

Implementation and Future Trends of the Japanese Language Teaching Programme for the Undergraduate Programme at Mongolian National University of Education

Ganchimeg Ayurzana, Mongolian National University of Education, Mongolia

The European Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Japanese language courses have been offered in Mongolia for 48 years. According to the Japan Foundation's 2021 survey, there are 117 institutions that offer Japanese language courses in Mongolia including 23 universities, 29 secondary schools, and 65 language centers. MNUE, one of the largest educational institutions in Mongolia, began training Japanese language teachers and translators in 1998. In the 2023-2024 academic year, 89 students are majoring in Japanese Language Teaching and Japanese-English Language Teaching programmes. In this research, we aim to study and clarify the current status and future trends of the implementation of the “Japanese Language Teaching” and “Japanese-English Language Teaching” programmes within the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” undergraduate programme at MNUE, which has been implemented since 2014. Any educational programme requires analysis for improvement. Therefore, a total of 64 first- to third-year students from the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme were asked about and analyzed for the implementation of the programme. This research analyzed the current situation related to various aspects of the programme, including programme selection, course teacher selection, independent assignments, assessment methods, textbooks, teaching methodologies, and satisfaction survey. In the end, the issues within the undergraduate programme will be summarized, and recommendations will be made for further improvement.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Programme, Students, Course

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction: State Policy on Higher Education

According to Mongolian law on Education, the purpose of education is to cultivate healthy and responsible citizens with internationally recognized knowledge and skills, who value statehood, history, culture, tradition, and heritage, respect democratic and humanistic values, and contribute to socio-economic development.

In line with this, Mongolia's Five-Year Development Guidelines for 2021-2025, developed by the Government of Mongolia, outline the implementation of national educational programmes that promote Mongolian values and are enriched with Mongolian history, language, culture, traditions, patriotism, and national heritage, alongside internationally recognized content. These programmes will be introduced in all educational institutions, regardless of their ownership. The Guidelines also state that a competitive education system at the international level will be introduced in stages.

To prioritize education as a key sector, develop a world-class national education system, and continuously enhance the quality of education and skilled workforce, the Government of Mongolia has initiated the fourth Master Plan for Education of Mongolia from 2020 to 2030.

This policy document specifically emphasizes the importance of developing and implementing standards for teacher-training universities, increasing teachers' capacity and competency, enhancing the quality of education at teacher-training universities, and improving the quality of students. These measures are crucial, as the issue of teaching personnel is essential for implementing the tasks outlined in this master plan.

The Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE), the leading institution among teacher-training universities, aims to become a world-class center for quality training, education, and research. Currently, MNUE has 10,874 students, including 7,782 undergraduate students, and is ranked 4th in the country.

Eight study programmes of the Mongolian National University of Education such as the "English Language Teaching" programme and "Mathematics Teaching" programme were accredited by international accreditation institutions such as ASIIN and ACQUIN, and 36 programmes of the MNUE were accredited by the Mongolian National Council for Education Accreditation (MNCEA) at national level.

In an order issued by the Minister of Education and Science of Mongolia, it is stated:

"Educational programmes offered by all higher education institutions, regardless of their type, must meet the following requirements. The Programmes of Study should be comprehensive documents that reflect the aims and objectives of the programme, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired through students, the teaching methodology, assessment, learning environment, and tools, as well as the requirements for teaching personnel, new entrants, and graduates."

To enhance education quality, implement quality reforms in teacher education, and ensure continuous development, the Mongolian National University of Education has adopted new management practices. This includes formulating policies and programmes to improve quality assurance; update study programmes, standards, content, methodology, and technology for each major; establish an Evaluation Department to measure programme

outcomes; develop an evaluation system; create online courses; and develop and offer additional study programmes such as transformative courses, correspondence courses, and distance learning. These efforts are aligned with societal needs and demands and ensure that all programmes are accredited by both national and international accreditation bodies.

The School of Social Sciences and Humanities, a constituent school of the Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE), has four foreign language departments. In 2014, the lecturers from the foreign language faculty developed and began implementing an undergraduate programme, “Teacher, Foreign Language Education,” which includes six languages such as English, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

Since the “Japanese language teaching” programme started in 1998, 185 students have graduated from MNUE as Japanese translators. Additionally, 23 students have graduated as Japanese teacher-translators, and 185 as Japanese teachers. Besides offering undergraduate degree programmes, the faculty also provides professional courses for a master’s programme. In 2020, the Japanese teaching programme had been accredited at national level. Currently, 89 students are majoring in Japanese teaching and Japanese–English teaching at MNUE.

In this research paper, we aimed to assess the current status of the “Japanese Teaching” and “Japanese–English Teaching” programmes based on students' opinions and attitudes. The survey covered various aspects, including the selection of course teachers, independent assignments, textbook content, teaching methodology, and satisfaction survey. Based on the findings, we offer recommendations for improving the Japanese Language Teaching and Japanese–English Teaching programmes which is part of the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” programme.

Research Methodology

In this research, we employed a mixed-methods approach to gather and analyze data. We collected data through structured surveys to evaluate the implementation process of the “Japanese language teaching” programme at MNUE. The surveys provided both quantitative data on student learning experiences and qualitative insights into their feedback.

We analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of this programme. This combined approach enabled us to evaluate the programme's adherence to educational standards, its impact on student learning outcomes, and identify areas for improvement.

The Research Participants

Here, we conducted a questionnaire survey among the students majoring in “Japanese Language Teaching” and “Japanese-English Language Teaching” within the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” undergraduate programme at MNUE. Out of the 64 students who participated in this survey for the 2023-2024 school year, 57 were female and 7 were male. Additionally, nine fourth-year students have been participating in an internship programme in Japan for one year. The distribution of students across the courses is as follows:

- First-year students: 38 (13 in Japanese Teaching, 25 in Japanese-English Teaching)
- Second-year students: 18 (all in Japanese-English Teaching)
- Third-year students: 8 (all in Japanese Teaching)

1. “Japanese–English Language Teaching” Programme Within the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” Undergraduate Programme

The newly developed curriculum for each course was reviewed several times by the Sub-Committee of the Academic Programme of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities. This committee, consisting of lecturers from each department, provided feedback on the curricula. The curricula were then revised based on this feedback before final approval. The “Japanese-English Language Teaching” programme has been in implementation for two years. Below is the general structure of the syllabus.

Subject types	Compulsory subjects		Elective subjects		Total subject	
	Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent
General education	21	16.9%	4	3.2%	25	20.2%
Teacher education core courses	12	9.7%	4	3.2%	16	12.9%
Professional core courses	75	60.5%	8	6.5%	83	66.9%
Total mark 120< total credit to be collected for instruction <130	108	87.1%	16	12.9%	124	100%

Table 1. The syllabus of Japanese language teaching programme

This is the syllabus for the undergraduate “Japanese Language Teaching” programme. MNUE transitioned from a traditional system to a credit system in 2014, which allows students to create their own class timetables. Students in the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme are required to complete 124 credit hours during their studies. The professional courses include Japanese grammar, Japanese speaking skills, Japanese writing skills, Japanese listening skills, Japanese teaching methodology, and linguistics, and so on. In the academic year 2023-2024, a total of 145 students enrolled in foreign language teaching programmes offered by the university, and 17 of them are in their first year of the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme.

Subject types		Compulsory subjects		Elective subjects		Total subject	
		Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent	Credit	Percent
General education		18	11.9%	4	2.6%	22	14.5%
Teacher education core courses		12	7.9%	4	2.6%	16	10.5%
Professional core courses	Japanese	48	31.6%	8	5.2%	56	36.8%
	English	39	25.7%	4	2.6%	43	28.3%
Teaching practicum, graduation	Guided practicum	5	3.3%			5	3.3%
	Teaching practicum	8	5.3%			8	5.3%
	State examination and thesis	2	1.3%			2	1.3%
Total mark 120< total credit to be collected for instruction <130		132	87%	20	13%	152	100%

Table 2. The syllabus of Japanese-English language teaching programme

“The Japanese-English Language Teaching” programme began in the 2022-2023 school year. Currently, there are 29 students in their first year and 22 students in their second year. Students in this programme are required to complete a total of 152 credits during their

studies, with 132 credits allocated to compulsory courses and 20 credits to elective courses. Compared to the Japanese Language Teaching programme, this programme tends to attract more applicants.

The course curriculum outlined in the syllabus includes the skills, knowledge, and abilities that students must acquire. It also covers various components such as course content, which includes both theoretical and practical knowledge, course planning, teaching methodology, types of assessments, and a list of textbooks for each course.

1.1 Career Choice

A total of 64 students participated in the questionnaire survey, including 43 from the “Japanese-English teaching” programme and 21 from the “Japanese language teaching” programme. They responded to the question, “Why did you choose this major?” as follows:

- The largest percentage, 51.5% (33 students), chose this major with the purpose of studying in Japan.
- 21.8% (14 students) chose this major to become Japanese teachers.
- 20.9% (9 students) chose this major to become English teachers.
- 17.1% (11 students) chose this major based on the advice of their family members.

When asked, “Are you satisfied with the major you have chosen?”, 73.4% (47 students) responded “Very satisfied,” while 26.6% (17 students) responded “Neutral.” No students selected the option “Dissatisfied.” When we inquired why some students chose “Neutral,” 4 students mentioned that traditional teaching methods were predominantly used, 5 students said that most of the courses were focused on educational studies, and 7 students found the study load to be heavy.

Additionally, in response to the question, “Will you work in your profession after graduating from university?”, 54.6% (35 students) responded “Yes,” 4.6% (3 students) responded “No,” and 40.6% (26 students) were “Not sure.”

Their responses suggest that although there are employment opportunities for English and Japanese teachers in Mongolia, relatively few students plan to pursue teaching careers. This may be related to the low wages for secondary school teachers in Mongolia. Many students want to study in Japan after graduation. Therefore, whether they pursue teaching careers depends on their future goals.

In recent years, the number of students choosing the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme has decreased. It is related to the increase in language centers and the growing tendency among young people to view language as a skill rather than a profession.

In response to the question, "Does the content of the teaching programme implemented at the university meet your needs or demands?", 59.4% (38 students) answered "very satisfied," 23.4% (15 students) responded "neutral," 1.6% (1 student) answered "dissatisfied," and 15.6% (10 students) responded "not sure."

The findings of this survey indicate that while the implementation of the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme has yielded positive results, further improvements are needed. To enhance this programme, quality research should be conducted on course selection, lecturer

performance, textbook quality, teaching methodology, independent assignments, assessments, teaching practicum, and satisfaction surveys.

1.2 Selection of Course Lecturers

Following the transition to a credit system and the implementation of a new undergraduate programme by MNUE in 2014, university students were given the option to select their lecturers. But the students' selection of lecturers has drawn our attention. We wanted to know the factors that they consider when selecting their lecturers. According to the survey, 50% of participants preferred flexible class timetables based on their learning loads when selecting lecturers, while 23% got advice from senior students and friends. Additionally, 21.2% of participants indicated that they do not consider any specific factors, and 10.9% chose lecturers they personally liked.

The survey findings suggest that students should be provided with transparent and detailed information about lecturers' experience and achievements in training and research, as well as guidance that helps students make informed class choices based on the content of the study programme.

1.3 Independent Assignment

When asked about the types of independent assignments given by lecturers, 51.5% (33 students) reported that they defend their assignments orally, 71.8% (46 students) said they write essays on given topics and make translations, and 56.2% (36 students) answered that they make presentations using PowerPoint.

Most students found it difficult to complete their independent assignments due to the following problems:

- Inadequate textbooks and sources
- Lack of guidance from some lecturers
- Limited examples or samples related to the assignments

A few students also noted additional challenges:

- Difficulty performing assignments due to simultaneous deadlines
- Unfavorable learning environment and restrictions on staying at the university until evening
- Limited vocabulary knowledge
- Poor internet speed
- Ineffective teamwork among students during group presentations and tasks

To solve these problems, lecturers should ensure coherence and integration between courses when assigning independent tasks and provide clear, detailed guidance and examples, including specifying appropriate sources. Additionally, the types of independent assignments should be expanded beyond short essays, conversations, and brief presentations to encourage their creativity. Lecturers should offer students more creative tasks that involve small-scale research, including data collection, processing, and analysis.

1.4 Teaching Methodology

While 79.7% of the research participants rated the teaching methodology of Japanese lecturers as good, 20.3% considered it to be at an average level. As MNUE is a leading teacher-training institution in Mongolia, it is essential for every lecturer to excel in teaching methodology. Best practices include using knowledge-creation methodology such as analyzing, discussing, reflecting, reviewing, and summarizing that suits the feature of each course.

Although many students view the lecturers' teaching methodologies as good, more creative methodologies and techniques should be introduced in language courses. Lecturers need to enhance their knowledge and skills to align with international language policies, social needs, and the latest teaching technologies for foreign language instruction. In addition, expanding partnerships between Japanese language teachers at both national and international levels and learning from their best practices is crucial for providing quality service to our students.

1.5 Textbooks of the Courses “Speaking Skills Development” and “Grammar in Use”

Students who took the professional Japanese language courses “Japanese Grammar in Use” and “Japanese Speaking Skills Development” were asked their opinions about the textbooks. Of the students who studied the professional course “Speaking Skills Development,” 89% (57 students) responded that the textbook was suitable for their language level and that the content was good, while 11% (7 students) said they were unsure.

With the implementation of the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” programme, there is a need to select and use textbooks with the latest content and methodology for university students. The textbook “Dekiru Nihongo,” developed for elementary, middle, and intermediate levels according to the Japanese language education standards, is used as a basic textbook in professional courses.

When asked about the textbook used in the course “Grammar in Use,” 87% of students (56 students) said that the textbook was suitable for their language level and had good content, while 13% (8 students) responded that they were not familiar with it.

In the “Teacher, Foreign Language Education” programme, the course name was changed from “Japanese Grammar” to “Grammar in Use”. Although the name was changed to focus on usage-based teaching, students studying in Japan were not satisfied with the textbook’s content. Therefore, in 2021, I authored the textbook “Grammar of Japanese Language-I” at the elementary level as part of a textbook project funded by the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at MNUE. This textbook, developed for first- and second-year students majoring in the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme, has been in use for three years since its publication.

Developing course curricula based on the content of only one or two textbooks is limited. This should be taken into further consideration. When developing course curricula, teachers are required to use or create textbooks that are suitable for Mongolian students.

1.6 Lecturer Satisfaction Survey

Lecturers at MNUE are evaluated by students at the end of each term. This evaluation is one of the criteria used to assess the professional development and skills of course teachers. According to the survey, 67.2% of students believe that such evaluations are necessary, while 12.5% think they are not necessary, and 20.3% are unsure about their necessity.

Additionally, some students reported that they did not pay much attention to completing the lecturer satisfaction survey because they felt the results were unreliable. This feedback suggests that certain questions on the satisfaction survey should be revised to enhance its effectiveness and accuracy.

1.7 Extracurricular Activities

When the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme was accredited by the Mongolian National Council for Education Accreditation in Mongolia in 2020, student personal development was the main area of concern. Extracurricular activities, such as student clubs, are essential for students to spend their free time, explore their hobbies, and foster personal growth. However, when surveyed, 87.5% of students reported that they were not involved in any clubs or activities, while only 12.5% said they were. This suggests that they are unable to join clubs that contribute to their personal development due to a lack of time, caused by heavy study loads, assignments, and teaching practicums.

Japanese language teachers run speaking and reading clubs, but these are not regular activities. Therefore, we suggest that the school administration and student office support the regular operation of student clubs at the university.

Conclusion

The lecturers and professors of the Foreign Language Faculty at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, MNUE, have developed educational programmes following state education policies and international trends as part of the quality reform in higher education. Based on a questionnaire survey of students majoring in Japanese teaching programme, we reached the following conclusions:

- The number of students majoring in "Japanese Language Teaching" is declining annually, while enrolment in the “Japanese–English Language Teaching” programme is increasing. This suggests that the “Japanese–English Language Teaching” programme better aligns with current social needs and demands.
- Although the “Japanese Language Teaching” programme has several advantages, improvements are necessary. Over 50% of surveyed students indicated that they intend to work in their profession after graduation. So, it is essential to develop and implement a policy aimed at raising the value and reputation of the teaching profession.
- Many students studying Japanese in Mongolia aim to continue their studies in Japan. Learning foreign languages has become a common interest because most young people view language education as a necessary skill rather than a profession. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt to current trends and updates in language education and view language education from various perspectives to keep pace with changes.

- The research reveals that students face difficulties in doing independent assignments. Course teachers should provide clear instructions and examples, offer a list of sources, and design assignments related to the course content.
- To improve the programme, it is important to select textbooks that feature updated content, new solutions, and creative activities.
- Most students don't participate in extracurricular activities or join clubs. To support their personal development, study loads should be adjusted, and classrooms should be made available after class hours, provided students adhere to school rules.
- To promote Japanese language instruction, it is crucial to provide information about Japan and Japanese culture to children and youth.
- The JF Japanese education standard should be reflected in the educational programme.
- Expanding partnerships with Japanese language teachers at both national and international levels is necessary to learn from the teaching methods of other instructors.
- When updating the educational programme, the focus should be on preparing professionals who can compete at both national and international levels through internationally recognized study programmes.

References

Education Sector Mid-term Development Plan 2021-2030 Mongolia. (n.d.)
<https://en.meds.gov.mn/education-sector-mid-term-development-plan>

Japan Foundation. (2021). *Survey on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2021*.
(September 2021)
<https://www.jpff.go.jp/e/project/japanese/survey/result/survey21.html>

Mongolia's Five-Year Development Guidelines for 2021-2025. (2021).
<https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/15584>

Contact email: ganchimeg@msue.edu.mn