



•• Japanese-Language Education Overseas

The Japan Foundation, whose founding mission is to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other cultures and contribute to the development of a peaceful global community, places special emphasis on Japanese-language education as a way of making Japanese culture more accessible to people around the world and devoted to promoting all facets of Japanese-language education—from the development of instruction methods and textbooks to teacher training and administration of the Japanese–Language Proficiency Test outside Japan.

As Japanese is coming to be used in increasingly diverse domains, Japan has an international obligation to support efforts to improve Japanese-language education worldwide and to proactively strengthen the education that it provides. To fulfill its share of this obligation, the Japan Foundation launched an initiative in May 2005 to create international standards for Japanese-language education. It hopes to release the standards in 2009 in time with the revisions to the Japanese–Language Proficiency Test, which is administered by the Japan Foundation in countries outside Japan.



●●● Establishing New Standards

Diversifying aims and interests among learners

The number of people studying Japanese outside Japan surpassed 2 million in 1998, and by 2003 the figure had risen to 2.35 million. There has been a particularly notable increase among younger people, and there is also a growing interest in Japan's cultural exports. This has resulted in a diversification of interests and objectives among language learners, prompting reports that existing teaching and evaluation methods are not adequate in coping with such trends.

The Japan Foundation's involvement in Japanese-language education has thus far centered on supporting the initiatives undertaken in each country and region and on answering their distinctive needs. This was believed to be the optimum approach, as it emphasized respect for local efforts and encouraged independent, localized education. Indeed, this has helped build a solid base for Japanese-language instruction in many countries. At the same time, the worldwide spread of Japanese-language education has proceeded much faster than anticipated, partly as a result of advancing globalization, and it is becoming evident that existing methods cannot adequately deal with this new reality.

Time for sweeping adjustments

Full-fledged efforts to systematize and standardize language education have been ongoing since the 1990s in the United States, Australia, and Europe, which have increasingly been marked by

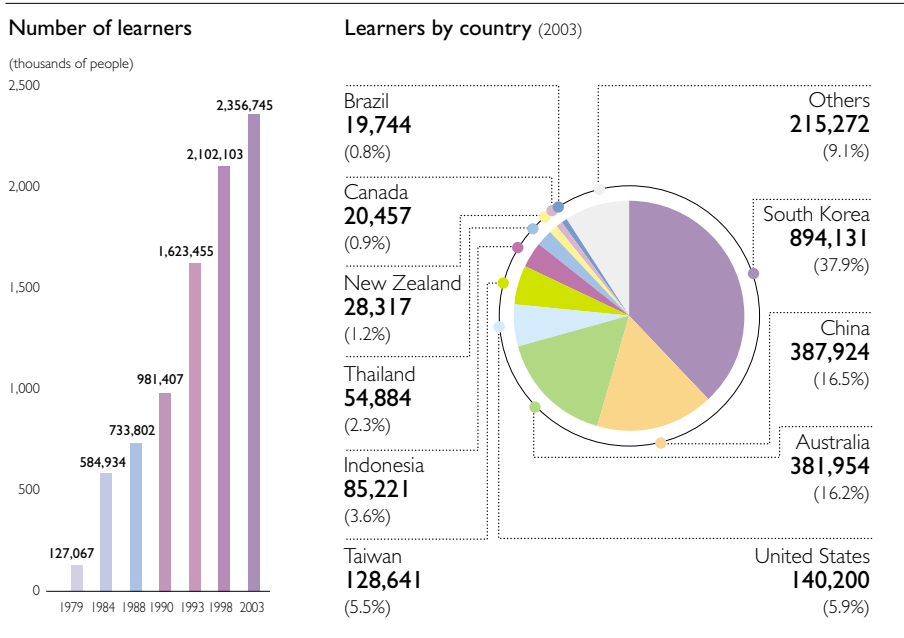
multicultural coexistence and greater need for multilingual education. The linguistic environment in Japan differs from those in these countries and regions, but given the remarkable growth in Japanese-language education overseas, the day is not far off when Japanese will be more commonly used in various international contexts. Within Japan as well, further increases in the number of foreigners will naturally lead to a broader range of speakers of the language. As such, the Japan Foundation has concluded that now is the time for sweeping adjustments in Japanese-language education. This can also help promote the autonomy and localization of teaching efforts being made around the world.

What, exactly, does systematization and standardization involve? Not only in the acquisition of Japanese but in any foreign language, it is customary to determine and evaluate learners' level of proficiency in accordance with the number of hours studied or words and phrases acquired, ranking them into such categories as "beginner," "intermediate," and "advanced." This does not, however, enable the objective gauging of the learners' real communication abilities. Communicating in a foreign language involves more than just having an adequate knowledge of words and phrases; one must also be able to carry out linguistic activity in real circumstances and specific domains to cope with a variety of situations and conditions in that language's cultural milieu. By systematizing such abilities and establishing standards for each learning level, and by

measuring achievement through tests and other evaluation methods on the basis of those standards, it would also be possible to establish international standards for the education of that language.

Building Japanese standards on Western-language models

In fiscal 2005 the Japan Foundation launched a project spanning several years aimed at constructing Standards for Japanese-Language Education based on Western-language precedents. This time span is extremely short considering the more than three decades that were required to prepare and introduce similar standards in Europe. Having served for 33 years as a core organization in





developing domestic and international human resources in Japanese-language education, however, the Japan Foundation believes this to be a realistic target. For more than two decades we have administered the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. As the structure and functions of the test can serve as a prototype for the gauging of linguistic ability under the Standards for Japanese-Language Education, we are working on revising the

proficiency test alongside creating the standards. These efforts are aimed not only at improving and promoting the Japan Foundation's various Japanese-language programs but also at encouraging the development of Japanese-language education in general, both in and outside Japan. We feel that this task is our international responsibility in promoting the use of the Japanese language in international society.

●●● Japanese-Language Proficiency Test

The Japan Foundation has conducted the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test in collaboration with overseas testing bodies since 1984 to assess and certify the Japanese-language competence of non-native speakers. (In Japan, the test is conducted by Japan Educational Exchanges and Services.)

The test consists of three parts—writing-vocabulary, listening, and reading-grammar—and is classified into four levels of proficiency. The 2005 test session was held in 116 cities in

44 countries and regions overseas on Sunday, December 4, 2005, with approximately 400,000 examinees.

2005 Japanese-Language Proficiency Test: Examinees by Region

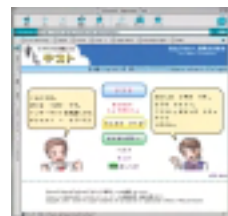
	Examinees	Test sites
Asia	278,286	63
Oceania	1,271	9
The Americas	8,165	21
Europe	6,561	21
Middle East and Africa	504	2
Japan	61,457	20
Total	356,244	136

●●● Internet Japanese Test—Sushi Test

A proprietary introductory-level test developed by the Foundation for young overseas learners; released in March 2004. (In English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Indonesian, and Portuguese)

Learners can take the test for free as many

times as they wish by accessing the website and completing the user registration from. The test, which has a time limit of 30 minutes, consists of 30 questions in three parts. A “sushi chef” rewards students according to their score.



▲ Sushi Test
(<http://momo.jpf.go.jp/sushi/>).

●●● Japanese-Language Specialists Dispatch Program

The Japan Foundation sends Japanese-language specialists and junior specialists overseas to train Japanese-language teachers, develop curriculums and teaching materials, and offer advice on teaching methods and lesson plans. In 2005 we sent 80 Japanese-language specialists to 39 countries and 32 junior specialists to 18 countries and held 11 traveling seminars in 10 countries.

The Foundation also provides indirect support by underwriting the participation of lecturers overseas for Japanese-language courses and

disbursing grants for speech contests, conferences, seminars, and workshops.

In 2005 the Foundation began dispatching Japanese-language assistant teachers and senior visiting professors under the JF Volunteers Program to meet the diverse needs of overseas organizations engaged in Japanese-language education while expanding work opportunities for Japanese-language specialists of different ages and backgrounds.

●●● The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institutes in Urawa and Kansai



▲ The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Kansai



▲ The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa

The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa, was established in 1989 in response to the rapidly rising number of students learning Japanese, their diversifying goals for studying the language, and the increasing calls from overseas institutions for additional assistance and closer cooperation. The Institute comprises a main building for the classrooms, administration offices, a library—the only library in the world that collects Japanese-language teaching materials and related resources from across the globe—and a 148-room dormitory.

The Institute conducts programs for Japanese-language teachers at primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions, including child and adult education, and invites them to participate in coursework related to the Japanese language and Japanese-language education as well as Japanese culture and society. It also operates a graduate-level program in Japanese language and culture offering M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in collaboration with the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies. This program is designed to train individuals who will guide the course of Japanese-language education in various overseas countries.

The Institute also invites specialists to Japan and provides the necessary support for overseas Japanese-language and research institutes to offer the opportunity for their Japanese-language specialists to conduct research and studies in Japan. In addition, the Institute provides grants to overseas publishers that plan to publish Japanese-language-related teaching materials. The Institute donates teaching materials to educational institutions overseas.

The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute, Kansai, began operations in 1997. Its main buildings include an 18-story dormitory and

a 2-story building housing classrooms and other training facilities, the library, meeting rooms, and administrative offices. It conducts Japanese-language training programs for people whose jobs require some level of proficiency in the Japanese language, such as foreign-service officers, public officers, librarians, researchers and postgraduate students. Other Institute services include training programs and recognition for Japanese-language learners to encourage their studies and to deepen their understanding of Japanese society and culture, such as the Study-Tour Award for Outstanding Students of the Japanese Language, Japanese-Language programs for high-school students and the Lee Soo-Hyun Memorial Program, which invites young people from Korea to Japan. It also conducts local exchange programs, including a basic Japanese-language program for JET participants in Osaka and an intensive program for Australian Teachers invited by the Osaka prefectural government.

Japanese-Language teaching materials

The Japanese-Language Institute, Urawa develops and publishes Japanese-language teaching materials, including textbooks, dictionaries, and multimedia materials. A list of the Japanese-language teaching materials developed by the Japan Foundation can be reviewed at:

http://www.jpf.go.jp/j/urawa/j_rsrsrcs/jrs_02.html.

The Minna no Kyôzai site at:

<http://www.jpf.go.jp/kyozai/> offers free teaching materials for Japanese-language teachers worldwide; launched in 2002 and annually updated to include more photos, illustrations, and functions, the site recorded over 2.5 million page views in 2005 (in Japanese, English and Korean).



●●● Japanese-Language Education Information Available in Print or on Our Website



- *Nihongo Kyôiku Tsûshin* Nos. 52–54 (in Japanese) Information on teaching materials, classroom ideas, current topics, and trends in Japanese-language education.
- *Kokusai Kôryû Kikin Nihongo Kyôiku Kiyô* (The Japan Foundation Japanese-Language education Bulletin) No. 2. Research papers, education reports, and other articles by Foundation specialists.
- *Sekai no Nihongo Kyôikw* (Japanese-Language education around the globe) No.15 (in Japanese)

Collected papers on Japanese-Language education:

- *Survey of Overseas Organizations Involved in Japanese-Language Education*.

Full report and executive summary published by Bonjinsha in March 2005. Summary is available on our website in English at:

<http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/japan/oversea/index.html>

- *Directory of Overseas Japanese-Language Educational Institutions*.

<http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/japan/oversea/index.html>