

Japanese language education in Sri Lanka: a critical analysis of the past, present and future

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Abstract

After completing more than fifty years of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Japan, Japan plays a crucial role in Sri Lankan economy, culture and education. Economic and cultural relations including trade and tourism have increased the interest among Sri Lankans in Japan, its people and its language. In respect of Sri Lanka, Japanese is the language with the highest demand in the field of foreign language education with the highest number of students offering it for their secondary and higher education. Traditional book-based and teacher centred teaching methods have been replaced with more modernised methods of teaching. Even though the interest in Japanese Language Education in Sri Lanka has grown rapidly since its introduction to Sri Lanka decades ago, no considerable research that probes into its development has been carried out. Hence, this paper places its importance on the history, the present and the future perspectives of Japanese language education in Sri Lanka with an analysis of data collected from the secondary schools and tertiary level education institutions including universities, language schools, and technical colleges. In summary, this paper probes into the history of Japanese language education, its progress, analyses the quality of teaching and learning and the benefits that have been imparted. Moreover, it throws some light on the standards achieved, the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching methodology, the facilities available and on the future perspectives of Japanese language education in Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Relations between Japan and Sri Lanka have a long history. Since the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the 7th Century B.C. in the Nara Period, relations between the two countries existed in the form of religious exchanges. Being Asian and Buddhist at the same time drew analogies between the two countries. Cultural similarities further motivated the relations to grow rapidly. Trade and tourism heightened the friendly relations and diplomatic relations were established. Since then, Japan and the Japanese language have become popular among Sri Lankans and especially in the field of foreign language education it has drawn the attention of many academics.

History of Japanese language education in Sri Lanka

Japanese language education in Sri Lanka first commenced in 1967 with a private tuition class in Colombo which was carried on from 1975 as an affiliated Japanese language course of the Embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka. In 1994 this was handed over to the Japanese Language Education Association of Sri Lanka: a private institution which has become the centre of Japanese language education in the private sector since its introduction. This study programme is generally known as the "Japanese Language Course at Sasakawa Centre".

In 1978, Japanese language was introduced to the University of Kelaniya, first as a "Certificate Course" (apart from the main Degree Programme) and to the Bachelor's Degree Programme consequently in 1979. In the Secondary level, Japanese language was first introduced as an elective subject at the A/L Examination at Devi Balika Vidyalaya in Colombo followed by other schools in Colombo and the suburbs at Kandy, Galle and others. As the number of students offering Japanese language at the A/L Examination with the intention of entering into local and Japanese Universities increased rapidly, its popularity was unquestioned. With these developments, it was introduced to the O/L Examination as an optional subject in the year 2001.

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (Nihongo Noryoku Shiken): a worldwide examination to measure the language proficiency was introduced to Sri Lanka, with Colombo as the test site in 1985. Primarily this examination was considered as one of the pre-requisites to enter Japanese Universities. This has four levels: 4kyu (Level 4) and 3kyu (Level 3) for Beginners and 2kyu (Level 2) and 1kyu (Level 1) for Intermediate and Advanced levels respectively. Measures are being taken to introduce the latest examination which is meant for international students entering Japanese universities, (Nihongo Ryugaku Shiken) with its trial examination held in November 2005.

Presently Japanese language is being taught both in schools in urban areas as well as in a few number of schools in rural areas. At the tertiary level, Japanese is taught in the University of Kelaniya and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and at the Post Graduate level in the University of Colombo. A beginners' level Japanese course is being conducted in the Technical College, Galle. Apart from these Government institutions there are many private institutions and language schools which offer Japanese language starting with large scale institutions to small scale institutions.

A vast majority of the institutes, especially institutes in the private sector, commenced with spoken Japanese classes spreading into GCE Advanced Level, GCE Ordinary Level and preparatory classes for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Courses for professional purposes were overwhelmingly few. When studying the findings of the research carried out by the Japanese Embassy in Sri Lanka in 1998, it can be seen that most institutions have one Sri Lankan teacher and among them there are instances where a Japanese native is also present. At the commencement, the range of class hours per week was 1-10 hours whereas the large scale institutions carried out classes for more than 15 hours per week.

Aims of studying Japanese language

Aims of the Japanese language study cover a wide area with many interests. According to the research carried out in various institutions in Sri Lanka by the

Japan Foundation in 2003, the following can be given as the aims of studying Japanese language.

1. To prepare for qualifying examinations including the university entrance.
2. Interest in the language itself.
3. To acquire knowledge about Japanese culture.
4. As a future job prospective.
5. To study in Japan.
6. To be able to communicate in Japanese.
7. To acquire knowledge about Japanese politics, economy and society.

According to these, it can be seen that the main aims of studying Japanese language support educational and professional purposes as well as individual interests.

Levels of study

There are 3 main levels.

1. Beginner's level
2. Intermediate level
3. Advanced level

Courses offered for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level examination and G.C.E. Advanced Level examination cater to the beginner's level covering basic expressions, enabling students to have a very basic knowledge about grammar, kanji characters and culture. In the University of Kelaniya, beginner's and intermediate level study programmes are being carried out. Students in the General Degree Course, who have already acquired basic knowledge in the language and culture at the GCE Advanced Level Examination, continue their studies at the intermediate level. Certificate and Auxiliary course units offer beginner's level education.

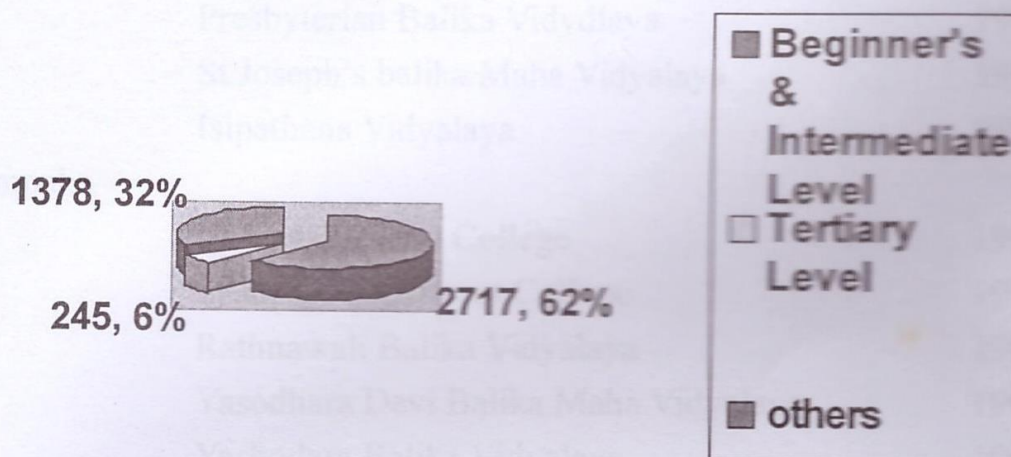
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka offers beginner's and intermediate level courses. Students offering Japanese as their major, study in the intermediate level and those who offer it as the minor, study in the beginner's level. Sri Lanka

Japanese Language Education Association (generally known as the Sasakawa Centre) conducts classes in the beginner's, intermediate and advanced levels with 8 terms altogether with the duration of 4 years. They target at the 2nd level of Japanese Language Proficiency Test at the completion of the course.

Present situation of Japanese language education in Sri Lanka

Generally the number of students has increased in almost every institution compared with the number of students at their commencement. (Refer graphs). Comparing with the number of students in the intermediate level in 1998, an increase of 14% can be witnessed in 2003. In the tertiary level however a decrease of 1% is evident. The number of students studying in other institutions also shows a decrease of 13%.

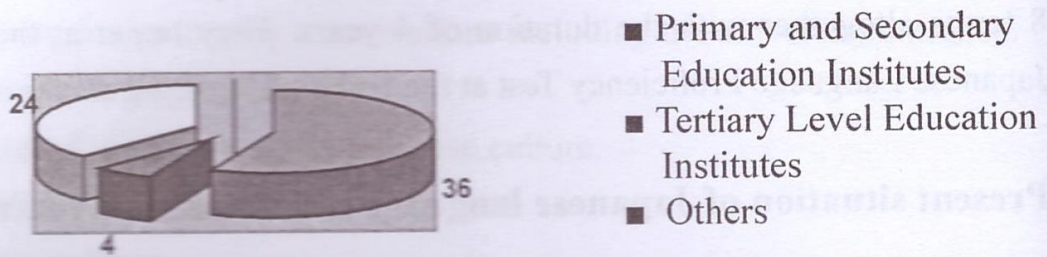
Number of Students 1998



The Japan Foundation Survey 1998, 2003

According to the research carried out by the Japan Foundation in 2003, there were only 37 institutions that are involved in Japanese language education in Sri Lanka which shows a great decrease compared with that of the number in year 1998. (Refer graphs)

Number of Educational Institutes 1998



The Japan Foundation Survey 1998, 2003

However this number can vary since there is the possibility of some institutions not being registered officially. (Refer Tables A, B and C for the list of Japanese Language Institutions in Sri Lanka)

Table A**List of senior secondary schools conducting Japanese language classes in Sri Lanka (1998)**

District	Name of the Secondary School	Year of Commencement
Colombo		
1	Devi Balika Vidyalaya	1983
2	Vishaka Vidyalaya	1988
3	St.Paul's Girl's School	1991
4	Anula Vidyalaya	1991
5	Ananda Balika Vidyalaya	1993
6	Gothami Balika Vidyalaya	1994
7	D.S Senanayake College	1994
8	Sirimawo bandaranaike Vidyalay	1995
9	Vihara Mahadivi Balika Vidyalaya	1995
10	Ananda College	1996
11	Royal College	1996
12	Presbyterian Balika Vidydlaya	1997
13	St.Joseph's balika Maha Vidyalaya	1997
14	Isipathana Vidyalaya	1997
Gampaha		
15	Nalanda Central College	1993
16	St.Joseph's Convent College	1994
17	Rathnawali Balika Vidyalaya	1995
18	Yasodhara Devi Balika Maha Vidyalaya	1995
19	Yashodara Balika Vidyalaya	1997
20	D.S. Senanayake Maha Vidyalaya	1997
21	Seeduwa Davi Samara Maha Vidyalaya	1998
Kandy		
22	Swamamali Balika Maha Vidydlaya	1993
23	Kingswood College	1995
Polonnaruwa		
24	Mayurapada Junior School	1996

The Japan Foundation Survey 1998, 2003

Table B**List of Private Japanese Courses in Sri Lanka (1998)**

District	Name of the Institute	Year of Commencement
Colombo		
1	The Japanese Language Education Association	1974
2	Serandib International School	1992
3	Ni-Cey International (Pvt) Ltd.	1993
4	Mitsushi Educational Center	1994
5	Sri Dharmakeerthy Maha Piriwena	1995
6	Emico Institute	1997
Gampaha		
7	Modern Japanese Institute	1992
8	Sarath Illeperuma Memorial Institute	1992
9	Minobushan Kuonji Lanka Betsuin	1994
10	Negombo South International School	1996
11	Science College of Kelaniya	1997
12	"Shin Nihongo" Japanese Language Institute	1997
13	Youth Educational Centre	1997
14	Weerasinghe Piriwena	1998
Kegalle		
15	Sanga Bodhi Vidyalaya	1996
16	International Social Welfare Organization	1997
Kurunegala		
17	Japanese Language School Kurunegala	1996
18	Wayamba Janakala Kendraya	1997
Kandy		
19	Kandy Japanese Institute	1997
20	Sakura Japanese School	1997
21	Al-Imran International School	1998
Ratnapura		
22	Princeton International School	1993
Badulla		
23	Saito Japanese Language School	1996

Table: C**Japanese Language Education Institutions in Sri Lanka 2003**

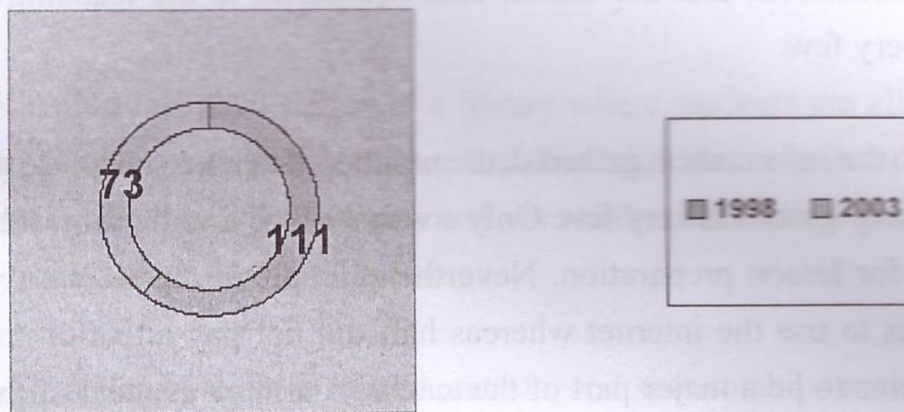
Name of Institution	Name of Japanese Language Department	Type of Education
Galle Technical College	Japanese Language Course	Higher Education
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages. Department of Languages. Japanese Language Centre	Higher Education
University of Colombo	Faculty of Graduate Studies. Post Graduate Diploma in Japanese	Higher Education
University of Kelaniya	Department of Modern Languages	Higher Education
Ananda Balika Vidyalaya	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Ananda College	Arts Section	Secondary
Central College, Piliyandala	Arts Section	Secondary
D.S.Senanayake College	Arts Section	Secondary
Devi Balika Vidyalaya	Arts Section	Secondary
Ferguson High School, Ratnapura	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Gothami Balika Vidyalaya	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Isipathana College	Japanese Language Section	Unified Primary-Secondary
Kingswood College	Arts Section	Unified Primary-Secondary
Sri Saranankara Central College, Kuliyaipitiya	[NO DATA]	Unified Primary-Secondary
Musaeus College	Arts Section	Secondary
Newstead Girl's School	Education Department Japanese. Language for Advanced Level	Secondary
Ratnavali Balika Vidyalaya	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Royal College	Arts Department. Advanced Level	Secondary
St. Joseph's Girls' School	[NO DATA]	Secondary

St.Paul's Girl's School	Language Section	Secondary
Vihara Maha Devi Balika Vidyalaya	Japanese Language Division	Secondary
Visakha Vidyalaya	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Devi Samara Maha Vidyalaya, Seeduwa	[NO DATA]	Secondary
Deepashika National Theatre	Department of Japanese Language	Language School, Community Education etc.
Emiko Institute	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
High Way Institute of International Languages	Japanese Language Section	Language School, Community Education etc.
Izumi Educational Centre	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
Japanese Language Education Association of Sri Lanka	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
Kandy Japanese Institute	Language Section	Language School, Community Education etc.
Minobusan Kuonji Lanka Betsuin Japanese School	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
Mitsushi Japanese Language Centre	Japanese Language Section	Language School, Community Education etc.
Nozomi Japanese Language Center	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
Quick Way Education Centre	[NO DATA]	Language School, Community Education etc.
Richmond Castle	Cultural and Information Affairs	Language School, Community Education etc.
Sputnik International Education Centre	Sputnik International Japanese Language Department	Language School, Community Education etc.
Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka	National Vocational Training Institute	Language School, Community Education etc.
Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management	Foreign Language Section	Language School, Community Education etc.

Source: The Japan Foundation Research 2003
(Edited by the author to suite the purpose)

With regard to the kind of appointment of the teachers, most are under temporary, contract or visiting basis. However, with the recent developments introduced with the Graduate's Recruitment Scheme in 2005 a certain number of teachers were appointed as permanent teachers in some of the National Schools. The number of teachers has also decreased despite the increase in the number of students. In 1998 there were 111 teachers whereas in 2003 there are only 73. (Refer graph)

Change in the Number of Teachers



The Japan Foundation Survey 1998, 2003

Students studying in private institutions mainly focus on GCE Advanced Level and GCE Ordinary Level Examinations of which the number of Advanced Level students are comparatively a large number. Classes for Japanese Language Proficiency Test and other professional purposes such as Spoken Japanese and Business Japanese are also available.

The number of native Japanese teachers and local teachers are almost in 1:1 ratio as there is a considerable number of Japanese natives involved in the Japanese language education field. Inquiry into the number of class hours a week revealed the majority of the institutions have allocated more than 5 hours per week and there are institutions where more than 10 hours have been allocated depending on its scale. The media of teaching vary such as Japanese, Sinhala, English and a

combination of 2 or all these languages. But the number of institutions which use a combination of all these languages is largely big.

1.1 Teaching Methodology

According to the data collected, material that are mostly used by the teachers of Japanese range from books, magazines, newspapers, audio and video tapes, flash cards, picture cards, letter cards to CDs DVDs and multimedia. However, the number of institutions that use multimedia equipment in the teaching process is drastically very few.

According to the information gathered, the number of teachers who use the internet when preparing lessons is very few. Only a very limited number of teachers utilize the internet for lesson preparation. Nevertheless, half of the teachers encourage their students to use the internet whereas half did not pay attention to it. Lesson planning seems to be a major part of the teacher's routine as most of the teachers have allocated more than 3 hours for lesson preparation per week. A considerable number of teachers allocate 5-7 hours for lesson preparation per week.

Qualifications

As for the place of study, the majority of the teachers have started their language education in a school and in a Japanese language institution. Among them about 9 persons (36%) have graduated from university offering Japanese language as one of their subjects in the Degree course. Every teacher has studied Japanese language at least for 3 years and a lot of teachers have a history of more than 5 years of language study.

All the teachers who were taken as a sample have sat the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and their proficiency level lies in level 3. Among them a very few number has passed level 2 as well. (Note: It is a pre-requisite to have passed level 3 of the above examination in order to become a member of the Japanese Language Teacher's Association of Sri Lanka). However, according to unofficial

data, a considerable number of teachers involved in the field don't possess this qualification. A very few teachers have had the privilege of visiting or studying in Japan ranging from short to long term study programmes in which short term programmes are common. Among them are 2 weeks, 2 months and 6 months study and training programmes. A vast majority has not undergone any kind of teacher training. A very few number has undergone the teacher training programme conducted by the Japan Foundation.

Facilities

2/3 of the institutions have access to a library where students are allowed to use the material freely. Availability of other facilities such as computers, audio-video tapes, internet access, CD-DVD, multimedia are in the descending order. Language Laboratory facilities are drastically few.

Institutions that have benefited with donations and sponsorships are considerably few, especially in the beginner's and intermediate level institutions. However, a small number of institutions get donations from the Japan Foundation and JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency). Tertiary level education institutions, mainly the 2 universities: namely University of Kelaniya and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka get donations of books, audio-video material almost on a yearly basis. Student and teacher exchange programmes are overwhelmingly few. Some institutions are involved in sister-school projects and cultural programmes with schools and institutions in Japan. Universities and a few high schools are privileged to have short term scholarships to Japan. With regard to the universities scholarship and exchange programmes available. Refer Table D for Scholarships / Exchange programmes and the grantee institutions.

Table D

Scholarships/Donations and Sponsorships and the Grantee Institutions

Institution	Grantee Institution/ Name of the Programme	Number of scholar ships	Period
University of Kelaniya	Government of Japan Monbukagakusho- scholarship for undergraduates.	1-3	1 year
	JASSO in collaboration with Soka University, Japan Student Exchange Programme	1-2	10 months
	Japan Foundation Shortterm undergraduate Programme	2-3	6 weeks
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	Japan Foundation Shortterm undergraduate Programme	1	6 weeks

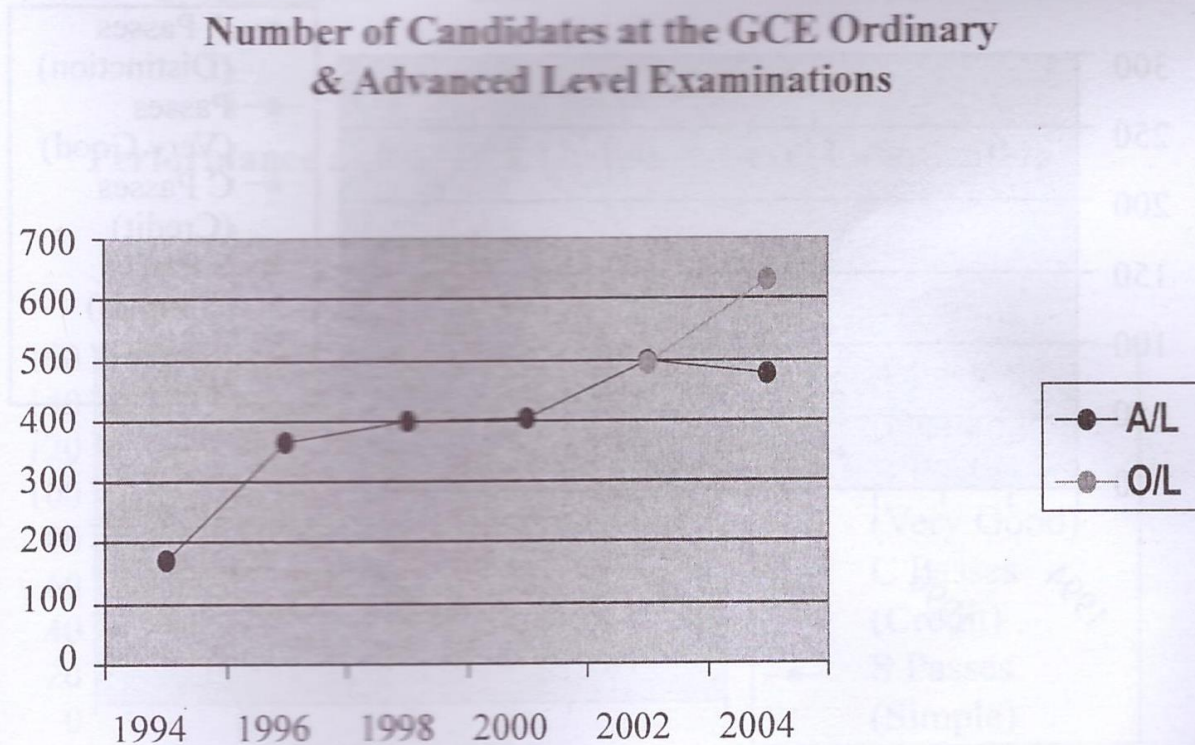
Inquiry into the availability of any scholarships at the Secondary Educational Institutes proved that the number is very few. According to the information gathered, the main grantee institutions of various kinds of donations, scholarships and sponsorships are as follows.

1. The Japan Foundation
2. The Japanese Government
3. The Japanese Embassy in Sri Lanka
4. Japan International Corporation Agency
5. Sri Lanka Japan Culture Organization
6. Other Non-Governmental Organizations

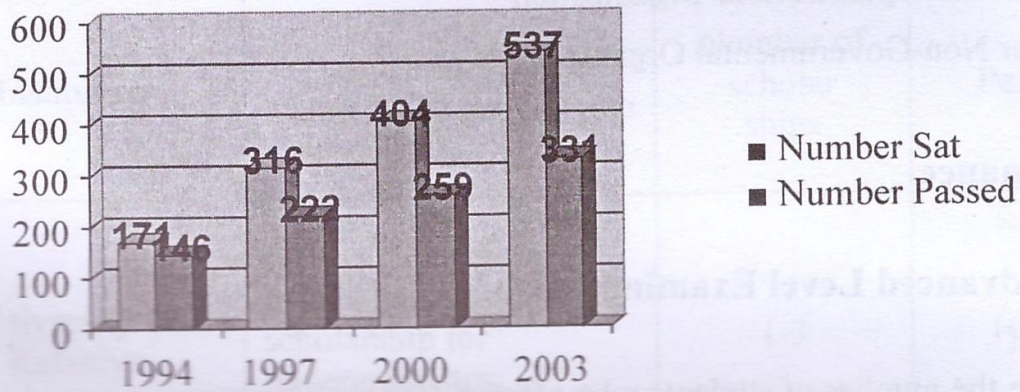
Performance

GCE Advanced Level Examination

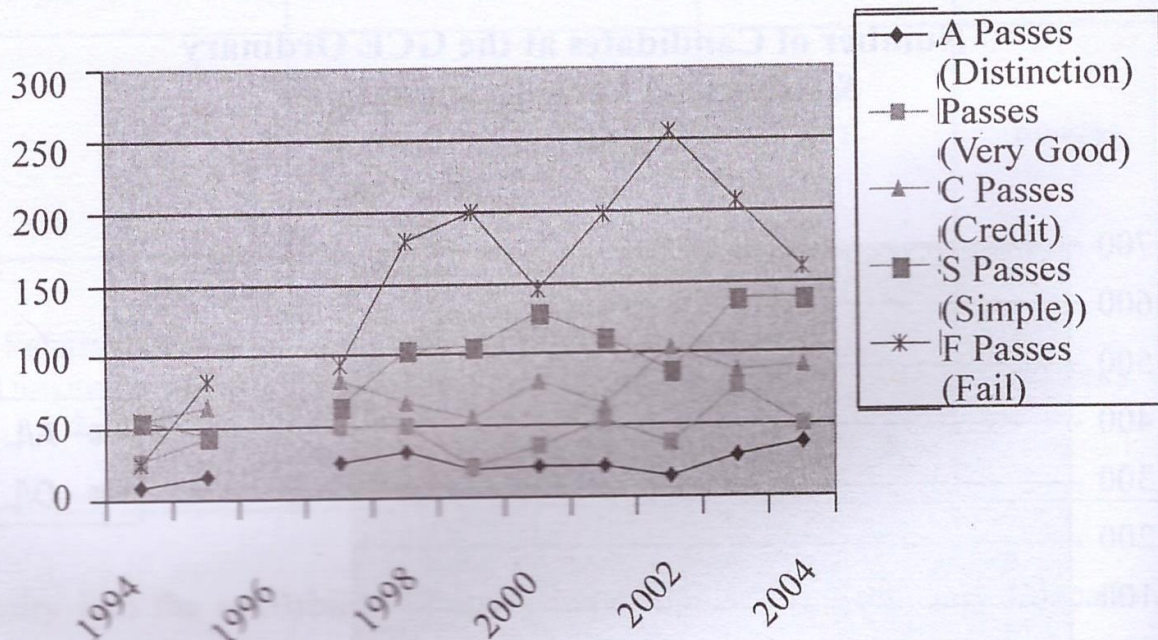
Although the number of students who offered Japanese language at examinations has increased, the number of students who got through has decreased. In 1994, 85.3% have passed whereas in 1997 the pass rate is 70.2%. In 2000 it has further decreased to 64.1% and in 2003, 61.6%. Although the decrease is not rapid, it can be seen as a considerable change. (Refer the following graphs)



Performance - GCE Advanced Level Examination



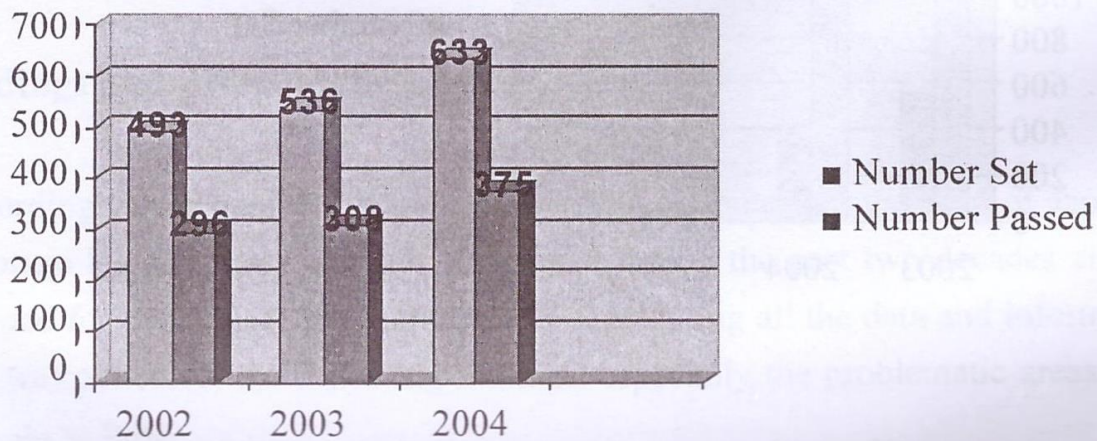
Performance at the GCE Advanced Level Examination



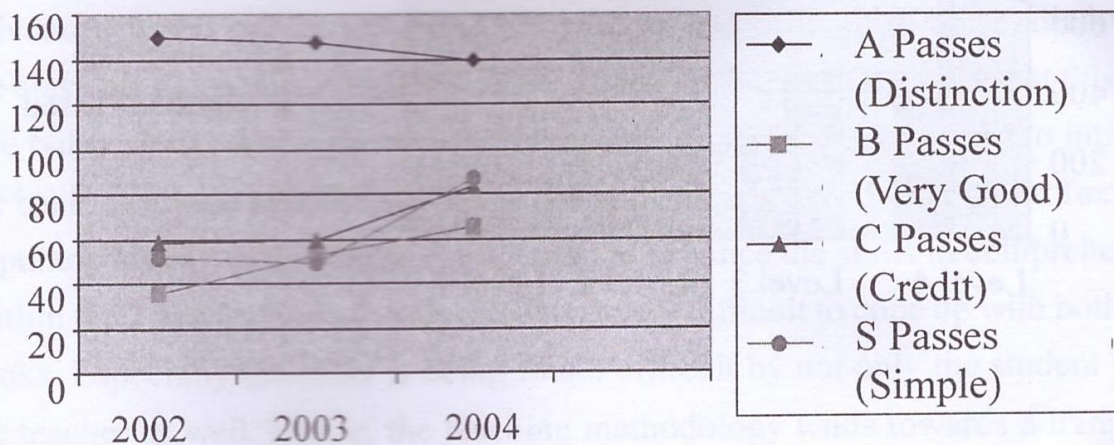
GCE Ordinary Level

The same phenomena as the above are visible in the Ordinary Level Examination as well. Although the number of students who sat the examination has increased, the pass rate has decreased. In 2002 the pass rate is 60% whereas in 2003 it is 55.9%. In 2004 a slight change is visible as the pass rate has increased up to 59.2%. (Refer graphs)

Performance - GCE Ordinary Level

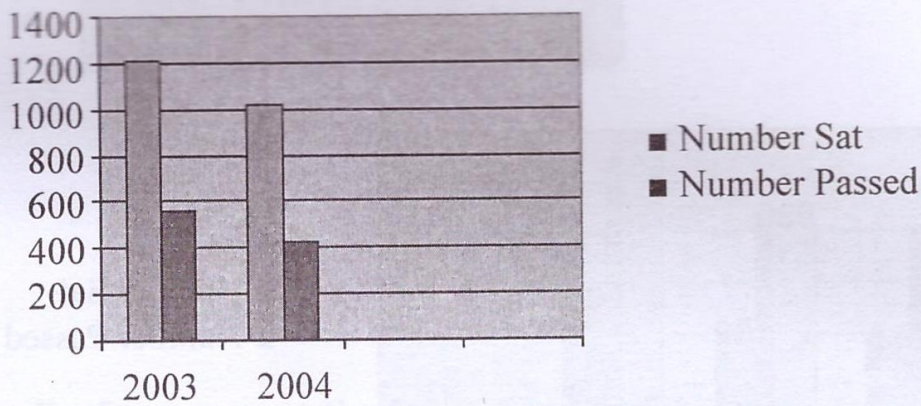


Performance at the GCE Ordinary Level Examination

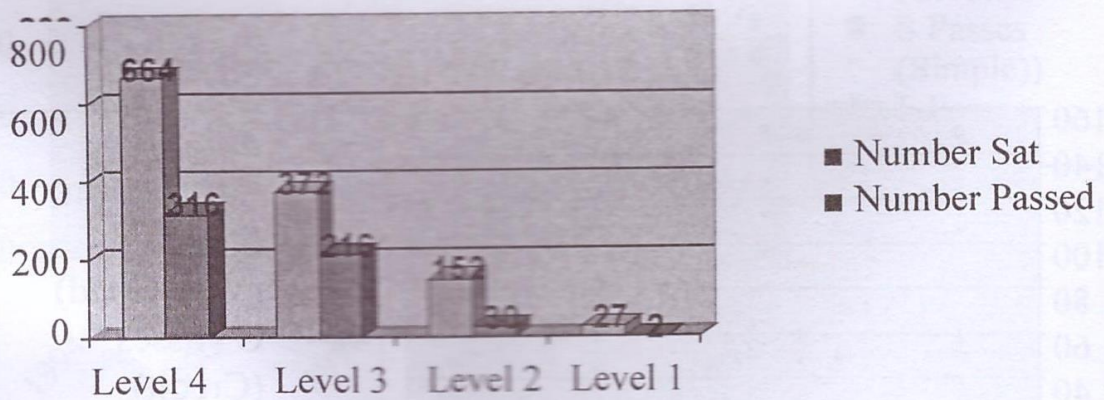


Japanese Language Proficiency Test

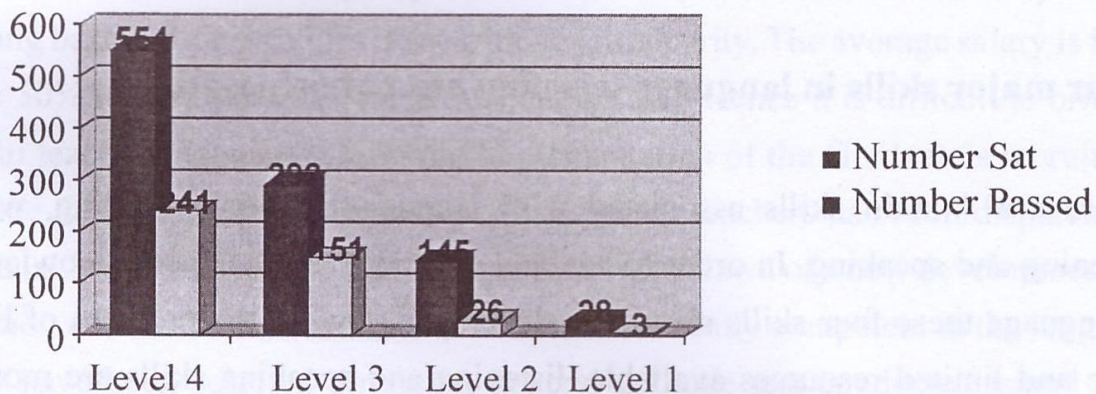
In comparing the data for 2003 and 2004, the number who sat the above examination has decreased. In 2003, 316(47.5%) passed Level 4, 216(58%) passed Level 3, 30(19.7%) passed Level 2, 2(7.4%) passed Level 1. In 2004, 241(43.5%) passed Level 4, 151(51.7%) passed Level 3, 26(17.9%) passed Level 2 and 3(10.7%) passed Level 1. (Refer graphs)



Perfermonace at Each Level 2003



Performance at Each Level 2004



Findings and problematic areas

According to the data that were collected it is evident that the field of Japanese language learning has definitely developed during the past two decades and the demand for the subject has increased. In considering all the data and information that was collected, the following findings, especially the problematic areas were brought to light.

Primary and secondary education

The syllabus is too long and difficult.

With regard to the secondary education especially in the schools, the present GCE Advanced Level syllabus is found to be bulky and difficult to be handled within the class hours that have been allocated. There are 2 texts that are used at this level, The Nihongo Shoho (a beginner's Japanese language text book) used to introduce the basic grammar structures, vocabulary and characters and the Pupil's Text book popularly known as the "Blue Book" used to enhance the skills in comprehension. Within the 2 year period of study it is absolutely difficult to cope up with both these books. Especially the latter is being found difficult by not only the student but by the teacher as well. Hence, the teaching methodology tends towards a translation

and memorizing approach. Consequently, the teachers are much hesitant to use material such as picture cards, letter cards and audio-video material due to the lack of time even though they are available.

Four major skills in language learning are not achieved.

There are 4 main skills associated with language learning: reading, writing, listening and speaking. In order to have an enhanced and balanced knowledge of a language these four skills should be developed. Due to the problem of limited time and limited resources available, listening and speaking skills are mostly in a state of neglect. Since the main objective of the student is to get through the examination, no importance is placed upon the above skills. In such a state the quality of learning is questionable.

Lack of teacher training.

Most of the teachers have not undergone any kind of teacher training and there is a very few number of teachers who have mastered Japanese language after graduating from high school. Majority of them have studied Japanese at their GCE Advanced Level and have taken up to teaching with that beginner's knowledge alone. Since there is no teacher training available, quality of the teaching methodology is also in a poor state. Earlier the NIE (National Institute of Education) had been conducting teacher training programmes which have come to a stop by now. The average level of the teachers lies in the 3rd level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Due to the lack of proper teacher training programmes the teachers are unaware of the new teaching methodology and the knowledge of the particular culture which plays a major role in understanding the language itself is absent. Particularly in teaching the Pupil's Text Book which consists of lessons based on Japanese culture and issues regarding Japanese society, this knowledge is indispensable.

No job security.

It was revealed that the majority of the teachers are under contract, temporary or visiting basis which provides them with no job security. The average salary is found to be 50% lower than that of a permanent teacher. Hence it is difficult to bring up skilful teachers. However, with the implementation of the Graduate's recruitment scheme this year, a limited number of permanent teachers has been dispatched to National Schools. Even though this seems to be the dawn of a new development, the question remains as to whether these teachers are really competent in the language. They have been selected through a general aptitude test conducted island wide, without any evaluation performed on their language abilities.

Unavailability of a cultural institute.

As the syllabus requires knowledge on Japanese culture, a place where that knowledge can be acquired is absolutely essential.

Unavailability of a support system for teachers.

At the moment there is no support system available for teachers where their language problems can be solved. The need of the existence of an advisor or an expert is thus required.

Tertiary level education

Lack of opportunities to engage in post - graduate studies and research.

The number of scholarships granted for post graduate studies and research is drastically few especially with regard to language studies. The Ministry of Education (Monbukagakusho) of Japan grants about 20 scholarships in a yearly basis but the study fields mainly occupy science and other study fields excluding

Japanese language studies. A proper criterion is required in order to produce able teachers.

Lack of job opportunities

The number of students who graduate from higher education institutions is gradually increasing. Yet suitable job opportunities do not cater to the high demand. Hence it is essential to create new job opportunities

Conclusion

Japanese language education is a field that boasts of many developments during its short history. Even though there are many developments, certain problematic areas also exist. The quality of teaching and learning should be enhanced by improving the teaching methodology; training the teachers and educating them about the new trends in foreign language learning and introducing modern teaching methods. The 'examination mentality': learning in order to get through the examination should be changed with an insight into developing the four main skills in language mastery: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Thus it is essential to develop the infrastructure mainly in schools. Donations, sponsorships and scholarships are also favorable in this process and proper administration and maintenance of the grants that have been already given is needed.

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