one lump sum. All members can participate in any activities implemented by MAJLIS according to the capacity and needs. However, only ordinary and lifetime memberships have the right to vote in General Meetings and are eligible to be appointed for any position in the Association. Ordinary and associate members who fail to pay fees for three consecutive years are deemed to have withdrawn membership. However, members will be re-accepted into the Association when all outstanding fees are paid. Withdrawal from a membership shall be submitted to the Secretary and the fee shall not be refunded. Compared with other associations related to Japanese language education, MAJLIS is still new. However, its establishment is seen to be very much in line with the current development of Japanese language education in Malaysia

which requires the development of T&L and is beneficial to improve the quality of T&L, particularly in the Japanese language. This objective is also shared by the JFKL regarding the Japanese language as a medium of instruction while MAJLIS uses the Malay language in each activity implemented to further strengthen the acquisition of knowledge.

Alumni Look East Policy Society

The Alumni Look East Policy Society (ALEPS) is the first established organization associated with Japanese Language Education and shares common roots with the implementation of the LEP in Malaysia. The society was initiated by the Malaysian Public Service Department and established in 1988 following the return of the first group of students who had furthered their studies in Japan. ALEPS membership consists of graduates of Japanese universities and technical colleges under the patronage of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Ungku Abdul Aziz. ALEPS uses a different approach in supporting the LEP compared to other associations in Malaysia. Its focus is on gathering graduates from Japan and students who will be studying in Japan. ALEPS has four organizational objectives, namely:

1. Support for the implementation of the LEP and achievement of the policy objectives.
2. Realization of technology transfer from Japan.
3. Assist government agencies in enhancing mutual relations with Japan.
4. Organize trainings and leadership programs for members to enhance their career development.

To ensure its objectives are achieved, ALEPS organizes various programs, forums, seminars, trainings, and other activities specifically tailored to its target group. Activities such as seminars on employment opportunities and tips to further improve employability and the longevity of a graduate's career are frequently held in tandem with the obligatory reunions. Among the activities organized that aim to strengthen the brother/sisterhood among Japanese university and college graduates and to reunite graduates include ALEPS open house, the Ramadhan *iftar* ceremony and ALEPS Futsal Competition. ALEPS is also proactive in caring for the welfare and well-being of its members and has been helping members and Malaysians affected by floods and other disasters. In fact, ALEPS'

effort is not limited to Malaysia, but extends beyond and has also provided financial assistance to the victims of the tsunami tragedy in Japan.

ALEPS also conducts programs for students who will further their studies in Japan to help them better adapt to the Japanese language and culture by linking them with previous graduates willing to transfer their knowledge and share their experiences living and studying in Japan. These programs also act as a means to provide an initial exposure that might serve to develop adequate preparation before they set foot in Japan. This is in line with the mission of the LEP to ensure that students not only excel in academics but are also able to adapt to the life of Japanese society and build a network of relationships with Japanese society. In addition, to help students face the Mongbukagasusho exam, motivational programs were also held with workshops consisting of an orientation, various forms of motivation, experience sharing, competitions, preparation for exams as well as other activities.

The activities not only involve students selected to further their studies in Japan, but include programs in the form of guidance on opportunities to further their studies in Japan and apply for scholarships. ALEPS has also been actively involved in the development of Japanese language education by organizing speech/oration competitions and Japanese language classes as a platform for members of the public wishing to improve their Japanese language proficiency. ALEPS also serves as a liaison between Malaysia and Japan in helping to strengthen relations between the two governments. The programs held included an official meeting with the former Prime Minister of Japan, HE Shinzo Abe, via the LEP 40th Anniversary Exhibition and the LEP 30th Anniversary Forum. Various government and private agencies, alumni of Japanese universities, practitioners in the field of the Japanese language and culture were invited to attend these programs which indirectly opened up opportunities for collaboration with ALEPS. Through this oriented support, ALEPS aspires to produce more highly skilled engineers, corporate leaders, and successful entrepreneurs amidst the various challenges of the new millennium.

Conclusion

ALEPS and MAJLIS are the brainchild of LEP, while JLSM was established long before LEP. Although they have different objectives, they are complementary in empowering Japanese language education in Malaysia. JLSM focuses on providing space to promote intercultural interaction between Japanese and Malaysians through activities and events such as the JLFest, Japanese language courses, and the administration of the JLPT. MAJLIS mainly targets those who are interested in areas pertaining to Japanese language education by enriching their knowledge in the language and Japanese culture through seminars, workshops, conferences, and publications. ALEPS focuses on gathering graduates from Japan and students heading for Japan by organizing various activities specifically tailored to its target group.

The contributions, support and cooperation among ALEPS, JLSM and MAJLIS have had a distinct impact on the development and orientation of LEP in Malaysia. Their roles have led to an understanding of Japanese culture and the Japanese way of thinking apart from the mastery of Japanese language among Malaysians without them having to visit Japan. In addition, these organizations have provided the space for collaboration between Japanese culture and language education activists, tourism, investment, trade, and technical, bridging the gap in external relations between Japan and Malaysia in realizing the LEP. Although newly established organizations in this area are increasing in number, ALEPS, MAJLIS and JLSM's roles are still significant in the enhancement and development of Japanese language education and supporting the continuity and success of the LEP today.