

*Lessons Learned From Teaching Japanese for Medical Purposes
to International Students*

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Abstract

This work shows the lessons learned from the online course on Basic Medical Japanese for international students conducted between May and July 2020 at Tokushima University. The participants were five graduate students from China, Bangladesh, Thailand, including one male and four females. This course was designed for the learners to master basic medical terms and phrases in Japanese, as well as to be able to make basic conversation in health care context. The course materials were prepared bilingually, consisted of 13 lessons covering practical topics such as “parts of human body”, “basic symptoms”, “medicines and drug store”, “respiratory system”. For each lesson, the learners were introduced to new vocabulary and basic expressions by doing role play, translating sentences, solving quiz, and watching clips. The results of class assessments and end-course assessment had shown improvements of vocabulary capacity and context-based conversation skills for most of the topics. However, the learners showed difficulties in learning topics with more complicated terminology such as “psychiatry”. The learners reported that besides improving their medical Japanese language skills, they had gained more confidence in using Japanese for medical purposes, as well gained motivation for mastering medical Japanese. They found visual aids and English instruction were helpful to absorb the content. These results imply that teaching Japanese for medical purpose may contribute to improving practical Japanese skill and confidence in daily life for international students in Japan.

Keywords: Japanese Language for Medical Purpose, Online Teaching, Adult Learning

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Introduction

In recent years, Japanese language education is gaining increasing popularity worldwide, as almost four million of learners enjoy studying Japanese (Japan Foundation, 2018). Until before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, there was a steep influx of international students into Japan. For some international students, especially graduate students, and research students, who come to Japan with little Japanese skills, they must face many challenges during their campus life due to shortage of Japanese communication skills. On the other hand, the receiving universities in most of the cases offer general Japanese languages courses to the international students who enroll in any kind of programs. Many of courses and Japanese education materials are focused on zero level or beginner level, often supplemented with visual aid and pictures (Takahashi, 2020). This approach seems very practical to address the need for survival Japanese in Japan. However, these beginner level courses often not address the need for Japanese communication in specific settings such as at healthcare facilities. In reality, foreigners who can speak a little Japanese always face a hard time to make communication in Japanese at health facilities in Japan (Inoue et al., 2006).

Some universities provide international students or researchers specialized in medical-related fields with medical Japanese courses (Masuda et al., 1998; Matsumoto, 2000). A Japanese language course on medical field often covers the medical vocabulary, conversational skills at medical settings and knowledge about medical system in Japan. However, looking back at the history of Japanese language education, little attention has been given to medical-related courses. Until recently, there have been enormous renewals of interest in teaching Japanese language course on medical science.

At Tokushima University, Japanese language courses are being offered for international students at any level of proficiency (Hashimoto, 2017). Among a variety of courses, Medical Japanese course has been introduced since 2018, conducted based on the teaching material developed previously by International Center (Fukuoka et al., 2019). The textbook, which titled "Medical Vocabulary and Expressions for International Students and Japanese Students" created in 2017 as a joint learning material for medical-related international students and Japanese students. The Medical Japanese course is primarily intended to target all international students, including undergraduate, graduate, research students, exchange students who want to learn making conversation in Japanese for practical purposes such as going to clinics, visiting hospital, shopping at drugstore, talking at laboratory etc. The course was designed to suit to any student regardless of Japanese proficiency. It was also intended to recruit Japanese students who might be interested in practicing their medical interpretation skills by direct interacting with international students in a bilingual conversation simulating medical settings.

This textbook "Medical Vocabulary and Expressions for International Students and Japanese Students" organizes each topic with illustrations, vocabulary and sentences written in Japanese with kana, romaji notation and English translation, for the intention that it could be used by both beginners and advanced learners of Japanese. The lessons are designed to cover practical topics such as parts of human body, basic symptoms, medicines and drug store in Japan, respiratory system, digestive system etc. In addition, each lesson or topic is designed to be as much as possible stand-alone, so that an absence would not hinder further attending to the course. The textbook includes a set of basic vocabulary and general expressions about the human body and common illness that could be used in healthcare settings. Instead of the conventional grammar-based approach, this textbook uses context-based approach to

implement a curriculum in which Japanese language learners from beginner to intermediate level and above could participate in the same class. The student-participants have given high evaluation scores for the Medical Japanese course conducted in 2017. Nevertheless, because of its un-systematic nature, it is still an issue to evaluate if the students' Japanese proficiency have been improved after taking this course.

Given what has been done so far, the remaining questions are how the Japanese language course related to medical topic should be provided to international students, and to what extent medical-related Japanese language teaching should be paid attention to meet the need. Moreover, what are the international students' specific needs regarding Medical Japanese and what are the associations between the students' linguistic backgrounds and their satisfaction regarding this class? How about their online learning experience during the pandemic? This paper aims to show: (1) the concept, process and results of the Medical Japanese course conducted in spring 2020; (2) the satisfaction level, challenges and needs of international students in a medical Japanese class, and implications for providing language training support to international in the future.

Method

During the spring semester 2020, due to Covid-19 breakout, all courses including this Medical Japanese course were mandatory to be conducted online. In this Medical Japanese course, participants were recruited voluntarily by university-wide announcement at the beginning of the semester, in line with the other courses within the Japanese Education program for international students. This course was conducted mainly using the textbook "Medical Vocabulary and Expressions for International Students and Japanese Students" developed by the International Center, Tokushima University. Besides, for increasing interactivity in online mode, some additional materials had been introduced in parts such as online videos (Easy Languages, 2014; Japanization, 2014), out-patient questionnaire (KIFJP, n.d.), textbooks (Ono, 2018; Osuka, 2018).

The course syllabus contents of 13 lessons with 90 minutes for each lesson (Table 1). The learning objective for the whole course was for the participants to master basic medical terms and phrases in Japanese, then to be able to make basic conversation in health care context. Each lesson consisted of new vocabulary and basic expressions as well as illustrations to the topic. Each lesson consisted of a minilecture and practice activities such as role play, translating sentences, quiz, and watching video clips. In principle, no homework is given to avoid overloading students with their studies. The classes were conducted bilingually, with English as the language of instruction, with support of audio-visual aid and additional contents such as health system in Japan, health insurance, classification of drugs in Japan. All lessons were conducted via Google meet platform, as all the tests and final evaluation forms were used Google forms. We made analysis quantitatively and qualitatively of the data obtained from the classroom tests, final evaluation, discussion and Q&A, teaching notes and students' feedback.

Table 1. Course Syllabus

<i>No</i>	<i>Lesson</i>
1	Parts of Human Body (1)
2	Parts of Human Body (2)
3	Phrases for Illness (1)
4	Phrases for Illness (2)
5	Medicines
6	Inside Hospital (1)
7	Inside Hospital (2)
8	Respiratory organs/Otolaryngology
9	Digestive organs/Internal Medicine
10	Psychiatry
11	Obstetrics/Gynecology
12	Dentistry
13	Phrases for Medical Practice

Results

Characteristics of participants

Among a pool of about 200 international students with various level of Japanese proficiency, five students registered for the Medical Japanese who were from China, Bangladesh, Thailand, including 1 male and 4 females. The participants were 1st year or 2nd year graduate students who enrolled in a Ph.D. course related to biomedical or pharmaceutical fields, holding education background in medical, pharmaceutical, or biomedical fields. All of the participants had intermediate English proficiency and had Japanese conversational level of fluency. These participants had either completed or concurrently had been joining another basic Japanese course.

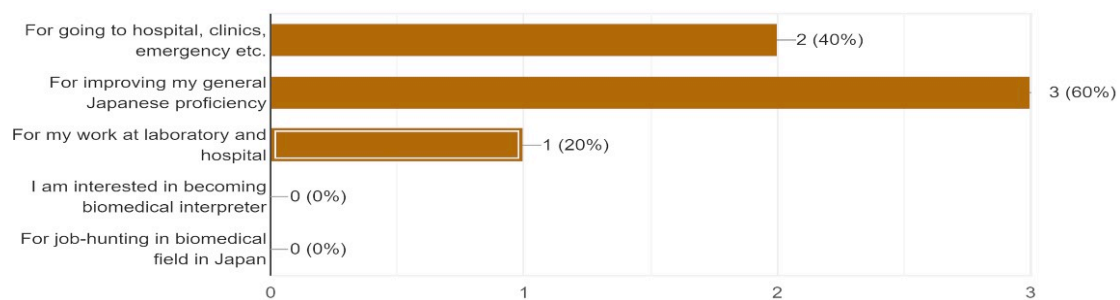


Figure 1. Reasons for studying Medical Japanese

Regarding the purposes for joining this course, participants reported their motivation such as for improving general Japanese proficiency, for going to hospital or dealing with emergency, and for working at laboratory. Interestingly, no one related the purpose of participation with job-hunting in Japan (Figure 1).

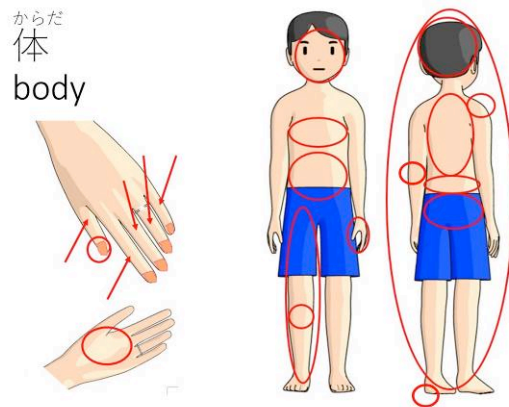


Figure 2. A slide used for practice vocabulary

Leaning of medical-related vocabulary

Figure 2 shows an example of slides used online for practicing vocabulary about the names of body parts in Japanese. Familiarizing with the body parts and medical terms was an essential part of the course. Using the provided textbook, the participants practiced pronunciation of the terms. For each lesson, a list of vocabulary was provided including essential terms written in English, Japanese, romaji, and furigana. The terms included in the list were carefully selected to include the most essential but not too overwhelming. Using pair-work in repetitions and warm-up, the participants goals were to memorize the terms naturally and be able to use these terms in conversation.



Figure 3. A sample of vocabulary test in hiragana only and Kanji with hiragana

No placement test at the beginning nor end-course examination had been conducted. Assessment for vocabulary mastering was conducted at spot, during or at the end of lessons. Several multiple-choice tests were applied using Google forms to spot check the level of vocabulary gained by participants. Figure 3 shows a sample of vocabulary test in hiragana only and Kanji with hiragana. The test results showed that participants could retain about

80% of the vocabulary from immediate previous lesson (data now shown). The participants showed difficulties in memorizing terms for abstract topics such as psychiatry, where visual aids could be designed to support memorization.

Conversation Practice

Figure 4 shows a slide used for practicing basic conversation. Given a simulation setting of an outpatient clinic, participants were assigned a task to do a role-playing in pair following a standard sentence pattern. This exercise had been continued in repetitions until the participants gained some feel of mastery.



Figure 4. A slide used for practice making conversation

Assessment of conversation skills had been made by multiple choice tests or fill-in the blank test, as well as some sentence translation tests. Assessment on spot by the instructor was used to check improvement of context-based conversation skills. Pair-work for conversation practice had been assigned as students were requested to practice in patient-doctor pair and shifted their roles until achieving some mastery. The sentence patterns were limited to minimum per lesson and keep practicing the same pattern in the next class.

Self-evaluation, satisfaction, and challenges

The learners reported gaining more confidence in using Japanese for medical purposes, as well gained motivation for mastering medical Japanese. This was partly achieved together with improvement of understanding about healthcare system in Japan. This content was provided supplementarily in the form of mini lectures in English but introduced new Japanese vocabulary. The visual aids and illustrations in the textbook, as well as using English as a language of instruction were helpful to absorb the content. 100% participants reported preference of English instruction and bilingual class design. In response to the question “What aspects of this course were most useful?”, the responses were “the practice of communication with nurse and doctor at hospital”, “Conversation practice”, “Vocabulary for hospital”, “Parts of body, symptoms and name of different types of medicine was useful.”

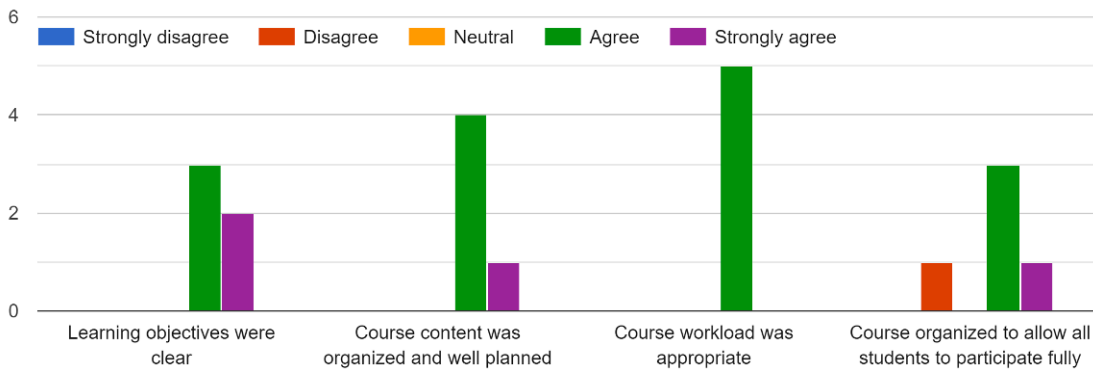


Figure 5. Opinions regarding the course's contents

Regarding the course's content, the participants were agreed that the learning objectives were clear, the contents were well planned, the workload was appropriate. The full engagement of learners into the learning process remained a challenge, partly due to the influence of not being familiar enough to the online mode or learning.

Regarding challenges that participants faced within this course, a participant reported that "in this course, we enjoy learning and practicing Japanese and English which is fun but there are difficulties as well since both languages are not our native language so it may take more time to absorb the contents." For Chinese natives, it was less difficult learning kanji-based vocabulary. For Bangladeshi and Thai students, memorizing terms in Kanji seemed more difficult than for Chinese, however for practicing grammar structure and conversation, it was the same level of challenge.

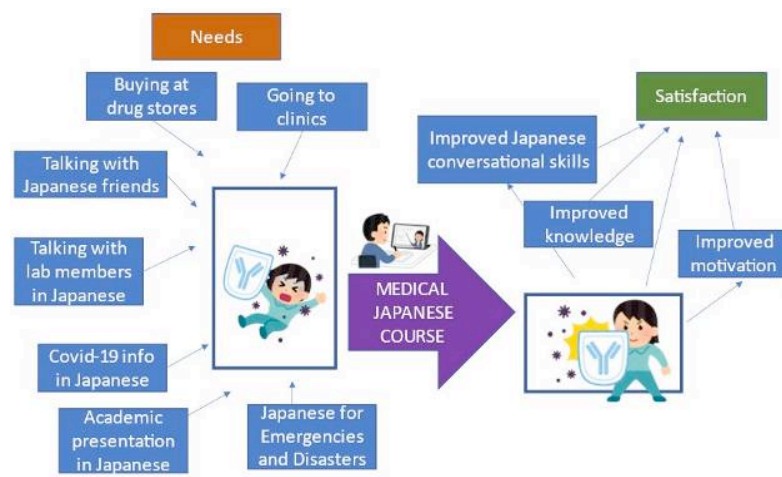


Figure 6. Conceptual framework proposed by the authors

The increasing trend of inbound international students and job hunting in Japan is related to the higher needs for supporting their integration into Japanese society. Japanese language education also is transforming to meet higher demands for diversified options, including Medical Japanese. Through conducting this course, we have learned about the multiple needs of international students such as going to clinics, buying OTC drugs at drugstore, calling emergency, coping with disaster, watching TV news about COVID-19, talking with laboratory colleagues, presenting at academic meetings in Japanese, etc. By taking this course, even online, the participants could achieve some KAS (knowledge, attitude, and skills), which may contribute to their general satisfaction as international students in Japan (Figure 6). Meeting the needs of international students could contribute indirectly to increasing inbound international mobility into Japan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper shows some of the results and lessons learned from the online course on Basic Medical Japanese for international students conducted at Tokushima University. This data was taken after the breakout of pandemic and universities just introduced online mode of education. This course was designed for the learners to master basic medical terms and phrases in Japanese, as well as to be able to make basic conversation in health care context. The learners reported improvement of Medical Japanese language conversation skills, along with gaining more confidence and motivation for mastering Japanese. They found visual aids and bilingual mode with English instruction used in this course were helpful to absorb the content. These results imply that there is a need for Medical Japanese and the universities should find a way to continue and improve teaching Japanese for medical purpose, which contributes to improving practical Japanese skill and confidence in daily life for international students in Japan.

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