Bridges Between Japanese Culture and Language Teaching
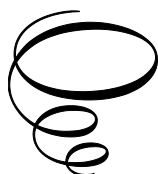
Bridges Between Japanese Culture and Language Teaching

Edited by

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HOW TO DEAL WITH LOW ENROLLMENT IN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

KATSUYA IZUMI

Introduction

This book investigates pedagogical connections between Japanese culture and language teaching to seek possibilities of teaching and/or using Japanese culture to generate, maintain, and enhance students' interests in learning the Japanese language. In English-speaking countries, students' enrollments in college language courses have been difficult to maintain. With an understanding that there are many reasons that explain this problem socially, politically, and economically, this book attempts to help Japanese language college instructors grapple with the challenge to encourage their students to start and continue studying Japanese through various approaches explained in all the chapters. The methodologies of the chapters in this volume vary: some use the instructors' actual experiences experimenting on using Japanese popular cultural products such as anime, manga, and films; some make arguments to support the uses of specific anime, songs, or literary works in language classes by using pedagogical theories; some are about possibilities and their ongoing experiments of providing students with opportunities to use Japanese in practical settings and of using traditional Japanese art forms such as tea ceremonies and calligraphy to enhance students' interests in the language; and some are about pedagogical methods to enhance students' motivations or to teach specific aspects of Japanese. With the variety of methodologies of their research and teaching, all chapters make contributions to building bridges between Japanese culture and Japanese teaching.

Proficiency in a second language increases its importance in this globalized and interconnected world. Even with the rapid development of AI, proficiency in one or more additional languages will help students be successful in the competitive job market and in the workforce after they start

their career. At the same time, however, it is important for language instructors to emphasize that each language cannot be separate from its culture. While learning a foreign language, students also learn the culture and history of the people who speak it because understanding what others say always requires us to understand the context in which it is said. When we think about this inevitable connection between the text and the context, we, as language instructors, need to question ourselves if we have made enough effort to build the bridge between language and culture when we teach our students a foreign language.

Because of the global popularity of Japanese anime, manga, and video games among others, Japanese programs in higher education have relatively healthy enrollment. However, it has been increasingly difficult to sustain the enrollment in intermediate and advanced Japanese courses at the college level at least in English-speaking countries. Especially for students whose native languages use the Roman alphabet, the Japanese language that uses hiragana, katakana, and kanji looks too challenging and even intimidating to continue learning. Therefore, it is also important to discuss how the traits that are peculiar to Japanese are enjoyable and can enrich learners' intellectual activities. Language learners will necessarily expand their brains by using some characters, words, and grammar that they have not used speaking in their native languages.

This challenging situation for college-level language programs to sustain is not just a problem for language instructors; it is also a problem for the countries in which foreign language programs are closing. Four-year institutions in the U.S., for example, experienced a 16.6 % decrease in language enrollment from 2016 to 2021, according to the Modern Language Association's report (Lusin, et al., 2023). Whereas European languages such as French, Portuguese, Latin, Italian and Spanish lost about a fifth of their enrollment in those years, Japanese declined only by 4.6 %. However, even a small decline looks serious in the program that does not have many students to begin with. To sustain many languages' programs, instructors' efforts to generate innovative approaches are not the only important factor; in a way, administrative support from entire institutions other than individual programs and departments plays a more crucial role in enrollments. The external factors to support language programs include adequate funding for the program and support from administrative offices to increase interest in foreign languages and to provide students in language programs with opportunities to work in local businesses by using the languages, as the MLA report shows (Lusin, et al., 2023, 3). Even though there are some institutional efforts to make their language education useful, many colleges and universities tend to make shifts to give more funding to the STEM fields

especially when we experience financial challenges and inflation in many countries. Empirical research shows that there is an ideological separation between STEM fields and foreign language education that discourages students to start, and especially continue, to study foreign languages at the institutional transition from secondary to postsecondary education in the U.S. (Dian and Liu, 2021). In many universities and colleges, foreign language learning is treated as one of the general education requirements that students are advised to fulfill as quickly as possible.

Even though the world's globalization has greatly enhanced communications across different counties, this does not encourage college students to study foreign languages but leads to increasing empowerment of the English language. Closures of many language programs in universities have not just been happening in the U.S., and they are not quite recent phenomena. According to Shelly Godsland (2010, 113-114), as early as 2002, Britain's newspaper wrote about university language departments that were under threat of closure, and sixteen British universities indeed stopped offering degrees in Spanish, French, German, and Italian five years later. Foreign language learning's unpopularity along with the lack of institutional support to sustain language programs seems contradictory to the phrases that often describe the twentieth-first century such as a global economy, the borderless world, values of diverse cultural perspectives, etc.

It is, therefore, significant to reconsider how we understand foreign language learning. Foreign language learners want to be able to communicate with others through the language, but it is also important to observe the process of their learning by thinking about what happens to learners' understanding about different cultures during the process. In other words, they should be constantly reminded that they are also learning culture in their language classes. Thousands of hours of study will be required if learners want to be able to use the language in practical settings, but foreign language education can provide them with opportunities to experience different cultures and to decenter learners' own cultures. What seems to be lacking when we understand the importance of foreign language programs is the need to emphasize the effects on how college students understand different cultures including their own before they embark on their postgraduate careers.

Thanks to the popularity of Japanese culture among people in foreign countries, there are still many students who are interested in taking courses in Japanese programs, but it has been increasingly difficult to connect and transfer their interests in Japanese culture to their interests in the Japanese language. Not only does this book suggest pedagogical methods to improve students' Japanese language skills in language courses, but some chapters also highlight the integrations between Japanese culture and language by

discussing how we should use students' interests in Japanese culture to encourage them to study the language. With these chapters used as stepping-stones, it is another hope of mine that members of Japanese programs can further think about how to enrich communication between different teachers who teach different courses (culture or language) and thus generate common goals and a harmonious atmosphere in their teaching communities.

Using different approaches to Japanese culture, this project also responds to the learners' diverse backgrounds, interests, and language levels even though all chapters develop their arguments and suggestions about teaching Japanese in university and college contexts. To clarify, all contributors have taught Japanese as a second language (L2) in countries where English is the common language. There are many scholarships available for how to teach English in Japanese institutions (for example, Keiko Tsuchiya and Maria Dolores Perez Murillo's *Content and Language Integrated Learning in Spanish and Japanese Contexts*, 2019) partly because many are critical of English education in Japan that is grammar-translation-based. Although it is possible to make a link between teaching English in Japan and teaching Japanese in English-speaking countries, I specify that this book is about the integration between Japanese culture and language and how to use them to enhance college students' interest in Japanese studies.

Hiroshi Nara and Mari Noda's *Acts of Reading* (2002) explores how to teach reading skills of Japanese as second language (L2). Acknowledging close correlations between reading the first language and second language, they express their concerns about using pedagogical theories of teaching European languages based on an alphabetic script as universal ones for teaching foreign languages. Many chapters in this book also deal with specific challenges that we face when teaching Japanese while sharing the concerns. While this book's contributors deal with various skills such as speaking, reading, and writing, we, unlike Nara and Noda, do not necessarily deal with the instructional order between oral language and written language. Each chapter in this book expresses different approaches about how to use their students' interest in Japanese culture in language classrooms and/or about what kinds of materials they should choose and how they should use them. We emphasize the importance of the cultural knowledge in teaching and learning an L2, and we deploy and use throughout the book different strategies to use it by emphasizing both cultural and linguistic traits. Our chapters deal with something that is related to Senko K. Maynard's *Japanese Communication: Language and Thought in Context* (1997), or what Maynard calls "the interrelationship of context, language, and culture" (Introduction, 5). Drawing on previous interpretations of some theories about how much "thoughts" are controlled

and influenced by language, Maynard explains that shared experiences, and not only the linguistic traits of certain languages such as grammar and words, construct "thoughts". While Maynard's study focuses on figuring out the relationship between language and thoughts, and by extension, culture, many chapters of this book, again, focuses on more practical and pedagogical methods to use or create various bridges between Japanese culture and language.

To study foreign languages, more learners have started to use various technologies such as online applications. *Technology-Supported Learning In and Out of the Japanese Language Classroom* (2019) edited by Erica Zimmerman and Abigail McMeekin explains many ideas about how to facilitate students' learning Japanese in and out of the language classroom with the use of technology. Zimmerman and McMeekin emphasize the importance of technology-supported learning out of the classroom to enhance students' autonomy as learners. Language instructors also need to be familiar with various technological tools and online resources that students can easily obtain.

Regardless of what courses they teach, many college instructors have shifted their discussions from how to prevent their students from using AI to finish their assignments to how to incorporate the use of AI in classroom activities and assignments. Nonetheless, the advancement of technology can be regarded as another factor that enrollments in language programs have been low because AI can, for example, translate English into Japanese, and therefore, we do not need to learn foreign languages. This way of thinking exacerbates the problem that foreign language programs are facing because it regards foreign language learning as something meaningless if the language cannot be used in practical settings. Perhaps, we need to ask ourselves if we deem it justifiable to use Google Translate and Chat GPT when we want to know what others speaking in foreign languages mean; are we fine with not being able to speak any foreign languages if AI can do that instead of ourselves? Many students start studying Japanese because they want to be able to enjoy Japanese anime in Japanese even though they can watch and enjoy them with English subtitles. This already shows that people have a desire to experience the original and the authentic, bringing foreign language learning out of merely practical and useful education. Thus, this book's project inevitably contextualizes learning and teaching Japanese in a wider field than Japanese programs. While introducing and explaining classroom activities, we go beyond the language classroom to help students construct their identities as learners of the language and culture and continue their learning.

Introducing Each Chapter

For the purpose of constructing students' identities as learners of language and culture, the book starts with Yuki Yoshimura's chapter titled "Extensive Reading in Japanese Language Education: Enhancing Learner Engagement and Learner Autonomy". Extensive Reading (ER), or *tadoku* in Japanese, has recently been implemented into many Japanese programs. In elementary, intermediate, and advanced Japanese courses, some instructors also use part of the class times for their students to read Japanese books that they choose. Because they can choose their reading materials according to their individual interests in Japanese culture and their language proficiency levels, Yoshimura argues that students will be encouraged to study Japanese while developing their identities as readers of Japanese. For many students, four years in college will not be enough to be fluent in Japanese. Therefore, it is important that students establish learner's autonomy by developing their reading habits to study the language by themselves after graduating from universities. Enhancing the learner's engagement with the reading materials, ER is a useful method to create a comfortable environment in which students will sustain their enjoyment of reading both in and outside the classrooms. Yoshimura also contends that ER is useful to respond to the diverse body of students in Japanese classrooms because they can choose various and authentic reading materials about multiple aspects of Japanese culture.

Vance Schaefer's chapter, "Finding Your Voice in Japanese: Harnessing Popular Culture to Enhance JAL Learners' Communicative Repertoire of Speech Styles and Identities", further deals with diversities of the Japanese language by responding to the heterogeneous Japanese speech styles according to how Japanese speakers identify themselves. Schaefer argues that Japanese popular culture such as anime, manga, TV shows, and videogames will foster "greater communicative competence among JAL [Japanese as an additional language] learners" because they use different speech styles and shift among them according to the development of characters identities and plots. Japanese popular culture can expose JAL learners to different speech styles including those of marginalized voices among native Japanese speakers. Watching and analyzing the language samples used in Japanese popular culture are the best way to learn the complex interplay of styleshifting and to decide which styles JAL learners want to learn. Schaefer explains the close correlations between the characters and their speech styles by referring to examples of Japanese popular culture such as *Rurōni Kenshin*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *The Door into Summer*, *What did you eat yesterday?*, and the Japanese translations of

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. Drawing on the controlled EXposure process of EXplaining, EXamining, Experiencing, Experimenting, and Exploring (Schaefer and Warhol, 2020) speech styles, Schaefer explicates how students go through each step of the process by using Japanese popular cultural materials.

Hiromi Muranaka-Vuletich's chapter, "The Use of Popular Culture Materials in a Tertiary-Level Japanese Language Classroom: Insights from J-pop and J-hip hop", examines "the potential" of using contemporary Japanese popular music (J-pop and J-hip hop) as an example of the use of popular culture materials in a tertiary-level Japanese language classroom by introducing the course she has revised and cultivated at a university in Australia since 2015. Muranaka-Vuletich shows how a recent J-pop song contributes to the study of gender-specific expressions in Japanese, particularly in fostering analytical skills, which is the fundamental aim of university learning. Although some widely used Japanese textbooks cover limited elements of language and culture such as various gender-specific first-person pronouns and sentence-ending particles, students manage to do more in-depth analyses through examining contemporary J-pop songs. She continues to contend that J-hip hop songs are also a useful resource for analytical exercises by showing how the students scrutinize the rhymes and other matching sound patterns in them. As some of the comments from her students' evaluations of the course show, these Japanese popular songs deepen their understanding of Japanese culture while they also give them opportunities to learn many Japanese grammatical structures. Perhaps, because her students are actively engaged in the course materials that stimulate their interests, they notice and analyze Japanese cultural aspects beyond her expectations. Thus, she contends that J-pop and J-hip hop, if carefully selected according to the learner's language level, can be useful materials to teach Japanese culture in addition to Japanese linguistic elements beyond what traditional textbooks can cover.

Sumiko Iida and William S. Armour's chapter, "Learning Japanese through Manga and Anime: A Multifaceted Approach in an Advanced Level Japanese Language Course in Tertiary Education", explains how they intertwined the concepts of pedagogy, andragogy, and heutagogy to design a course that encourages their students to develop both self-directed and life-long learning of the Japanese language using manga and anime. By taking an interdisciplinary approach that enables students to analyze their favorite titles of manga and anime to deepen their understanding of the language and context in them, students apply their analytical skills to a learning project that they design to achieve their own learning goals. Iida and Armour have practiced this innovative approach

and methods of using manga and anime in an Australian university since 2013. They also describe various activities used in and outside of the classroom, including how these activities were assessed.

Junko Ueno's chapter, "Developing Students' Multiliteracies through the Use of Anime", is also provocative in that it observes how people understand "literacy". It does not merely involve the written language but also the graphic and the cultural understanding. In this sense, Ueno argues, anime is useful to foster our students' "multiliteracies" because it consists of multimodalities that include written, audio, audiovisual, visual, digital modes, and combinations of them in specific cultural contexts. Carefully choosing a few anime that are set both in a familiar setting of a school and in unfamiliar Japanese cultural settings for her students, she explains how her class activities enable her students to experience, contextualize, analyze, and apply the Japanese language to enhance their multiliteracies in authentic contexts. Ueno also contends that her class activities align with the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language (i.e. Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational Communications) created by the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in 1996. Emphasizing anime's multimodal elements, she successfully maintains that the use of anime to foster students' multiliteracies increases enrollments in Japanese program not only because it fulfills students' desire to learn the language through their favorite materials but also because it coincides with the way in which today's students develop their multiliteracies through various digital devices.

Discussing what materials teachers of Japanese as a second language (L2) can use to improve L2 Japanese learners' reading skills, Mitsue Tabata-Sandom's chapter hinges on an important question about how we should understand "authentic" reading experiences of foreign languages. Some teachers have hesitations about using specially written texts used in extensive reading and speed reading as well as simplified texts of original works such as novels and manga to enhance L2 learners' reading skills and motivation; they assume that such texts may fail to provide L2 learners with authentic reading experiences in the target language. However, carefully comparing some excerpts of Dazai Osamu's short novel, *Hashire Meros* (1940), and of its specially written version for L2 Japanese learners in terms of their vocabulary's frequency distribution, Tabata-Sandom argues that L2 Japanese learners can experience the language authentically through reading the latter depending on the learners' language levels. While her analysis demonstrates that many "unsimplified texts" targeting native Japanese readers are often too difficult to use as teaching materials in L2 Japanese language classrooms, Tabata-Sandom contends that "unsimplified texts" are also useful to improve their reading skills if teachers choose them according to each learner's

interests and provide them with sufficient preparation that she calls "scaffolding". She concludes that L2 Japanese teachers should use reading materials that L2 learners can read comfortably with their current vocabulary size and grammar knowledge. She further asserts that if teachers can depart from the old "no pain, no gain" mentality, Japanese language curricula, particularly, reading programs, will become more facilitative and be better sustained.

Kathryn Negrelli's provocative pilot course goes along with the current penchant to contextualize language education in practical settings. In her chapter, "*Isseki, Nichō* (One Stone, Two Birds): Combining Culture and Community Engagement through Innovative Course Design", Negrelli explains the benefit of receiving support of neighboring Japanese companies and Japan-related organizations and communities. Open to all students including those without prior formal education in the language, the course encourages them to begin learning by "cultivating intercultural competence in key Japanese sociocultural concepts vital to effective communication with Japanese speakers". Negrelli's pilot course leverages partnerships with Japan-related organizations in Georgia and events in the metropolitan Atlanta area, allowing students to apply their knowledge of Japanese concepts and vocabulary in practical contexts. Through class activities, students will deepen their international understanding and enhance their communication skills with Japanese native speakers and others involved in Japan-related organizations.

Chiaki Takagi's "When Cats Wave: Teaching Japanese Culture through Cats" introduces a course about Japanese culture that she teaches at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Observing that Japan has "feline fever" and a "cat boom", Takagi uses various social events and issues related to cats and feline characters in Japanese cultural products, films, and literary works to discuss multiple aspects of Japanese society with her students. Behind the popularity of cats, she argues, are people's desires for softness, warmth, and innocence, which cats can provide because people seek healing (*iyashi*) in cats' *kawaii*-ness, or cuteness. However, Takagi reminds us that there are also feline characters which can be used to understand and analyze the dark sides of Japanese society such as gender inequality (for example, she sees the voiceless victim even in *kawaii* Hello Kitty which does not have a mouth). Trying to figure out the source of Japanese "feline fever" with her students, she uses her Japanese culture course to build a learning community and to encourage her students to deepen their interests in Japanese culture and language through the popular and familiar, and yet complex, representations of cats in Japan.

The last two chapters of this book use Japanese cultural and artistic activities, *chanoyu*, or tea ceremony, and calligraphy. Teaching *chanoyu* in her culture course at Colgate University, a liberal arts institution in the State of New York, Yukari Hirata asks us in her chapter if students will develop or maintain their interests in learning the language once they learn the cultural elements through experiencing them because intercultural competencies and linguistic ones are not separate. Her chapter makes a provocative argument that, for students to enhance their intercultural competencies, physical hands-on practice of cultural elements and the emotional responses to these cultural elements are significant and useful. The premise of her argument is the theoretical framework of "embodied learning": People will learn most effectively when they fully engage with physical activities using the five senses. Based on her own experiences of studying *chanoyu* in Kyoto, her lectures also introduce the support and benefits that she received from her instructors and peer practitioners. Hirata encourages her students to explore and experience harmony and respect that Japanese society greatly values in relation to their *chanoyu* performances. Her students can learn various Japanese cultural aspects through *chanoyu*, which includes the skills and knowledge of other specialized Japanese cultural fields. Hirata's empirical study using the *chanoyu* course indicates that the embodied learning methods enhance students' intercultural competencies and potentially encourage them to study the language by having them realize that linguistic competencies and intercultural competencies are intertwined.

My chapter, which works as a conclusion of this book, regards Japanese language learning in a wider frame. Using Japanese calligraphy to encourage my students to start and continue learning Japanese, I consider the classroom as a space in which students recognize the importance of harmonious relationships with others from different cultural backgrounds. First, I emphasize that practicing calligraphy is closely linked with building and living in Japanese society by using the pictographic trait of kanji and some Japanese films about calligraphy. While Japanese films about calligraphy often emphasize that calligraphy can be used to build harmony among students and among society, they describe calligraphy as a cultural practice that has the power to transcend different cultures by experiencing the language as a form of art. In a Japanese calligraphy course, students experience writing Japanese to communicate their emotions to others as well as to communicate what the words that they practice mean. My calligraphy course uses a few classes to critique classmates' calligraphy works. Not only can they improve their critical thinking by writing how they evaluate each other's work, but they can also enhance their creativity by

trying to figure out appropriate writing styles to deliver what they want to express to others. I contend that students can develop their interests in learning Japanese and Japanese culture by becoming responsible citizens of a globalized society through experiencing Japanese calligraphy which is distinctly different from their own languages and cultures.

Importance of Institutional Efforts

Some of our chapters introduce the college courses which are open to students who have no previous experience learning the Japanese language while others deal with what kinds of cultural materials we should use and how we should use them in Japanese language courses. One can say that the former only deals with the potential of the courses to invite students who are interested in Japanese culture to learn the language. While this may be true, this also shows how challenging it is to increase enrollment in the language program by using individual language teachers' efforts. Thus, I would like to repeat that entire educational institutions need to make various efforts including administrative ones to enhance the visibility of language programs.

For example, when a colleague of mine came to my calligraphy session to observe my teaching, she suggested that I cross-list my Japanese calligraphy course with the college's wellness program so that students can take it to fulfill their general requirements. Cross-listing courses can be one of the ways in which to promote Japanese and Japanese culture on campus.

I have only taught my Japanese calligraphy course once in Fall 2024 at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Even though it was not a language course but a culture course, my college listed in my students' evaluations the question: "Do you want to continue studying this language at Trinity College?", to which three students out of fourteen answered that they would. Among the fourteen students who filled out the students' evaluations, four students were seniors, and another four students were already enrolled in Chinese language courses. This means that three students out of the six students who would still be in college in the following year (2025-26) planned to take Japanese language courses. My chapter describes my Japanese calligraphy course as an opportunity and space in which my students think about how to link what they learn in the classroom to society and how to be a responsible citizen of the world by developing their skills of communication not just through Japanese. However, my Japanese calligraphy course looks promising to promote Japanese and Japanese culture among students if the three students indeed enroll in Elementary Japanese at my college.

It is difficult, but important, to think about how we can encourage our students to develop their interests in the Japanese language by using and introducing various aspects of Japanese culture. Learners' interests in Japanese traditional and popular culture may be good enough for them to start learning the language. The popularity of the Japanese language has been relatively sustained, compared to the declining popularities of other foreign languages such as Chinese and German, but it is still difficult to maintain healthy enrollments in higher-level Japanese courses. Students will continue studying Japanese if they become interested in the language itself. Underscoring the importance of making close relationships between language and culture, this book also responds to the contradictory phenomenon that many college students are not interested in learning Japanese even though they are interested in various Japanese cultural products and aspects.

One of the concerns I have while teaching in the U.S. is the lack of substantial communication between scholars who teach Japanese literature, Japanese film and anime, Japanese art, Japanese history, etc. in English and scholars who teach the Japanese language. My project started by asking myself how we could facilitate more communication between them and between their courses. I wish that more scholars who teach Japanese literature in English had joined this book project, but this book's chapters serve as guidelines for teachers who think about what and how Japanese cultural aspects and products can be used to encourage college students to study Japanese.

While we acknowledge the importance and necessity of teachers and scholars' constant efforts to attract students to Japanese studies, we are also aware that there are many problems that should be dealt with outside of the classroom: What should we do to increase the financial support from each institution for human sciences? How can we increase the number of international students who are interested in learning non-alphabet languages in English-centered and monolingual countries? How can we encourage elementary, middle, and high schools to increase the selection of languages that their students can learn before they come to college? How can we foster a sense of intellectual responsibility that cannot be satisfied by using AI to translate from one language into another? I would like to emphasize once again that we keep making interdisciplinary, interinstitutional, and intercultural efforts to tackle these problems.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the contributors to this project for sharing their thoroughly planned and devised methods and approaches to teaching Japanese and Japanese culture. Through multiple communications, I have learned a lot about how to make Japanese language education

attractive. I am grateful that I received from each of them many constructive suggestions and comments on each chapter's description that I included in this introduction. I especially want to express my gratitude to one of our contributors, Vance Schaefer, who kindly offered to proofread some of the chapters in this book including my introduction and my chapter.

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EXTENSIVE READING IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION: ENHANCING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

YUKI YOSHIMURA

This chapter explores effective strategies for implementing Extensive Reading (ER) in Japanese language education, with a focus on various class styles, formats, and the teacher's role in fostering learner autonomy. Unlike conventional foreign language education, which relies on identical textbooks and accuracy-based assessments, ER promotes individualized learning trajectories through learner-centered management of materials and processes. By utilizing diverse reading materials and moving away from standardized evaluations, ER offers a more personalized and flexible approach. Through this method, learners develop the ability to take ownership of their learning, i.e., learner autonomy, by selecting materials that best support their progress and personal goals, ultimately fostering lifelong learning success.

What is Extensive Reading?

Extensive Reading (ER) offers students the opportunity to acquire a foreign language by reading books for pleasure, without the constraints of using fixed textbooks or uniform lesson plans that dictate a standardized learning pace. Instead, learners have the autonomy to select reading materials that align with their individual interests and language proficiency levels (Awano, Kawamoto, & Matsuda, 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998). While Intensive Reading (IR) practices are often used in traditional reading comprehension tasks, a key distinction between ER and IR lies in the approach to unfamiliar vocabulary. In IR, students are expected to comprehend every word and grammatical structure, often using a dictionary to

ensure detailed understanding necessary to answer comprehension questions accurately. Conversely, ER encourages learners to infer the meaning of unknown words and grammatical structures, promoting uninterrupted reading without relying on a dictionary. This method emphasizes incidental vocabulary acquisition, allowing students to focus on understanding the broader context rather than memorizing specific vocabulary items (Day & Bamford, 1998; Gass, 1999; Krashen, 1989, 2009; Webb, 2008). While intentional vocabulary learning has traditionally been viewed as central to second language acquisition, its retention over time is not always guaranteed (Webb, 2019). Incidental learning, though slower to manifest, supplements intentional learning by facilitating language acquisition through meaning-focused, pleasurable reading activities.

To successfully integrate ER into foreign language learning, Day and Bamford (1998, 2002) propose ten guiding principles.

1. *Students read as much as possible,* perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom.
2. *A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available* so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
3. *Students select what they want to read* and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them.
4. *The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.* These purposes are determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the student.
5. *Reading is its own reward.* There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading.
6. *Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students* in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words makes fluent reading difficult.
7. *Reading is individual and silent,* at the student's own pace, and, outside class, done when and where student chooses.
8. *Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower* as students read books and other material they find easily understandable.
9. *Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain* the methodology, *keep track* of what each student reads, and *guide* students in getting the most out of the program.
10. *The teacher is a role model of a reader for students* – an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.

These principles underscore the significant differences between IR and ER. In IR activities, learners are typically expected to acquire a substantial amount of vocabulary within a short period, often using brief, focused passages. The emphasis is on detailed and precise comprehension of every sentence, along with vocabulary memorization, with assessments that frequently contribute to their grades. In contrast, ER activities encourage learners to read for pleasure and overall comprehension rather than for the explicit purpose of memorizing vocabulary. A distinctive feature of ER is that the instructor does not provide direct lectures on grammar and vocabulary, nor do students participate in choral reading. Instead, students read silently at their own pace, choosing books that align with their individual interests and proficiency levels. The focus is on the enjoyment of reading, free from the pressure of being tested on specific vocabulary or grammar for grading purposes (Awano, Kawamoto, & Matsuda, 2012).

The pedagogical benefits of Extensive Reading (ER) can be categorized into three major areas. First, ER helps learners maintain motivation without the stress typically associated with traditional language learning. Learners have the autonomy to select books based on their interests and are not compelled to complete a book if it does not meet their expectations; they can simply choose another that better aligns with their preferences. This flexibility allows learners to engage with materials that truly interest them, fostering a more enjoyable and motivating learning experience.

Second, ER exposes learners to authentic vocabulary and expressions that are often absent from conventional foreign language textbooks. These include terms related to onomatopoeia, colors, animals, cooking, informal speech, slang, and even potty language. Picture books for toddlers often contain expressions that adult beginner and intermediate learners may not encounter in traditional textbooks designed for college students.

Third, ER provides learners with a deep understanding of Japanese culture through exposure to authentic texts. As one of the guiding principles of ER suggests, a wide variety of materials on diverse topics should be made available (Day & Bamford, 1998, 2002). These materials extend beyond graded readers that are specifically written for ER to include chapter books, novels, children's picture books, cookbooks, pictorial encyclopedias, manga, and bilingual books. The genres represented are diverse, encompassing daily life, romance, mystery, fantasy, folk tales, horror, school-themed stories, and historical narratives, among others. The wide variety of genres offers diverse perspectives on Japanese culture across different eras and age groups.

Another long-term educational benefit of ER is that it fosters the development of skills essential for lifelong learning, specifically the acquisi-

tion of learner autonomy (Aoki, 2011; Hanabusa, 2015; Yoshimura, & Kobayashi, 2018a). Learner autonomy in foreign language learning refers to the ability of learners to make informed decisions about their own learning (Aoki, 2001, 2011). Through ER activities, learners are expected to take responsibility for selecting books and learning materials, managing their learning schedules, and organizing their time for independent reading outside the classroom. While learners receive guidance from instructors on various aspects of their ER activities (See 4. Teacher's Role as a Facilitator and Mentor in Extensive Reading, for more details in this chapter.), they are ultimately responsible for their own learning and must consider the potential outcomes of their efforts.

Language learning is a lifelong journey, and the acquisition of learner autonomy is a gradual process. Initially, learners may struggle to identify the most effective materials for their learning. However, as they continue selecting books, develop an understanding of their preferences, grow comfortable reading without a dictionary, and experience a sense of progress, they gradually become proficient at managing their own learning. ER activities support this process by fostering independence and gradually developing learner autonomy.

Implementation and Methods of Extensive Reading

The most common approach to implementing ER involves creating a reading-friendly environment with a diverse selection of books across various genres and language proficiency levels. Students select their own books and engage in silent reading during class. Typical homework assignments often include maintaining a book journal, where students record the books they have read and are currently reading, both inside and outside the classroom (Hanabusa, 2015; Yoshimura & Domier, 2017; Yoshimura & Kobayashi, 2018a). In-class activities may encompass a variety of practices, such as students sharing their favorite books with classmates, listening to the instructor read aloud short stories, hearing the instructor introduce recommended books, and receiving personalized advice (Yoshimura & Kobayashi, 2018a).

In recent years, book journal assignments have transitioned from hard copy to digital formats (Hanabusa, 2015; Yoshimura & Kobayashi, 2018a). Digital journals provide students with the flexibility to update their entries from anywhere, while offering instructors an efficient way to monitor submission status and track students' reading progress. These journals often include sections for learners to record the books they have been reading, those they disliked and chose not to finish, the number of pages read

outside of class, favorite or memorable expressions, insights gained, and whether they would recommend the books to others.

In addition to the in-class activities and book journal assignments mentioned earlier, the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst), the author's institution, first introduced an assignment in the fall semester of 2017, in which students have since been creating and revisiting their own ER plans three times per semester. Through this assignment, students set personal learning goals to achieve by the end of the semester, detailing how much they plan to read, what they aim to learn, and the steps needed to reach their goals. Midway through the semester, students review their accomplishments so far and revise their initial plans accordingly. At the semester's end, they evaluate their overall progress. According to a semester-end survey, most students reported that creating and revising their ER plans helped them maintain motivation to read and fostered the development of learner autonomy.

As mentioned earlier, one of the in-class activities involves students sharing their favorite books with others. This can be done through a formal presentation format called 'Bibliobattle' (Awano, Kawakami, & Matsuda, 2012) or through an informal book chat within a small group. Bibliobattle is a structured event where participants present and recommend a book, followed by the group collectively selecting a 'book champion.' In contrast, the informal book chat does not involve choosing a book champion. The goal of these activities is to encourage learners to reflect on their favorite books while inspiring others—particularly those who tend to select books within a narrow range of genres—to explore new options.

Instructors' book recommendations also play a crucial role, particularly for beginner ER learners, by helping them explore the range of available book options. Additionally, instructor-led read-aloud sessions help students connect written content with spoken language, often enabling them to recognize that books they initially perceived as too difficult are, in fact, accessible. At the author's institution, UMass Amherst, brief read-aloud sessions lasting 5 to 10 minutes are occasionally held at the beginning of ER classes, with either the instructor or an invited guest reading a selected book aloud. Semester-end class surveys indicate that many students enjoy the informal discussions that follow these sessions, particularly those focusing on the book's content, such as Japanese ghost stories. These read-aloud activities also serve as an excellent opportunity to introduce elements of Japanese culture through engaging but often overlooked folk tales that are rarely covered in traditional language classes. Furthermore, they offer a valuable opportunity to guide learners toward more culturally specific reading materials.

Reading Materials for Extensive Reading

Reading materials can be divided into two categories: authentic books and Graded Readers (GR). Authentic books encompass virtually everything written for native speakers of Japanese, while GR are specifically designed for learners of Japanese to facilitate ER. GR are tailored to learners at different language proficiency levels (NPO Tagengo Tadoku, 2025). Most GR books are classified into levels ranging from zero to five and are available in both print (p-books) and digital (e-books) formats. Various GR series from different publishers are available (NPO Tagengo Tadoku, 2025), some of which include audiobook narration to further support learners' reading. Additionally, some GR series are written by teachers and learners of Japanese and are published by Japanese language schools. The levels assigned to GR books, which indicate language difficulty, allow learners who are new to ER to start at level zero and identify which level best suits their reading ability. Since excelling in traditional first-year or second-year Japanese classes does not necessarily equate to proficiency in reading non-textbook materials, starting with GR and gradually advancing to higher levels is an effective strategy for finding a comfortable reading level in the early stages.

Authentic books include, but are not limited to, picture books, novels, poetry collections, cookbooks, encyclopedias, and manga. Even national language textbooks used in Japanese elementary schools can serve as suitable reading materials for ER. Some picture books contain only a few words or a single sentence per page, accompanied by illustrations, which makes them an ideal starting point for ER beginners. Exposure to a small amount of linguistic information per page helps learners develop the ability to infer the meaning of unknown words without relying on a dictionary, much like how children naturally acquire language (Krashen, 2009).

It is well known that illustrations and visual information enhance reading comprehension beyond a learner's reading ability (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). Manga and comics, which are largely image-driven, are among the very popular genres read by students. Yoshimura and Domier (2017) report that manga and comics are the second most frequently chosen materials by students, following GR. The study also highlights differences in book preferences across learner levels, showing that GR is most commonly read by beginner learners, while manga is preferred by advanced learners. Furthermore, the study indicates that as learners' reading levels increase, they tend to select manga more frequently, along with authentic books written for native Japanese speakers. This progression from simpler texts to more advanced authentic materials illustrates the ideal and

natural trajectory that learners are expected to follow for successful ER (Awano, Kawamoto, & Matsuda, 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998).

The findings also suggest that manga is highly enjoyable for students, appealing to their interests, especially given the global popularity of Japanese anime. Yoshimura and Domier (2017) further note that many popular Japanese manga have TV or movie anime adaptations. Survey results confirmed that one of the main reasons students choose manga in ER classes is their familiarity with the content from anime adaptations. This phenomenon is significant, as ER principles emphasize reading for pleasure.

Apart from GR and authentic books, one highly recommended multimodal resource is *Ohanashi no kuni*, a series of short video clips accompanied by e-books, published by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). These stories are primarily adaptations of Japanese folk tales, Grimms' fairy tales, and other folk tales from around the world. The videos feature a single actor portraying multiple characters while narrating the story. Viewers can choose to display or hide the text, which appears in paragraphs alongside the video (Figure 1). Additionally, there is an option to view sentence-by-sentence subtitles at the bottom of the screen or to switch to a vertically written text format for a more traditional reading experience (Figure 2). All texts include *furigana* to assist with kanji reading, making these materials accessible to learners of all levels, including beginners.

Fig. 1-1 Video and text: "Momotaro" from *Ohanashi no kuni*

These resources are particularly effective for making connections between text and sound, a crucial aspect of language learning (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Even when learners are already familiar with the content, such as Grimms' fairy tales, it is valuable to observe how the story is conveyed in Japanese, both in its written and spoken forms.

Fig. 1-2 Vertically written text: "Momotaro" from *Ohanashi no kuni*

To maximize the usefulness and effectiveness of multimodal reading resources, instructors must provide tailored recommendations that align with the purpose of ER, individual student needs, and the class format—whether face-to-face or remote (See 5. Class Styles and Formats, for more details). Many students who are new to ER are unaware of resources like *Ohanashi no kuni*, as these are primarily designed for native Japanese-speaking children. Students also require specific guidance on finding Japanese e-books, including which websites to visit, which search queries to use, and how to assess the language difficulty without skimming the first few pages. Searching for e-books in Japanese involves multiple steps and skills to identify suitable materials. While students can successfully locate a book when they have a specific topic or a title in mind, the browsing process to find e-books is significantly more challenging compared to browsing print (p-books) that are physically available and conveniently stored together in a dedicated space for ER collections.

Despite the usefulness of multimodal resources, Yoshimura and Kobayashi (2018b) report that students prefer p-books over e-books when both are available. Their study, conducted in a face-to-face library setting, revealed that students surrounded by physical books tended to favor the quicker access of p-books over the process of searching for e-books through digital queries. Additionally, students appreciated the texture, weight, and physical act of turning pages—a luxurious yet intriguing phenomenon in an increasingly digital world dominated by electronic devices. For many, reading p-books provided a rich and tactile experience in the digital age.

Teacher's Role as a Facilitator and Mentor
in Extensive Reading

One of the most common questions about implementing Extensive Reading (ER) in Japanese language education concerns the instructor's role. When students read silently and individually in an ER class, what role does the instructor play? If they are not expected to lecture on grammar or vocabulary, lead choral reading, or ask comprehension questions, what can they do? The short answer is that the instructor takes on the role of facilitator and mentor, supporting and enhancing students' learning in ER. Aoki (2001) identifies three core elements essential for fostering learner autonomy: providing appropriate resources, maintaining learning records, and offering advising. Among these, the final element, "advising," is critical to students' success in ER and represents a key role of the ER facilitator.

Advising in ER involves helping learners select appropriate reading materials, checking their individual progress, and sharing the joy of reading (Hanabusa, 2015, 2016; Umeda 2005). The first challenge that most learners face in ER is selecting books on their own. Because of their limited exposure to authentic Japanese books, many learners struggle to choose books that match their language level and interests (Yoshimura & Kobayashi, 2018b). Many have never had the opportunity to select learning materials on their own. Instead, they are often accustomed to reading and studying from provided materials, relying on glossaries or dictionaries to understand and memorize content.

In ER, however, students are encouraged to do the opposite—read without relying on a dictionary and focus on understanding the content rather than memorizing it for an accuracy test. The primary goal of ER is to learn a language by reading for pleasure and comprehension, rather than focusing on achieving a good grade—an approach that may be new for many students. To achieve this goal, instead of using accuracy-based assessments, students should be evaluated holistically through portfolio assessments. These assessments include tracking their reading progress, reflecting on their own learning journey, sharing favorite books, and participating in book-creation projects. Such activities require close attention and guidance from the facilitator (see 2: Implementation and Method of Extensive Reading, and 6. Outcomes and Assessment, for more details in this chapter).

Additionally, learners in ER classes often have varying levels of reading proficiency and diverse interests, particularly when engaging with authentic materials (Yoshimura, 2018). These differences affect students' ER reading skills and motivation. Therefore, they require step-by-step guidance from the facilitator to find and select books that match their abilities and interests.

This approach enables them to start reading at an easy and comfortable level while maintaining enough interest to keep their engagement.

After the initial phase, students are encouraged to advance to increasingly challenging levels and gradually tackle more difficult books (Awano, Kawamoto, & Matsuda, 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998). The pace of advancement varies among learners, as each student becomes comfortable with more challenging texts at their own rate. Some students may attempt to tackle advanced books before they are ready, which can result in frequent dictionary use or a slower reading pace due to encountering a high volume of unfamiliar words and complex grammar structures. In this context, the facilitator's role is crucial—providing individualized attention and ongoing advice to help learners maintain their motivation and continue reading without becoming over-reliant on a dictionary.

For facilitators to provide effective advice on book selection and reading progress, reviewing students' book journals is invaluable. These journals offer a concise overview of students' reading habits and pace, including the levels and genres they have explored (Hanabusa, 2016; Yoshimura & Domier, 2017). This enables facilitators to easily assess progress and recommend books that are both enjoyable and slightly more challenging, helping students improve their reading skills without feeling overwhelmed by a significant increase in difficulty. Recommending books that align with learners' interests is equally crucial for maintaining motivation, ensuring students feel neither obligated nor forced to read. To provide personalized advice, facilitators must have a strong familiarity with the available genres and book types, enabling them to offer timely and relevant suggestions.

Additionally, it is uncommon for institutions in the U.S. to have a wide selection of non-academic Japanese books across various genres and language levels (Yoshimura & Kobayashi, 2018a). As a result, recommending e-books during advising sessions can help compensate for the limited availability of p-books (See 3. Reading Materials for Extensive Reading, for more details in this chapter). Regardless of whether students choose e-books or p-books, the responsibility for book procurement and securing funding for such purchases may fall to facilitators and instructors, particularly if the institution hosting the ER class lacks non-academic Japanese books, including GR. Providing a wide variety of reading materials across diverse topics is one of the core principles of ER (Day & Bamford, 1998, 2002). This principle becomes especially important when instructors work with large groups of students who have diverse interests and varying levels of reading proficiency.

In sum, the role of instructors as ER facilitators encompasses, but is not limited to, the following: 1) providing effective, individualized guid-