

Japanese Education in the Australian Context¹

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with issues regarding to the Japanese language education (Japanese education, hereafter) in Australia. From the late-1980s there has been a huge boom in Japanese education across the world, the impact of which to the relevant areas was so dramatic and powerful that it was often referred to as the ‘Tsunami’ phenomenon. In Australia, too, the number of Japanese learners dramatically increased in the early 1990s and has consistently increased throughout the 1990s: It was around 60,000 in 1990 and increased to around 180,000 in 1993, and further to more than 300,000 in 1998². Needless to say, these increases were initiated by a variety of internal and external factors, based on the strong economical relationship between Japan and Australia, in particular.

More recently, according to Japan Foundation (2004), the number of Japanese learners has further increased from around 300,000 in 1998 to around 380,000 in 2003, which clearly indicates the continuous success of Japanese education in Australia, at least in terms of the number of learners. However, this success in the number of learners does not necessarily mean that Japanese education in the country has been successful in every aspect. As will be discussed

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² These figures are based on Japan Foundation (1994, 2000). More details will be given in Section 2.

later, there are also many problems that have accompanied the dramatic increase in the number of learners.

Furthermore, since the mid-1990s there have been some movements which could provide a negative impact on Japanese education in the country, for example, the economic crisis in Asia and the early closure of the funding support through NALSAS (National Asian Language and Studies in Australian Schools). In brief, as the quantitative growth has been achieved through the 1990s and 2000s, it is particularly important at this stage to consider how Japanese education in the country should be directed for its further development. This paper aims to review the development of Japanese education throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and to provide a perspective of its future. This will also identify major challenges in the current situation.

2. Mid-1980s to end-1990s

In this section, I will outline the progress of Japanese education in Australia since the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, by taking a closer look at some major occurrences relating to learners, teachers, and some internal and external factors of the learning environment.

Strong internal and external support

A dramatic boom of Japanese education in Australia has been motivated by a variety of internal and external factors. First of all, it is worth noting that there was strong support from the Australian government through its language policies, particularly from the mid-1980s to the early-1990s. During this period various reports were produced by a number of organizations, which promoted the Asian language education, in connection with the significance and needs of the link with Asian countries for economic reasons in particular. Among those reports, Joseph Lo Bianco's work in 1986-1987 on a national language policy was the landmark National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco 1987). Initiated by this report, the government allocated a budget for the implementation of a number of key projects, which produced significant outcomes for language education in the country: For example, Australian Language Levels Project, which resulted in the Australian Language Levels Guidelines³, National Curriculum Project for Asian Languages (in Japanese, the Yoroshiku series), and the National Assessment Framework for Language at the Senior Secondary Level.

³ Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines is particularly important in that it has provided a basis of LOTE education, including Japanese, in Australian schools. See Scarino et al. (1988), Vale (1991) and Saito (2000), for details of the ALL Guidelines.

Further, “The Languages of Australia: Discussion Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy for the 1990s” (Green Paper) and “Australia’s Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy” (White Paper) in 1991 also pointed out the importance of the education of LOTE (Languages other than English). Many organizations, for example, Asian Studies Council in 1986 and the National Language Institute of Australia in 1989, were established to promote and implement various language projects (See Akabane and Jonak 1996, for details).

Another significant report was “Asian Languages and Australia’s Economic Future” (Rudd 1994) prepared by the Rudd Committee for the Council of Australian Governments in 1994. Emphasising the link between language education and economic development, the report proposed a focus on four ‘priority’ Asian languages; Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian. It also included an implementation plan, allocating a substantial budget to fund a number of key programs including NALSAS (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools). NALSAS strategically targets that by the year 2006 all students in years 3-10 in Australian schools will be studying a LOTE of which 60% will be studying one of the priority Asian languages (Simpson Norris Pty Ltd 1999). For this, the Australian government has provided funding at the rate of approximately \$30m a year⁴.

So far, I have briefly noted some Australian language policy between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, which is one crucial factor for the dramatic boom of Japanese education in Australia⁵. Although these policies aimed to promote Asian language education in general, rather than Japanese education in particular, they internally provided a solid basis for the further development of Japanese education. During this period, the boom of Japanese education in the country was further accelerated by various factors and influences from Japan. For example, the strong economic relationship between Australia and Japan provided a good economic rationale for the study of Japanese. The late-1980s was also the time when the Japanese currency, yen, became stronger against other currencies and it became ever easier for Japanese people to visit overseas. A number of Japanese people increasingly visited Australia, whereby Australian people had more chance to meet Japanese people. This was also a positive sign that provided a good motivation for Japanese study.

It is significant that in 1983 the Nakasone government proposed ‘100,000 international-student-hosting plan’, which aimed to increase the number of international students studying at

⁴ This funding was originally planned to continue through to 2006, but has been ceased at the end of 2002 (Source: DEST online information on NALSAS). Also, see Section 3, for more details on this issue.

⁵ See Akahane and Jonak (1996), for well-documented information on Australian language policy in this period.

Japanese universities to 50,000 by 1990, and further to 100,000 by 2000 (Mozumi 1997). Through its various funding programs, the Japanese government has encouraged Japanese universities and other related organizations to promote programs for international students. It is a well-known fact that Japanese universities began establishing the Short-term Student Exchange Promotion Program since the mid-1990s, in order to accommodate more students from overseas. Linked to this program, the government-funded Short-term Student Exchange Promotion Program (Inbound) Scholarship has been offered since 1995 through the AIEJ (Association of International Education, Japan), in addition to the Monbukagakushou (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan) Scholarship that has been offered since 1954⁶. Needless to say, these efforts of the Japanese government, as well as support programs from various organizations, have played an important part in promoting Japanese education within Australia.

Quantitative achievement particularly at the primary-secondary level

One of the special features of Japanese education in Australian is its dynamic expansion at the primary and secondary education. As noted earlier in the introductory section, the number of Japanese learners has dramatically increased throughout 1990s. More precisely, the number was 62,032 in 1990, and then increased to 179,241 in 1993, and further to 245,863 in 1998, which was higher than that of China. ([Table 1], [Table 2] and [Table 3] below are extracted from Japan Foundation 1994, 2000)

[Table 1] Number of Japanese learners: Total (Primary-secondary + higher education + others)

Rank	1990		1993		1998	
1	South Korea	447,610	South Korea	820,908	South Korea	948,104
2	China	288,177	China	250,334	Australia	307,760
3	Australia	62,023	Australia	179,241	China	245,863

However, what is important to note here is the fact that this is attributed to the consistent increase of Japanese learners at the primary and secondary levels. Compare the trace of figures in the following two tables.

⁶ Source: 'Guide to Scholarships', the JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization) online information, <http://www.jasso.go.jp>. JASSO was established in April 2004, as a result of the unification of The Japan Scholarship Foundation, Association of International Education, Japan, Center for Domestic and Foreign Students, The International Students Institute, and The Kansai International Students Institute.

[Table 2] The number of Japanese learners: Primary-secondary education

Rank	1990		1993		1998	
1	South Korea	403,744	South Korea	679,493	South Korea	731,416
2	China	120,899	Australia	161,185	Australia	296,170
3	Australia	55,091	China	108,825	China	116,682

[Table 3] The number of Japanese learners: Higher education

Rank	1990		1993		1998	
1	China	74,507	South Korea	117,745	South Korea	148,444
2	South Korea	31,329	China	81,335	China	95,658
3	USA	16,818	Taiwan	44,590	Taiwan	76,917
4	Australia	6,387	USA	16,951	USA	31,159
5	Thailand	5,065	Thailand	10,853	Thailand	24,218
6	France	4,553	Australia	9,697	Indonesia	7,092
7	Germany	3,498	Indonesia	7,092	Australia	9,593

As shown in [Table 2], the number of Japanese learners at the primary and secondary level has increased three times between 1990 and 1993, from 55,091 to 161,185. Furthermore, this number increased to 296,170 in 1998, which is nearly two times of that in 1993. By contrast, as shown in [Table 3], at the tertiary level, although the number has increased by around 3,300 from 6,387 in 1990 to 9,697 in 1993, the number has in fact decreased by 1.1%, from 9,697 in 1993 to 9,593 in 1998. This change of figures clearly indicates that the Japanese education boom in Australia is largely dependent on the dramatic and consistent increase at the primary and secondary levels. This comparative aspect aside, the overall increase in the number of Japanese learners in Australia as a whole is a positive aspect of Japanese education in the country. However, it is also true that the sudden increase has created problems in the related areas. I will return to those problems later.

Responding to the sudden increase in the number of Japanese learners, the number of Japanese teachers has also been on the increase throughout the 1990s.

[Table 4] The number of Japanese teachers: Total (Japan Foundation 1994, 2000)

Rank	1990		1993		1998	
1	China	5,220	China	5,289	South Korea	5,604
2	South Korea	1,665	South Korea	2,944	China	5,156
3	Australia	962	Australia	2,428	Australia	3,131

As shown in the above table, a significant increase has been made during a short period of time, i.e. from 962 in 1990 to 2,428 in 1993. The number has further increased to 3,131 in 1998, an increase of more than three times since 1990. This reflects the commitment of the Australian government and other related organizations to fulfil the needs created by the sudden increase in Japanese learners during the same period.

However, there was a serious problem behind this sudden increase, during the first half of the 1990s in particular. That is, a number of teachers had to prepare themselves ‘in a hurry’ to teach the language without sufficient language training, in response to the dramatic increase of Japanese learners. For example, in some cases a teacher who had taught some other languages until now had to teach Japanese from the following year, after undertaking a short Japanese language course⁷. Furthermore, there were only a few teachers whose first language was Japanese⁸. Given such a situation, the teachers’ language proficiency was one of the major concerns in Japanese education in Australia during this period. Since then, the overall proficiency of Japanese teachers has gradually been improved, through various professional development programs funded by the Australian government, the Japan Foundation and others⁹. In addition, the increase of teachers who had majored in the Japanese language at university was also another positive movement to improve the situation.

To summarise, in Section 2, I have discussed the development of Japanese education in Australia from the mid-1980s through to the end of the 1990s, focusing on quantitative aspects of Japanese learners and teachers, and the background of the Japanese education boom in the country. Japanese education in Australia during this period can be summarised as achieving a quantitatively huge growth, in the number of both learners and teachers, particularly at the primary-secondary level. This was initiated by the timely support of the Australian and Japanese governments, in particular. Although the dramatic increase raised some problems, it provided a solid basis for the further development of Japanese education in Australia.

⁷ For example, the author had been involved in four weeks summer intensive Japanese language courses at the ANU between 1990-1994. The courses were for beginners and there were around 20-25 people from different professional background in each year. Among them, 5-7 people were language teachers who had taught other languages and had to teach Japanese soon after the four-week course. Coveney (1993) also points out a similar problem with Japanese teachers in Australian schools during this period.

⁸ According to Marriott et al. (1994), only around 14% of the total number of teachers (full-time and part-time teachers) were Japanese native speakers in the early 1990s.

⁹ For example, according to DEST (Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia), 2,500 teachers had been trained in Asian languages through NALSAS. (Source: <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/nalsas/about.html>)

3. Some developments in recent years

In this section I will focus on some developments since 2000. First, according to the survey conducted by Japan Foundation (2003), the number of Japanese learners has increased by around 80,000 since its last survey in 1998, from 307,760 in 1998 to 381,954 in 2003. The number of 381,954 in 2003 is made up of 369,157 in primary-secondary education, 8,269 in higher education and 4,528 in non-school institutions. Focusing on the numbers in school education, the comparison of these numbers with those in 1998 clearly indicates that again the increase was mainly made at the primary-secondary education, from 296,170 to 369,157, while the number has in fact dropped by more than 1,300 at the higher education level, from 9,593 to 8,269. The survey further shows that the number of Japanese teachers has increased by around 500, from 3,131 to 3,625. These figures indicate overall that Japanese education in Australia has continuously achieved success in the quantitative aspect throughout the period.

Second, the NALSAS program which was originally projected to continue through to 2006, was closed in 2002. As noted earlier, this program was initiated by the federal government in conjunction with state and territory governments in order to support Asian studies and languages, particularly Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian. According to the information released by ASAA (Asian Studies of Australian Association), the funding support provided through NALSAS covered approximately 70% of the funding for studies of Asian programs in Australian schools in 2002¹⁰. The early closure of NALSAS obviously provided a negative impact in the areas of Asian language education in general. The further increase in the number of Japanese learners and teachers in 2003, as mentioned above, seems to suggest that the closure did not have an immediate and direct impact on Japanese education, which may otherwise have resulted in a decrease in the numbers. However, this increase is an outcome of a variety of factors involved, and a closer observation over the next few years is necessary to evaluate its exact impact on Japanese education in Australia.

Finally, according to the survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, the number of international students studying in Japanese universities was 109,508 in March 2003¹¹. This means that Nakasone's 100,000 international-student-hosting plan has finally reached its goal. It is thus interesting to see its implication for the further direction of the Japanese government regarding its language policy. In 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, released its direction on

¹⁰ Source: 'ASAA News and Announcements, 2002 (23)', <http://sites.uws.edu.au/social/asaa/asaa23.html>.

¹¹ Source: '*Wagakuni no ryuugakusei reidou no gaiyou* ('Outline of International education in Japan')', http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/16/05/04071201.htm.

the international students policy¹². While its primary emphasis is on the balanced development both in-coming (i.e. students from overseas) and out-going (i.e. Japanese students to study overseas) students, the continuous support for the further development of in-coming students from overseas is also included. In this connection, it is unlikely that in the near future the Japanese government will change the direction of its language policy so that it may provide a serious negative impact on Japanese education overseas¹³.

4. Challenges

Japanese education in Australia has achieved a remarkable qualitative growth throughout the 1990s and up to date. The key rationales for this growth have been internal support from the federal, state and territory governments of Australia and external influences from the Japanese government and other organizations, on the basis of the strong economic tie between the two countries. On the basis of observations so far, it is safe to say that Japanese education in the country has been in a relatively secure position. There are, however, some challenges for the continuous development of Japanese education in Australia.

The first challenge is related to the issue of the diversity in the background of Japanese learners. As discussed earlier, the success of Japanese education in Australia is largely based on the quantitative growth in primary-secondary education. As a result, there is a significant number of learners who have studied the language before entering university¹⁴. The problem is that some of these students often have a different background of previous learning experience. For example, some of these students have stayed in Japan and studied at a Japanese school for 6 months or 1 year, while some others have studied the language for more than several years during their school time, but have never been to Japan before. It is often the case that the former students have good conversation skills, but need further effort to improve their grammatical knowledge. By contrast, the latter students have relatively good knowledge of the system of the Japanese language, but they are relatively weak in conversation skills. Furthermore, some students have both features, i.e. have studied Japanese for several years in an Australian school and have stayed in Japan for a significant period studying at a Japanese school, whereas there are students with no previous experience of studying Japanese. Another problem is that there is

¹² Source: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo0/toushin/03121801.htm.

¹³ For details, see *Ryuugakusei seisaku no tenkai* ('Direction of the international student policy') in http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/16/05/04071201.htm.

¹⁴ For example, in the case of the Japanese program at the ANU, about 30% of students in the beginner's level have been such students each year for the past three years. To be more specific, the ratio of learners with previous study in the beginner's program was 34% in 2002, 31% in 2003, and 27% in 2004.

an increasing number of students whose language background is not English. For example, in the beginner's course at the ANU Japanese program, the ratio of such students was about 7-15% between the late-1990s and early 2000, which is followed by a sudden increase since 2003, with a ratio of 27% in 2003 and 36% in 2004¹⁵. Development of various programs is necessary in order to effectively respond to the diversity of students' backgrounds.

As for the issue related to teachers, a variety of support for the further improvement and maintenance of their Japanese language proficiency is required. Acquisition of language skills is a time-consuming task, and yet another difficulty is to maintain their once acquired proficiency especially in the 'out-of-Japan' context. In this regard, it is notable that some professional development opportunities funded by the Australian government have been provided to Japanese and other Asian language teachers in recent years: For example, the Asian Language Professional Learning Project which is available for language teachers to further improve their skills and knowledge for their professional needs¹⁶, and the 2005 Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowships which aims to provide language teachers with the opportunity particularly to improve their language and cultural skills¹⁷. Such government support for professional development programs is deemed to be heading in a desirable direction. However, these programs do not particularly focus on Japanese language teachers. Recall that the number of Japanese teachers alone was 3,625 in 2003. In light of this large number and the significance of a teacher's language proficiency (i.e. its further improvement and maintenance) for effective language learning and teaching, more substantial funding support for more long-term programs are required.

Finally, I would like to make comments on some concerns regarding Japanese education in universities. A major concern for the current Japanese language education at the university system lies in its relation with other Japan-related areas such as Japanese economy, politics, law, history, media and information technology. According to a study by Professor Peter Drysdale, the number of people studying Japan, excluding language, has significantly dropped from 7,666 in 1996 to 3,694 in 2003¹⁸. Note that our ultimate goal to study Japan or

¹⁵ The figures are based on regular surveys in my courses, which have been conducted in the fourth week of the first semester each year.

¹⁶ The project aims to provide Asian language teachers with the opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge of language methodology (intercultural language learning, in particular), and other aspects of teaching. For details, see the information in <http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/aef/alplp/outline.htm>.

¹⁷ This fellowship is limited to primary and secondary school teachers of Spanish, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian and Japanese. For details, see the information in <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/programmes/endeavour.htm>.

¹⁸ Source: An article 'Japanese studies lose their allure' in Higher Education, *The Australian*, 14 July 2004.

Asia is to gain capacity and preparedness to effectively interact with Japan or other Asian countries, as also specified in the NALSAS Strategy¹⁹.

“The (NALSAS) strategy aimed to support enhanced and expanded Asian language and Asian studies provision through all school systems in order to improve Australia’s capacity and preparedness to interact internationally, in particular, with key Asian countries”.

In order for the successful achievement of such a goal, it is necessary to acquire both language skills and knowledge of other related areas. We have a high population of Japanese learners in primary and secondary school. This implies that universities have a large number of ‘potential’ students for their programs in Japan-related areas, as well as in Japanese language. Professor Peter Drysdale also notes that “The uptake from kids who’ve done a bit of Japanese or other Asian languages in schools is a fairly important source of demand for universities”²⁰. Further substantial funding support is required to enable universities to develop programs, and to train more experts, in order to accommodate the potential learners of Japanese studies.

It is important to note here that the Japanese language, as a general function of a language, can be a tool to study these areas. This means that as a whole, the more popular the study of Japan-related areas is, the more interests will be raised in the study of the Japanese language. The balanced development between Japanese language and other Japan-related areas is a desirable direction for the Japanese education in university. This will not only be ideal for our ultimate goal to study ‘Japan’, but it will also be an effective solution for the trend of the decrease in the Japanese language learners in recent years at the higher education level.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed issues on Japanese education in Australia, including the development over the past two decades and in recent years. It has been shown that the success of Japanese education in the country is motivated by strong internal and external support, which is in turn based on strong economic relation between Japan and Australia. In this connection, the recovery of the Japanese economics in recent years adds a positive perspective to the future of Japanese education. While there is no evidence that suggests a negative development in the future external influence from Japan, more substantial internal support is required for further

¹⁹ Source: ‘About NALSAS’ in the DEST online information, <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/nalsas/about.html>.

²⁰ Source: An article ‘Japanese studies lose their allure’ in Higher Education, *The Australian*, 14 July 2004.

development of a variety of projects and programs, particularly for Japanese teachers, Japan-related areas and Japanese language programs.

Given the significance of Australia's relationship with Japan for its future, in particular from the economic point of view, the further development of Japanese language education, together with other Japan-related areas, in Australia will be largely beneficial for Australia's own future. A solid basis for this has been made through the past development and it is now required to make efforts to further focus on the improvement of its quality. As far as such efforts are made, the future of Japanese education in Australia will be positive.

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Online resources

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- Information on the international student policy of the Japanese government: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/16/05/04071201.htm and http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo0/toushin/03121801.htm
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