

Japanese Language Education in the Philippines: Historical Development, Current Status and Future Prospects

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Abstract

The Philippines is one of the countries where Japanese language education is not only flourishing, but considered to be very relevant. The country has the ninth largest number of learners and the tenth largest number of teachers in the world. This is largely propelled by continuous Filipino migration and diaspora to Japan, for work, studies, and even reunion with family members who had migrated to Japan. Business and trade between Japan and the Philippines remain strong, receiving so much support from the governments of both countries. There is also ongoing increasing interest in Japanese culture and language among Filipinos. However, academic research on Japanese language education in the country is scarce, if not lacking. Thus, this article aims to provide a synoptic profile of Japanese language education in the Philippines. First, it presents the history of Japanese language education in the country, highlighting milestones pivotal to its development. Secondly, the article classifies different aspects of Japanese language education, such as academic-oriented education, occupation-oriented training, teacher networking, and events and programs held in the country. Thirdly, the article discusses the current status of Japanese language education in the Philippines such as demographics, students' motivation, and teachers' qualifications. The article highlights challenges that Japanese language education in the country confronts, such as the relatively few teachers and institutions for the population, the lack of formal training for teachers, and the limited networking for these teachers and other stakeholders. The article ends the discussion with future prospects of Japanese language education in the Philippines.

Keywords: Japanese language education, Japanese as a foreign language, Japanese in the Philippines

1. Introduction

Japanese language education is continuously flourishing globally. In 2021, Japanese was taught in 141 countries and regions at 18,272 institutions by 74,592 teachers (Japan Foundation, 2023a). Meanwhile, close to four million people were likewise reported to be learning the Japanese language.

The Philippines is one of the countries where Japanese language education is not only thriving, but considered to be very relevant. The country has the ninth largest number of learners and the tenth largest number of teachers in the world. This is largely propelled by continuous Filipino migration and diaspora to Japan, for work, studies, and even reunion with family members who had migrated to Japan. The Japanese and Philippine governments work together on various political, economic, and security matters affecting not only the country but the region and the world. There is also ongoing increasing interest in Japanese culture and language among Filipinos.

However, amidst the significant growth of the volume of Japanese language education in the Philippines, academic research on Japanese language education in the country remains limited, if not lacking. As Japanese language education in the Philippines continues to expand, some concerns and challenges have already emerged and they also need to be considered and

discussed. Hence, this article aims to provide a synoptic profile of Japanese language education in the Philippines, looking in particular at historical development, categories, profile of students and teachers, networking of stakeholders, pedagogy and instruction, and events and programs by various institutions. It also addresses challenges and provides future directions of Japanese language education in the country.

2. History and development

2.1. Foundation phase

Japanese was taught even before and during the occupation of the Japanese Empire in the Philippines. The first-ever Japanese language course in the country was offered at the Department of Linguistics of the University of the Philippines (UP), Diliman in the Academic Year 1924-1925, which means Japanese started to be taught since the dawn of the Department of Linguistics of UP which established in 1922. Since then, higher education institutions have been the major driving force in the spread of Japanese language education in the post-war Philippines. Japanese language education further expanded in the 1960s with the establishment of institutions or programs dedicated to Japan studies or Japanese language education. Included here are Japanese language courses at UP in 1964, the Japanese Studies Program at the Ateneo de Manila University in 1966, the Asian Center of UP in 1968, and the Japanese language courses by the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines in 1968 (The Japan Foundation, 2022). It is worth noting that the Ateneo's Japanese Studies Program is the first Japanese studies program not just in the Philippines but also in Southeast Asia (Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University, 2013). It started with three Japanese instructors, namely Masao Hisatake (who also served as the program's first director), Kiyoshi Aonuma, and Yoko Yoshikawa, deployed by the Japanese government, and nine other Japanese academics also served as directors of the program until 1980. They launched a minor in Japanese Studies and produced the first group of 12 students who were awarded its certificate in 1991. This only goes to show how interested the Filipinos are in the Japanese language and society even from more than half a century ago.

2.2. Development phase

More Japan-related programs or courses were further expanded since the 1980s, marked by the establishment of these in other universities namely De La Salle University in 1983 and the Trinity University in 1984 (The Japan Foundation, 2022). The establishment of Mindanao Kokusai Daigaku (Mindanao International College) in 2002 cannot be overlooked. It is distinctive in the fact that it was established by and serves as the Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai ('Association for Japanese-Filipino Descendants')'s educational services offering the possibility of majoring in Japanese Language and Studies in its International Studies Department. Another milestone was the establishment of The Japan Foundation, Manila (JFM) in 1996, which is a branch office of a Japanese government-affiliated agency tasked to promote the Japanese language and culture in the Philippines. JFM has been supporting Japanese language education in the country through its programs, funding, and deployment of experts.

2.3. Expansion phase

Organized Japanese language education became more available to those outside of higher education since late 2000s. In 2009, Japanese started to be offered in secondary education in the country through the Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) of the Department of Education (DepEd) and, according to The Japan Foundation (2023b), this expansion of Japanese language education to public schools ignited the increase in the number of students, teachers, and institutions at the secondary level.

An expansion for occupation-oriented Japanese language training was brought about by Japan's policy and agreements with the Philippines that allowed Filipinos to take up specific types of occupation in Japan, namely the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), the Philippine-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (PJEPA), and the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW).

Since 2017, when a new Technical Intern Training Act came into effect and the Philippines was among the countries that signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Japan, private language schools have been offering Japanese language training to candidates as TITP requires more than 160 hours of training before entering Japan.

Under the PJEPA, in 2009, Japan started to accept Filipino nurses and caregivers to work in Japan in order to cope with Japan's shortage of healthcare workers. After two years of implementation, JFM launched the Pre-Arrival Japanese-Language Training for candidates to enhance their Japanese language proficiency before arriving in Japan. Meanwhile, in 2019, The Japan Foundation Test for Basic Japanese (JFT-Basic) also began to be conducted in the Philippines ahead of other countries as one of requirements to apply for the SSW visa category.

3. Categories of Japanese language education

Japanese language education in the Philippines can be categorized into two: (1) Academic-oriented education where students learn Japanese as a part of degree programs or curricula at tertiary, secondary, and primary institutions and (2) occupation-oriented education where students learn Japanese for their occupational needs in non-academic institutions. This is a helpful and relevant categorization to be made as 42.8% of students are enrolled in academic institutions while 57.2% of them are enrolled in non-academic institutions (see section 6 for further discussion) Therefore, this section discusses these two categories in detail.

3.1. Academic-oriented education

As mentioned in section 2, academic-oriented Japanese language education in the country has been led by higher education institutions. In 2021, 25 institutions offered Japanese language courses. Among them, only Mindanao Kokusai Daigaku had a Japanese language as a full college degree (Furukawa, 2023). Other institutions only offered Japanese language courses as a part of other related degree programs, such as Japanese studies, international studies, linguistics, business, tourism, and the like, and also as part of extra-curricular activities. In terms of degree level, four associate degrees, 21 bachelor's degrees, two master's degrees, and one doctorate degree are offered in these institutions. As the Japan Foundation (2023b) points out, Japanese language courses are primarily offered as foreign language elective courses with the weight of three to six units (where one unit is usually equivalent to one hour of class session), except for some institutions which offer a series of extensive courses ranging from 21 to 54 units. A joint report by the Japan Foundation, Manila and the Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University (2020) also notes that Japanese language courses offered are skills-oriented but not research-oriented. In other words, they are more designed to train students to speak in Japanese but not exactly to do research on the language and linguistics of Japanese.

Meanwhile, at the secondary level, Japanese started to be taught in selected high schools in 2008, through the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) Programme, an exchange project by the Japanese government to strengthen people-to-people connections among the youth in Japan and Southeast Asian countries. In 2009, the Philippine government introduced Japanese into official curricula through the Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd), together with Spanish, French, German, Mandarin (from 2011), and Korean (from 2017) (Andaya, et al, 2020). Under this program, Japanese began to be offered in public schools as an elective course. It is taught

at the basic level for 120 minutes weekly in the third year of high school and subsequently at the intermediate in the fourth year of high school as stipulated by DepEd Order no. 55, s. 2009 (Department of Education, 2009). Up until 2017, 3,020 students were enrolled in these Japanese language courses, which was equal to 28.7% among all the SPFL enrollees nationwide (Department of Education, 2017).

At the primary level, four private institutions, namely Caritas Don Bosco School, Japa-Lingo Training Center, Inc, Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai International School, and San Pedro Relocation Center National High School, offer Japanese language education within their regular curricula.

3.2. Occupation-oriented education

The Japan Foundation (2023b) reported that the number of non-academic institutions (147) in the Philippines was bigger than that of academic institutions (112), and most of them are dedicated to occupation-oriented learners who wish to work in Japan or those who are employed by Japanese companies based in the country and needing some level of Japanese proficiency to fulfill their job responsibilities. These institutions are run by different types of owners: higher education institutions that also have regular Japanese language courses, Japanese commercial companies operating in the country, and local language schools.

Private language schools need to be accredited by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) of the Philippine government. Recently, TESDA itself started offering free training on Japanese language and culture in 2023 through its National Language Skills Center.

Among the popular pathways for Filipinos to work in Japan recently are the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW), and the Philippine-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (PJEPA). As such, Japanese language courses designed for candidates of these programs are offered in private language schools.

For TITP and SSW candidates, private language schools have been offering Japanese language training to candidates. TITP was established in 1993 to transfer skills, technologies, or knowledge accumulated in Japan to developing Asian countries, but has been functioning as a de facto guestworker program. In November 2017, a new Technical Intern Training Act came into effect and the Philippines was among the countries that signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Japan. Since then, private language schools have been offering Japanese language training to candidates as TITP requires more than 160 hours of training before entering Japan. Meanwhile, in 2019, SSW was created by the Japanese government as a new visa status to accept foreign nationals with expertise and skills in response to the labor shortage in Japan such as nursing care, construction, agriculture, etc. As SSW requires a certain level of Japanese language proficiency upon application, private language schools that have been offering Japanese language training to TITP candidates also started offer training designed for SSW candidates. In the same year, the Japan Foundation Test for Basic Japanese (JFT-Basic) also began to be conducted in the Philippines ahead of other countries as one of the requirements to apply for the SSW visa category.

The Japanese government also started accepting Filipino nurses and caregivers to work in Japan in 2008 under PJEPA, and more than 3,300 Filipino candidates had been sent to Japan by 2022 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, 2023). PJEPA requires candidates to undergo six-month long Japanese language training in Japan before they are deployed to work places. In addition to this training, six months of further training called the Pre-Arrival Japanese-Language Training, started in 2011 because the first two batches of Filipino candidates had a significantly low passing rate of nurse license exams during the first two years of implementation (Noborizato et al., 2014). Currently, candidates are required to take this training, consisting of more than 820 hours of integral Japanese language courses and specialized training to build up terminology in nursing and caregiving (Ota et al., 2022).

4. Schools and other institutions

There are 242 institutions that offer Japanese language education in the country. Among them, 76 are public, 163 are private, and three are Japanese-government-affiliated. As expected, the National Capital Region (NCR) has the most institutions (50%), while 22% are located in non-NCR Luzon, 16% in Visayas, and 12% in Mindanao (Matsumoto, 2023).

Table 1 summarizes the geographical distribution of students, teachers, and institutions in the Philippines. This clearly shows how students and teachers are centralized in Luzon, particularly NCR whilst other regions such as Visayas and Mindanao are less equipped with resources, which possibly results in little exposure of students to a better learning environment. However, Matsumoto (2023) also reports an increase both in the number of institutions and teachers observed in Mindanao.

Table 1

Geographical distribution of students, teachers, and institutions in the Philippines (based on Matsumoto, 2023)

Region		Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Institutions (%)
Luzon	National Capital Region	56	56	50
	Outside NCR	18	18	22
Visayas		12	12	16
Mindanao		14	14	12

5. Teachers

5.1. Profile

The Japan Foundation (2023a) reported that there are 1,111 teachers in the country. Among them, 639 or 57.5% are full-time while 472 or 42.5% are part-time. Aside from some full-time faculty in higher education institutions, many of the teachers are only classroom teachers and not teacher-researchers positioned to do research and create new knowledge of Japanese language teaching practice. It must be noted that freelance teachers who do not belong to any institution are not reflected in this survey or those who have multiple affiliations might be counted multiple times, as the Japan Foundation's survey was conducted only through existing institutions known to JF. There are 245 teachers (22.1%) who are native speakers of Japanese and they belong to 85 institutions (35.1%) in the country. Having native-speaking teachers in Japanese language education is important as they have many advantages that non-native-speaking colleagues do not have, such as more natural and up-to-date language use, exemplary language model, and they can help students immerse themselves in extra-linguistic experiences (e.g., culture, history, etc.) (cf. Medgyes, 1999; Gill & Reborva, 2001). In the Philippines, native-speaker teachers are hired in some higher education institutions and private language schools both full-time and part-time, but they are not necessarily Japanese language education experts, such as university faculty who specialize in related fields or those who live in the country with a Filipino spouse.

5.2. Qualifications

The Japan Foundation (2023b) gives a brief summary of Japanese language teachers' qualifications in the Philippines. It states that those who learned Japanese in university and/or private language schools, sometimes in Japan, are the majority of teachers in the country. However, it also points out that there are cases where individuals who do not really have expertise in the Japanese language but have studied in Japan or those with only Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N4, which is second to the lowest, are employed to teach due to the lack of qualified Japanese language teachers in the country. At secondary schools that offer Japanese language courses under SPFL, teachers must complete JFM's training (see

section 5.3) to teach (The Japan Foundation, 2023b) even though they concurrently handle other non-Japanese subjects (Ofune et al., 2012).

Furukawa (2023) conducted a questionnaire survey on Filipino teachers' profiles such as training teachers received, Japanese language learning experiences, and career prospects, analyzing answers from 48 teachers who belong to the Association of Filipino Nihongo Teachers (AFINITE). Among them, 26 teachers received training at JF (either Manila or Urawa) while others took it at other venues such as language schools (13 teachers), TESDA (6), and AFINITE (4). Only six teachers answered that they underwent training in the university (either in the Philippines or Japan), and even five teachers were reported to have never received any kind of formal training opportunity. In terms of length of training, 14 teachers took less than one year of training, among which were less than six months for six teachers and less than a month for five teachers. She concluded that there are few Filipino teachers who received extensive training programs for Japanese language teachers. Regarding their learning experience, more than half of the respondents were reported to have learned Japanese in language schools (25 teachers) while 18 teachers learned it through self-study.

Hayakawa et al. (2023) state that Filipino teachers of Pre-Arrival Japanese-Language Training for EPA candidates have to pass JLPT N3 or higher and be fluent to conduct lessons in Japanese upon employment. They also added that there are teachers who have stayed in Japan and who have more than ten years of experience.

5.3. Teacher training

At present, there is no organized and fully-developed teacher training for Japanese language teachers in the Philippines. However, several other forms of training are given by concerned institutions and organizations involved in Japanese language education in the Philippines. JFM principally offers training for teachers in coordination with the Department of Education and other institutions involved. Generally, one- to two-day workshops are provided both face-to-face and online, such as Practice Teaching Course and Marugoto Brush-up Course. For secondary school teachers, JFM, coordinating with DepEd, also launched training after introduction of SPFL was announced in 2009. This two-year training program includes intensive mid-semester training (100 hours), follow-up training during semesters (30 hours), and on-site training in Japan (ten days) (Ofune et al., 2012). The program aims to not only enable teachers to teach using a textbook developed by JFM but also train them to eventually train fellow teachers in the country. Nihongo Center Foundation, a private institution primarily tasked to provide preparatory Japanese language courses to outbound Filipino students, used to offer training for teachers. However, no institution is reported to offer training for teachers currently, aside from JFM (The Japan Foundation, 2023b; Furukawa, 2023).

Training programs have also been developed for those who teach occupation-oriented students. For teachers who handle SSW candidates, the Japanese Teaching Methods Program for Teachers of Specified Skilled Worker Candidates is offered. This one-month program is designed to provide teachers with a teaching methodology focusing on language proficiency needed for SSW candidates' daily life and work and a deeper understanding of Japanese society and culture that can be offered in their own class (Yamamoto et al., 2022).

Teachers with experience and higher Japanese language proficiency may apply for the Comprehensive Japanese Teaching Methods Program for Teachers of the Japanese-Language at the Japan Foundation's Japanese-Language Institute in Urawa, Japan. This program offers six-week training on teaching methodology targeted at Japanese teachers from all over the world. In 2022, two Filipino teachers from higher education institutions were selected to join this training.

5.4. Teachers' associations, academic associations, and journals

Several associations of Japanese teachers have been established in different regions in the Philippines. The biggest among them is the Association of Filipino Nihongo Teachers (AFINITE) established in 2000. Based in Metro Manila, it has approximately 70 members exclusively Filipinos annually and holds the Philippine Nihongo Teacher's Forum twice a year, in collaboration with JFM (Furukawa, 2023). Other regions also have teachers' associations: Visayas (established in 2008), Mindanao (2010), Northern Luzon (2010), Northern Mindanao (2010), Bohol (2010), Negros (2011), and Bicol (2011). However, the Japan Foundation (2023b) points out that most of these associations are not very active nowadays, except for AFINITE.

Aside from the Philippine Nihongo Teacher's Forum, there are no Philippine-based academic associations or journals exclusively dedicated to the Japanese language or its education. In the field of linguistics or applied linguistics, there are several of these in the country, such as the Linguistic Society of the Philippines' annual conference, the Philippine Journal of Linguistics, De La Salle University's International Conference on Applied Linguistics and Language Education, and the Philippine Association for Language Teaching. Nevertheless, studies presented or published in these venues are dominantly dedicated to Philippine linguistics, English language education, and mother tongue-based education. Academic research on Japanese language education in the Philippine context is mainly published in the Japan Foundation's Japanese-Language Education Bulletin, albeit most of the contributors are Japanese academics.

6. Students

6.1. Profile

The Japan Foundation (2023a) reported in its survey that there are 44,457 students in the Philippines in 2021, and the ninth-largest number of learners in the world and fourth in Southeast Asia although the number declined by 13.7% compared to the previous survey in 2018. However, the decline observed differs in numbers between academic institutions and other institutions as the Japan Foundation points out. The number of those in academic institutions decreased by 27.1% while the number of those in other institutions only decreased by 0.1%. The Japan Foundation concluded that more than two years-long restrictions on face-to-face classes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected school-based education while online classes offered gave an advantage to those who reside in remote areas where there used to be no available Japanese education. Independent learners who are not enrolled in any institutions are not reflected in this survey, as the Japan Foundation's survey was conducted only through existing institutions known to JF (cf. Ichinose, 2014).

Table 2 shows the number of students enrolled in Japanese language education in 2021 according to the types of institutions. There are 19,041 students enrolled in academic institutions (640 in primary, 9,220 in secondary, and 9,181 in tertiary) while 25,416 students are in non-academic institutions such as language schools. The larger number of students enrolled in non-academic institutions compared to academic institutions is one of the characteristics of Japanese language education in the Philippines, as Furukawa (2023) stated based on the 2018 data.

Table 2

Number of Japanese language students in the Philippines according to types of institutions (based on The Japan Foundation, 2023a, 2023b)

Types of institutions	Numbers	Proportion (%)
Academic institutions	19,041	42.8
Primary	640	1.4

	Secondary	9,220	20.7
	Tertiary	9,181	20.7
Non-academic institutions		25,416	57.2
Total		44,457	100.0

6.2. Motivations

The Japan Foundation's (2023a) report also surveyed objectives or motivations that compel students to learn the Japanese language. Note that this survey did not ask learners directly what their motivation is. Instead, it asked respondents of the survey (i.e., teachers or institutions) what motivates their learners at respective institutions to study Japanese. Therefore, this might not reflect learners' opinions completely.

Table 3 shows that the major objectives for Japanese language learners in the world are interest in the Japanese language and culture broadly such as the language itself (60.1%), pop culture (59.9%), and history, literature, arts, etc. (47.9%).

However, the survey conducted in the Philippines shows a different trend. As indicated in Table 3 working (62.4%) and studying (59.1%) in Japan, and having an interest in the language (59.1%) are major objectives for Filipino learners. This result reflects Filipino learners' strong desire to live in Japan in the future and they regard learning Japanese as integral to achieving this desire. Furukawa (2023) also notes the commentary by one of the Filipino teachers, who says that finding a job or spouse and wanting to stay in Japan as long as possible is one of the typical motivations of Filipino learners.

Table 3

Objectives of Japanese-language learning (all educational stages) in the Philippines and in the world (based on The Japan Foundation, 2023a)

Reasons for Learning Japanese	Philippines (n=242)	World (n=18,272)
Future work in Japan	62.4%	34.2%
Study in Japan	59.1%	29.3%
Interest in the Japanese language	59.1%	60.1%
Interest in history, literature, arts, etc.	56.6%	47.9%
Interest in anime, manga, J-POP, fashion, etc.	52.5%	59.9%
Current or future work in home country	45.0%	40.6%
Interest in intercultural understanding and cross-cultural exchange	38.0%	24.0%
Sightseeing in Japan	36.0%	34.5%
Advancement in education in home country	32.2%	35.6%
Interest in science and/or technology	24.4%	23.3%
Mother language or heritage language	14.5%	9.8%

Interest in politics, economy and/or society	14.5%	18.0%
Other	14.5%	5.5%
No answer	5.4%	9.3%

Some studies revealed findings are similar to that of the Japan Foundation (2023a). Gonzales (2010) found, through a questionnaire survey of 150 college students in Metro Manila, that Japanese language learners were more motivated by career and economic enhancement compared to other language learners such as Chinese, Spanish, and French. Quintos (2021) also investigated motivational orientation in learning Japanese through a questionnaire to 481 students taking up Japanese subjects at a state university in Bataan and it was revealed that, aside from the subject being a requirement for foreign language units, interest in the language, travel, and the need for the language in their career are the primary motivations of students learning Japanese.

Regarding careers, one of my colleagues at De La Salle University conducted a short survey in 2022 on 34 alumni of International Studies major in Japanese studies. According to this survey, 25 or 73.5% of them are locally employed after their graduation while four or 11.8% are employed in Japan. Among the locally employed alumni, more than half of them (14 or 56.0%) are working in Japanese language-related fields such as local cooperates that have Japanese counterparts, Japanese companies doing business in the Philippines, and employed by Japanese companies but working remotely from the Philippines. Table 4 summarizes the result of the survey.

Table 4
Careers of 34 alumni of International Studies major in Japanese studies at De La Salle University

Employment status	Number	Proportion
Locally employed	25	73.5%
Related to Japanese language/Japan	14	56.0%
Not related to Japanese language/Japan	11	44.0%
Employed in Japan	4	11.8%
Further studies	3	8.8%
Self-employed	1	2.9%
Unemployed	1	2.9%
Total	34	100%

This implies that students who majored in Japanese see Japanese as a necessary tool to work in Japanese-related fields and there are students who actually take a career path where Japanese can be utilized.

7. Pedagogy and instruction

7.1. Pedagogical approaches and classroom practices

Among the teaching methods, the audio-lingual method is mainly employed in the classroom. Audio-lingual method uses constant drilling of grammatical constructions frequently used in everyday life or context and situation being targeted (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This is also the prevalent methodology being employed in teaching Japanese in Japan. Teachers conduct classes in the target language even at lower proficiency classes, and even beginning classes. This strategy seemed to have been adapted in a foreign language teaching context in the Philippines. Occasionally, beginning classes taught by Filipino teacher may have

explanations and translations in English and/or the local language. This seems to be helpful among Filipino students as they usually learn an additional language with English and/or the local language as medium and bridge to learning the target language.

The Japan Foundation (2023a) also surveyed the implementation of online teaching mode since it was its first survey conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Philippines, 212 institutions out of 242 (87.6%) were reported to conduct online classes overall. Throughout types of institutions, online teaching modes were employed at a high rate: four in primary (100%), 53 in secondary (82.8%), 42 in tertiary (95.5%), and 129 in other institutions (88.4%). It is surmised that online teaching mode affected the mode of delivery and students' outcomes, particularly at the beginner level, as students are required and get used to writing three different characters unique to Japanese, yet further studies on the influence brought about by online teaching are expected.

7.2. Instructional materials

Many teachers in the Philippines employ structural syllabi mainly using traditional textbooks developed in Japan such as *Minna No Nihongo* and *GENKI*. These consist of model dialogue, grammar explanation, and pattern practices. The former is written in Japanese, although an auxiliary book is available in English, while the latter provides instructions in English. These textbooks have more than 20 years of history with multiple editions, so teachers' own experiences of learning with these textbooks probably make it easier to use them. These textbooks might not be easily available for individual learners as ordinary bookstores do not sell these in the country. Therefore, teachers tend to distribute photocopies or pdf files of these materials upon enrollment.

Some institutions also use a coursebook titled *Irodori: Japanese for Life in Japan*, designed to build the communicative skills needed to live or work in Japan based on the can-do approach, which is compatible with the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education, a framework developed based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) specifically for Japanese language education, and the CEFR itself. Another advantage of this textbook is that it is available online including worksheets and sample teaching plans both in Japanese and English. A Filipino version of the textbook is also available through JFM's website.

For SPFL at secondary schools, locally-developed materials are used in its curricula, namely *enTree: Halina! Be a NIHONGOJIN!!*. This material was developed by a collaborative team of JFM experts and local JFL teachers, considering SPFL's objectives set by DepEd, allocated time, and Philippine contexts. The material employs a topic syllabus and can-do approach, enabling students to express day-to-day needs in Japanese. Ofune et al. (2012) find these unique materials advantageous in terms of feedback from teachers and students, their usability by less experienced teachers, and finally, the sustainability of the program.

7.3. Assessment

One of the most important assessment tools for Japanese language learners is the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). JLPT is a language proficiency test to evaluate and certify the Japanese language proficiency of non-native speakers. It has five levels from the easiest N5 to the hardest N1. Currently, these levels do not correspond with the CEFR, but the CEFR level is to be added to JLPT score reports for referential purposes starting in 2025.

JLPT has been conducted by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services since 1984 and is used for various purposes such as college admission requirements, job application requirements, goals for Japanese language courses, etc. The Philippines has also been the test site since the beginning of the test in 1984. Currently, the test is offered twice a year (July and December) in four major cities across the country: Manila, Cebu, Davao, and

Cagayan de Oro (The Japan Foundation & Japan Educational Exchanges and Services, n.d.). In the recent test in July 2023, 5,668 took the test in the whole country, among which were 3,453 in Manila, 598 in Cebu, 1,565 in Davao, and 52 in Cagayan de Oro (The Japan Foundation & Japan Educational Exchanges and Services, 2023).

The Japan Foundation Test for Basic Japanese (JFT-Basic) is also used to evaluate students' achievement particularly those who wish to apply for the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW). This test is designed based on the CEFR and the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education. This test assesses the kind of tasks the test-taker can accomplish with their Japanese language competence, with the following levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2.

8. Various Japan- and Japanese language-related activities, events, and programs

Aside from the classroom-based education discussed above, Japanese language education thrives more through various events and programs in the country.

The NIHONGO Partners, which was launched in 2013 at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit Meeting to promote and enhance cultural exchange between Japan and other Asian countries toward the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympic Games which was eventually postponed in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program deploys native Japanese speakers as teaching assistants to ASEAN countries for short periods ranging from about six months to a year. The Philippines has been one of the participating countries since the first implementation of the program in 2014, receiving ten batches, of more than 80 teaching assistants mainly at secondary schools up until 2023 (The Japan Foundation, n.d.). Although these teaching assistants are not necessarily Japanese language experts, they are expected to serve as resource persons of the Japanese language and culture, motivate students as native speakers, and help local teachers who may not be highly literate in Japanese language and culture (Noborizato, 2016). Local teachers are also given a chance to take part in a training program by the Japan Foundation upon deployment of NIHONGO Partners so as to enhance the efficacy of the entire program (Arima & Shinohara, 2017).

Activities to promote Japanese language and culture are also held primarily by the Japan Foundation Manila. Nihongo Fiesta is an annual event where learners, teachers, and other stakeholders including some officials get together. This event also contains Japanese language speech contests where Japanese language enthusiasts can showcase their Japanese skills. The Japanese Film Festival (JFF or often locally referred to as Eigasai) is another major event that has brought about various genres of Japanese films to the Philippines since 1997. Furthermore, smaller events, such as speech/karaoke/cosplay contests and festivals, are also organized by universities, high schools, and student organizations to showcase their learning outcomes. Among them are, UP Asian Culture Fest by the University of the Philippines' Department of Linguistics, *Natsu Matsuri* ('Summer Festival') by the Ateneo Hinomoto, a student organization of Ateneo de Manila University, and Talent Festival by SPFL high schools.

9. Challenges

There are several challenges that Japanese language education in the Philippines confronts. Among them are relatively weak Japanese language education in the country, lack of full-fledged Japanese language programs, shortage of teachers and lack of adequate/comprehensive training programs for teachers, and limited networking for teachers and other stakeholders.

9.1. Relatively weak Japanese language education

The Philippines has relatively few numbers of learners, institutions, and teachers compared to other ASEAN countries. In particular, the number of learners per 100,000 population is significantly fewer (41), as indicated in Table 5, though the Philippines is the second most populated country in the region.

Table 5

Number of Japanese language learners, institutions, and teachers in five Southeast Asian countries (based on The Japan Foundation, 2023a)

Country	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia	Thailand	Vietnam
Population	109,035,343	270,203,917	28,334,135	65,981,659	96,208,984
Leaners	44,457	711,732	38,129	183,957	169,582
per 100,000 population	41	263	135	279	176
Primary	640	6,786	17	6,597	3,986
Secondary	9,220	642,605	19,140	150,240	30,590
Tertiary	9,181	27,454	13,715	19,803	45,752
Other educational institutions	25,416	34,887	5,257	7,317	89,254
Institutions	242	2,958	215	676	629
Teachers	1,111	6,617	484	2,015	5,644

In conjunction with this, the number of institutions and teachers is also relatively low at all educational levels compared to other ASEAN countries as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Number of institutions and teachers per educational level in five Southeast Asian countries (based on The Japan Foundation, 2023a)

		Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia	Thailand	Vietnam
Primary	Institutions	4	31	2	24	22
	Teachers	19	49	11	41	57
Secondary	Institutions	64	2,275	140	521	130
	Teachers	141	3,011	157	1,040	303
Tertiary	Institutions	44	164	43	74	88
	Teachers	178	804	155	383	753
Other educational institutions	Institutions	146	490	35	74	394
	Teachers	872	2,756	188	593	4,560
Sum	Institutions	242	2,958	215	676	629
	Teachers	1,111	6,617	484	2,015	5,644

The smaller number of institutions, teachers, and students of Japanese in the Philippines may be due to the dominance — or even the hegemony — of English in the Philippines. As English is a very important language in the Philippines (cf. Borlongan, 2023), Filipinos channel all their language education and endeavors to English, even at the expense of their own national language, Filipino. It can be noticed that Malaysia, the other English-using country in Table 4, has a much lower number of institutions, teachers, and students than the Philippines. English-

using Philippines and Malaysia might be having the assumption that, in the absence of sufficient proficiency in Japanese, English might still serve as the language of communication with Japan as Japan is also aspiring to be able to use English even intra-nationally. Needless to say, Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese are not widely used in Japan or by the Japanese as a language of communication outside Japan.

The Japan Foundation (2023b) also points out the lack of support by educational administrations such as the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education for foreign language education in the country. Further governmental support, both policy and financial, is needed to cater to an increasing number of Filipinos who wish to learn Japanese in the country.

9.2. Lack of full-fledged Japanese language degree programs

A full-fledged Japanese language degree program is quite limited and most of the Japanese language courses are offered under other related disciplines such as Japanese studies, international studies, linguistics, business, and tourism. Only Mindanao Kokusai Daigaku offers the Japanese language as a major at the collegiate level.

A degree program in a particular language is crucial in order to produce experts who are capable of the language taught and eventually understand various aspects of a country/region through the language. In comparison, there are two universities in Japan that have Filipino language majors. Osaka University with its current School of Foreign Studies, formerly Osaka University of Foreign Studies has been offering a Filipino language program since 1984 while the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies has done the same since 1992. Both institutions continuously have produced experts on Filipino language proficiency and with a deep understanding of aspects of the Philippines in various fields such as sociology, anthropology, history, political science, and literature and the arts. Half of their faculty are also products of their respective program. Given the advantage of having a degree program in a particular language, this should be where the Philippines should direct its course in the field of Japanese language education.

At the same time, degree programs in Japanese studies are also limited due to the lack of Japanese language majors and the fact that research is predominantly conducted in English (The Japan Foundation, 2022). The Japan Foundation, Manila and the Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University (2020) explain that the lack of a doctoral program in Japanese studies in the country may be attributed to the current Philippine education system “which does not prioritize area studies beyond the Philippines” (p. 5).

9.3. Shortage of teachers and lack of adequate/comprehensive training programs for teachers

Studies and reports repeatedly point out the limited number of teachers in the country (Ofune et al., 2012; Furukawa, 2023; The Japan Foundation, 2023b). The Japan Foundation’s (2023a) survey also attests this: 77 or 31.8% of institutions answered in the survey that the number of teachers is not yet enough. Because of this, teachers with JLPT N3 to N5, which is an insufficient level for teaching, are already made to teach basic Japanese. Moreover, 150 or 62.0% institutions claim native speaker teachers are insufficient. This is partly because academic institutions are not accustomed to or willing to secure necessary work permits with complex bureaucracy for potential Japanese nationals, aside from those with spouse visas or dispatched by other institutions.

The lack of teachers can be attributed to the lack of institutions that offer systematically designed training programs for Japanese language teachers, and consequently, JFM is in charge of such training programs as discussed in section 5.3. There are few individuals holding at least

a master's degree in Japanese language or Japanese language education, which means, there are not enough qualified individuals to train Japanese language teachers in the country. The joint report by JFM and the Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University (2020) states that only a handful number Ph.D. degree holders exist in each institution concerned and it was reasoned out that this is due to the small number of applicants in the arts, humanities, and social sciences admitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)'s scholarship to pursue graduate studies. And this prevents the emergence of a pool of local experts and teacher trainers on Japanese language and Japanese language education in the Philippines.

Relatively low salaries for Japanese language teachers in the country cannot be overlooked. Those with relevant Japanese proficiency may choose to work for business cooperations which offer higher salaries than Japanese language schools. There is a need to raise awareness on the value of the expertise of Japanese language teachers to improve working conditions and eventually increase the number of teachers with such expertise.

9.4. Limited networking for teachers and other stakeholders

As pointed out in section 5.4, opportunities for networking for teachers and other stakeholders are limited and teachers' association outside Manila is not very active these days. Although the Philippine Nihongo Teacher's Forum has been growing, marking its 37th meeting in October 2023, only relatively fewer teachers, who are mainly university lecturers and professors, join the forum compared to more than 1,000 teachers in the country. Thus, more local-based academic venues are needed such as through associations or journals.

10. Future prospects

10.1. Recommendations

As discussed in section 9, Japanese language education in the Philippines faces several challenges that may hinder the growing trend of Japanese language education in the country.

The lack of degree programs and teachers in the Japanese language leads to a smaller number of students compared to other ASEAN countries. Hence, putting up more degree programs dedicated to the Japanese language and its teaching at higher education institutions is required as a degree program in a particular language is crucial in order not just to increase the number of students who understand the language and culture but also sustainably produce experts who are capable of the language taught and eventually produce the next generations of experts.

Japanese language education is also crucial in conducting linguistic and areal studies of Japan. As also pointed out in section 9, scholarly research in the country is predominantly conducted in English, even in Japanese-related studies. However, Japanese language proficiency cannot be overlooked as it enables researchers to access directly more authentic and informative resources. To enhance scholarly research *through* the Japanese language and not just research about Japan and Japanese, an expansion of full-scale Japanese language degree programs is desirable.

The establishment of organized training programs, or even degree programs, to train Japanese language teachers at the tertiary level is also highly expected. Currently, Japan Foundation, Manila, a Japanese-government-affiliated institution, takes the initiative of training programs for teachers in the country or aspiring teachers have to go to Japan to receive formal training in teaching methods in Japanese. In short, channels to train local experts and teacher trainers in Japanese language and Japanese language education are still developing. Only solid and robust programs will be able to support and enhance the development of Japanese language education, secure stable employment of teachers, and, eventually, foster continuity and sustainability of Japanese language education in the country. In this regard, it is a noteworthy

development that the University of the Philippines, Diliman's Department of Linguistics started holding workshops on Japanese language education on the occasion of its centennial anniversary in 2023 as this can lead to the further development of locally organized training or even degree programs for teachers. It is also recommended that local universities establish scholarship programs in cooperation with Japanese counterparts so that aspiring teachers can receive formal training in Japanese language education in Japan.

More opportunities for these teachers and researchers to gather together to discuss scholarly research on pedagogy in Japanese are needed. Aside from the Philippine Nihongo Teacher's Forum, it is desirable that educators present their studies and practices at academic gatherings dedicated to language education, together with other foreign languages educators not just English language educators, so that they can discuss the best teaching practices of foreign languages in the Philippine context, which will also benefit Japanese language education.

10.2. Projections

The number of Japanese learners is expected to increase further as human mobility between these two neighboring countries continues to grow as well. In 2022, Filipino migrants in Japan were the fourth largest group (298,740 or 9.7%) among the total registered foreign population, after Chinese (24.8%), Vietnamese (15.9%), and Korean (13.4%) (Immigration Service Agency of Japan, 2023). Filipinos come to Japan not only for working and studying but also for sightseeing. Japan National Tourism Organization (n.d.) reported that 367,480 Filipinos came to Japan in 2023 as of November 2023. This is the eighth-largest tally among all nationalities and third among those from Southeast Asia, following Thailand and Vietnam. Business and trade between Japan and the Philippines also remain strong, receiving so much support from the governments of both countries.

Japanese language education in the Philippines will continue to flourish. For that, however, robust curricula and programs that support those who wish to systematically learn Japanese or Japanese language education are needed. The Philippine government, particularly the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education, should draw up policies and guidelines together with the Japan Foundation, Manila and other local institutions involved in Japanese language education to support foreign language education in public schools. Higher education institutions with Japanese language programs should also consider developing their programs into full degree programs to train students and educators. Solid Japanese language proficiency of Filipino people benefits not only the Japanese people who interact with them but also the Filipino people themselves and the bilateral relationship between the Philippines and Japan.

Furthermore, the online mode of teaching in Japanese language classrooms spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up a new possibility in teaching the language. As discussed in section 4, learners and educators are centralized in Luzon, particularly Metro Manila whilst other regions such as Visayas and Mindanao have fewer of them. Online classes enable these learners who used to be marginalized from the epicenter of available Japanese education to avail of formal Japanese language training more than ever. For instance, non-credit extramural Japanese language courses at Ateneo de Manila University and the University of the Philippines, Diliman continue to be offered online even after the public health restrictions have been lifted. This also suggests that Japanese language learners may further increase in the country.

11. Conclusion

Japanese language education in the Philippines has almost a century of history and is considered one of the most well-known foreign languages in the country, as the borrowed term from Japanese *Nihongo* ('Japanese language') has been used even in the official domain. As

we have seen, it has been thriving as the relationship between these two neighboring countries becomes stronger. They became even closer not just geographically but also psychologically in the 21st century as information and communication technology and cheaper flight options became more and more available. Given these facts, Japanese language education is relevant in the Philippines. Filipino people have numerous opportunities to be involved in situations where Japanese language proficiency is needed: work, study, business, family reunion, and so on. Moreover, such opportunities have become more realistic as people can now flexibly travel to Japan more than ever and some schemes to work in Japan have been put up by governments. Thus, Japanese language education in the Philippines has the potential to grow further as we have seen the growing number of learners and developing opportunities to learn the language, which makes Japanese language education a growing discipline in the country. There are still many aspects and facets to be improved even though improvement can be seen through very good cooperation with stakeholders such as the Japan Foundation, Manila and the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines. Japanese language education in the Philippines benefits not only the Filipino people who wish to pursue Japanese-related careers but also the Japanese people and the bilateral relationship with Japan, as one of its closest neighbors.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Yuko Fujimitsu, Bernadette Hieida, Takeshi Matsumoto, and Florinda Palma Gil for providing important statistics and insightful comments on Japanese language education in the Philippines and going through an earlier version of this article.

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