

# Problems and Issues in learning Japanese language among Thai and Chinese university students: A mixed method micro research

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to find the problems, issues and what challenges two groups of international students (Thai and Chinese) faced, and how they coped with these dilemmas in learning Japanese language as a second language during the academic semester. A mixed method micro research (e.g: questionnaire surveys, quantitative method, face-to-face oral interviews, recordings and a mixed micro method approach) were employed to triangulate the data. This mixed micro method research analyzes specific learning problems of Japanese language in grammar; Kanji characters; pronunciation; Hiragana characters and Katakana characters. The findings show three major challenges: Personal psychological issues, Sociocultural issues and Japanese language issues. Besides, group work, positive attitude, interaction with international friends and useful learning strategies are identified as coping strategies. The result will provide implications for international students as well as language instructors and program coordinators in a higher education institution to better assist the international students. Therefore, the method to get delicate in-depth findings was used, and the comparison for Japanese 1 class was made between those students who performed very well, were awarded A grades (Good students), and those students were awarded grade B plus or below (Bad students) in order to get the qualitative results which is my second research objective. In conclusion, those methods of research are useful to find the solutions of the learning problems and obstacles for the Japanese language learners. As a consequence, Japanese language learners could find better learning performance and outcome which will be greatly beneficial for not only my students learning Japanese language but also other learners of Japanese language as well as teachers teaching Japanese as a second language.

**Keywords:** Japanese language, language learning, Chinese and Thai university students, problems and issues

## 1. Introduction

There are quite a few research papers aiming to study problems in learning Japanese language as a second language in several countries. The problem is that students find it hard to pick up a second language due to social, cultural and Japanese-related language barriers. The goal and purpose of this research is to analyze the correlations between social, cultural, and Japanese-related issues, and second language deficiencies within college students (Chi-

nese and Thai students in specific). From this research, I would like to find information that could be used by the masses to help mitigate the growing difficulties in learning Japanese as a second language, and to that length, makes the analysis very relevant and more so important. Krashen (1988) argues that acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.

Those papers can be classified into two groups: a macro level study using unit of analysis as institutions such as paper by the Japan Foundation (2012), using the sample of 16,046 institutions in 128 countries; and a micro level study using unit of analysis as individual students such as a research conducted by Gamage (2003), Fujiwara (2018), Osumi (2019). Those three papers' results were firstly, Gamage (2003) investigated three important issues in Kanji learning strategies, using quantitative research methods with the sample of 116 Australian undergraduate students. Statistical analysis results revealed that repeated writing not only was the most used strategy type, but also a strategy training and explicit instruction on the fundamental differences of alphabetic and character background of Japanese language learners. Secondly, Fujiwara (2018) wrote two papers using his 537 and 68 Thai undergraduate students learning Japanese language as the unit of analysis, and studied 1) the 5-factor structure of the 35 items beliefs on the language learning inventory (BALLI) for English as a second language, he found out that learning Japanese in his studies is different from learning English as a second language.

Instead of finding five factors from BALLI, he found only three factors: Motivations and Expectations factor focusing on Nature of Language Learning dimension, Difficulty of Language Learning factor, Foreign Language Aptitude factor. Therefore, the students' experience of studying Japanese as a second language was more related to the changes of their beliefs on motivations and expectations, difficulty, and aptitude in Japanese language learning. And lastly, Osumi (2019) studied 119 undergraduate students using open ended - questionnaire, and found that most of the participants provided positive reasons to study Japanese language mostly for traveling rather than interest in learning Japanese for job/career opportunities as compared to the Japan Foundation (2012) finding. Therefore, in my study, I am going to use Kanji learning strategies; beliefs in motivations, expectations and aptitude; and the reason to study Japanese as a second language. My research objectives consequently are 1) problems in learning Japanese as a second language of Thai and Chinese students at a private university in Bangkok, Thailand; and 2) since the literature review below were only quantitative research papers, and consequently, no qualitative results can be obtained to get delicate solutions for the students' problems in learning Japanese as a second language. Therefore, my second research objective is to get delicate in-depth findings to compare between Good and Bad both Thai and Chinese students. Consequently, the research technique to be used is a mixed method research. This micro mixed method research will give more detail and specific research findings for all teachers teaching Japanese as a second language to be a starting point to improve their teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

Finding and solving serious problems on both teaching and learning of Thai and Chinese students on Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking Japanese language are very important in this research. Furthermore, this research paper analyzed more specific learning problems of my students learning Japanese in grammar; Kanji characters; pronunciation; Hiragana characters and Katakana characters. In this paper, I will find the solution for solving the learning problems and obstacles in order to find the better learning performance for them. Therefore, by analyzing Thai and Chinese students learning problems in each section in Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking by applying Qualitative and Quantitative methods, and then, the research result and findings will be greatly beneficial for not only my students learning Japanese language as a second language, but also other learners of Japanese as a second language. This research's objective is to find out the difficulties students face in learning Japanese language during the Japanese classes, and support them to achieve their goals in learning Japanese language with the best teaching method. Besides, the best technique is mixed-method research (questionnaire surveys, quantitative strategy, face-to-face oral interviews, recordings, and a mixed micro method approach) to collect the data from Chinese and Thai students.

From the findings of various different academic research articles, there are two distinct factors which are either their specific belief system or the psychology that builds up the individual's way of processing information. Dornyei and Ryan (2015) argue that it is within psychology that individuals would create a natural blockage in their language flexibility. However, Fujiwara (2018) argues that the difficulty is based on the individual's beliefs that they could not achieve the goal presented to them. As argued by Robinson P. (2005), the concept of language aptitude is related to the broader concept of human abilities, covering a range of cognitively based learner differences. These perspectives give a broader view of the reasonings behind the concept of language skills in differing humans.

Dornyei and Ryan (2015) argues that a well-developed strand of psychology— differential psychology or, as it has been recently more frequently referred to, individual difference (ID) research has been concerned with understanding those characteristics that make individuals dissimilar to each other, exploring how and why such differences occur. This matter is related to one of the fundamental issues underlying the whole domain of psychology as an academic discipline. Therefore, the importance of the learner characteristics, or the individual differences as referred in the studies of second and foreign language acquisition, has been widely recognized by researchers in language learning as well as language instructors, because of their crucial contributions to the language learning processes.

As the term suggests, individual differences are characteristics or traits in which individuals may be shown to differ from each other. Admittedly, for many scholars such differences constitute mere distractions to their work: How much easier it would be to formulate valid conclusions and generalizations about the human species if everybody was alike (Dornyei and Ryan, p17). Schumann (2013) provides an evolutionary explanation for how we may have arrived at this situation, exploring the connections between the individual, the environ-

ment, and language. He argues that since almost everybody masters a first language with little difficulty, we can assume that there must have been some evolutionary advantage associated with the acquisition of language, and as a result, the ability to master a first language was genetically transmitted to future generations, ultimately becoming a universal human characteristic. In contrast, in the earliest forms of human settlement there was probably little intergroup contact that would have made the capacity to learn languages an imperative, and indeed, the widespread learning of foreign languages appears to be a relatively recent human endeavor, largely stimulated by increased population mobility and the spread of mass education.

Fujiwara (2018) argues that the way how individuals learn languages is likely to be influenced by what they believe about learning in general and about learning languages in particular. Doryei and Ryan (2013) also stated that intelligence has been closely associated with learning success, and therefore it was only a matter of time before attempts were made to conceptualize the specific ability to learn a foreign language. This ability has been referred to under a variety of names, ranging from 'language aptitude' and a special 'propensity' or 'talent' for learning an L2 to more colloquial terms such as a 'flair,' 'gift,' or 'knack' for languages. Indeed, language aptitude is one of those psychological concepts that is readily recognizable for researchers and laypeople alike, as there is a widespread perception of a natural, innate ability to learn an L2 that varies significantly from individual to individual (p. 52). Carroll & Sapon (1959) there is no such thing as 'language aptitude.' Instead, we have a number of cognitive factors making up a composite measure that can be referred to as the learner's overall capacity to master a foreign language. In other words, foreign language aptitude is not a unitary factor but rather a complex of "basic abilities that are essential to facilitate foreign language learning" (p. 14).

Robinson, P. (2005) the concept of language aptitude is related to the broader concept of human abilities, covering a range of cognitively based learner differences. In the domain of second language learning "aptitude is characterized as strengths individual learners have—relative to their population—in the cognitive abilities which information processing draws on during L2 learning and performance in various contexts and at different stages" (p. 50).

Pasuk (2007) argues that there is limitation of Japanese studies at Thai universities, because most works on Japanese studies are translation and distillations of studies in the west, and often used as texts at university courses or for a general readership. Most of those articles written in the west on Japanese studies were not written by Japanese studies specialists nor they have Japanese language background. Furthermore, the research interest of Japan in Thailand has a tendency to focus on economics, politics, International Relations and the impact of Japanese pop culture in Thailand, which in order to conduct research on those fields do not necessarily require having Japanese language capability (p. 11). However, many Thai learners who have learned Japanese language mostly go into the business careers at the Japanese companies. Therefore, those graduates of Japanese would rather concentrate on linguistics than the social sciences field of Japanese economics, politics and International Relations (Pasuk, P, 2007, p. 11).

The learning of Kanji characters is also seen as one of the hardest and challenging in learn-

ing the Japanese language as a second language for the Japanese language learners. These days, Kanji learning strategies have been studied and researched increasingly by learners of Japanese language for alphabetical backgrounds. Because of the increasing number of non-Kanji character background learners of Japanese language around the world, there needs to be better understanding of individual differences among Japanese language learners (Gamage, G, H, 2003, pp. 1, 2).

Gamage (2003) argues that Japanese language learners with no prior knowledge of Chinese Kanji characters often find it harder to learn Kanji characters than those learners who have background in Kanji characters (Gamage, G, H, 2003, p. 2). About the research technique, I decided to use mixed method research studies to learn more than using one technique, of Qualitative or Quantitative research method.

### **The significance of learning Japanese language in Thailand.**

The significance of learning Japanese language in Thailand is that firstly, the research findings and result are useful for not only for me to improve my way of teaching and how to teach Japanese language my students, but also it will help many other fellow Japanese language teachers teaching those students with different cultural and linguistic background in many different countries around the world. Those Japanese language teachers could benefit from reading this research paper, and use it to find out their students' learning problems and obstacles as well as improving their way of teaching Japanese as a second language. Since this research paper found out the learning problems and obstacles for Thai and Chinese students, it will be useful especially for those Japanese language teachers teaching in Thailand, People's Republic of China and Taiwan. Secondly, most importantly, my current and future students at a private university in Bangkok will greatly benefit from this research by better understanding the Japanese language teacher of students' learning problems and obstacles that they encounter when learning Japanese language. Therefore, I, as a Japanese language teacher, my own students learning Japanese as a second language at a private university in Bangkok Thailand, and many other Japanese language teachers all over the world and their students will benefit from this research paper.

The survey conducted by the Japan Foundation (2006) revealed that there are increasing numbers of examinees for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) overseas. When the JLPT was first administered in 1984, there were approximately 7,000 examinees who took the test, with 4,473 examinees from overseas of Japan. The annual test has become a large-scale event, and attracted some 5,24000 examinees in 2007, with 4,30137 examinees overseas (5,3655 in 1994, 1,00893 in 2000, 2,15593 in 2003) (p. 5-6). Japan Foundation (2009) has conducted a survey on the Japanese language learners in 2009. According to table 4. Number of Teachers and Native Japanese Language teachers by country in 5. Data on teachers, there are 1,240 Japanese language teachers, and among 452 are native Japanese language teachers which is 36.5% and therefore, Thailand is ranked 7th out of 20 countries in terms of numbers of Japanese language teachers (p. 7).

According to Table Number 1. Numbers of Institutions, Teachers, and Students (20 countries with Highest Number of students) in 3. Japanese-Language Education in 20 countries

with Highest Number of Students, there are 78,802 students who study Japanese language in Thailand, half of those students were at high school level. It is important to conduct research on the high school level because it will provide an educational foundation for higher education (Japan Foundation, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, half of the Japanese language learners in Thailand were high school students back in the year 2009, but this number is even increasing. In contrast, 27.8% of the total number of the students at higher education in Thailand are learning the Japanese language, and the growth rate is rather stable (Japan Foundation, 2009, p. 7). However, after conducting in-depth interview to the Japanese teachers at university level, some university students who studied Japanese language at high school level, their Japanese language level did not reach the expected standard. Therefore, it is a requirement for some universities to undertake intensive courses in their first year of their Japanese language degree (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 110, Pasuk, P., p. 10). Since 1999, Japanese language has been included as an elective subject for the university entrance examinations in Thailand. The demand from Japanese companies in Thailand has led to this expansion of introducing and launching major programs in Japanese language at Thai universities who have heavily invested in Thailand, and as the economy has expanded, the increasing demand for Thai personnel who are proficient in Japanese language was necessary (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 111, Pasuk, P., p. 10). Therefore, Japanese language was assigned into the curriculum of high schools as a foreign language in 1981, because the Thai government announced Japanese language was in a shortage. About the shortage of Japanese language teachers, the primary reason is that many of those people who studied and major Japanese language at university level would rather prefer to work for private sectors at Japanese companies due to the compensation and the social value (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 113).

Courses in the Japanese language have been offered and available at several universities in Thailand since the 1960s, and the popularity of learning Japanese language has increased in the 1980s when Japan became significant for the Thai economy. However, many Thai people who have learned Japanese mostly go into the business careers at the Japanese companies. Therefore, those graduates of Japanese studies would concentrate on linguistics rather than the social sciences field of Japanese economics, politics and International Relations. Most of Japanese teachers at high schools are not Japanese major graduates, and they teach Japanese language together with other subjects because of the shortage of manpower (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 112, Pasuk, P., 2007, p. 11). Therefore, the High school Japanese language teacher training program for the teachers teaching Japanese language at high school was launched by the Ministry of Education of Thailand in collaboration with Japan Foundation in 1994. Those Japanese language teachers lacking the basic knowledge of Japanese language participated in this program at the Japan Foundation office in Bangkok. They received Japanese language teacher training for 10 months, and then they participated for further teacher training at Japan Foundation in Japan for seven weeks, and they returned to teach at their high schools. Estimated of 200 teachers received Japan Foundation's teacher's training and returned to their high schools between 1994 and 2008 (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 113).

### **Serious problems of teaching, and benefits of Thai and Chinese students.**

Finding and solving serious problems on teaching Thai and Chinese students on Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking Japanese language are very important in this research. Furthermore, this research paper analyzed more specific learning problems; grammar; Kanji characters; pronunciation; Hiragana characters and Katakana characters. By solving those learning problems for Thai and Chinese students learning Japanese as a second language that will be greatly beneficial for them. I will find the solution for solving the learning problems and obstacles in order to find the better learning performance for them. Therefore, by analyzing Thai and Chinese students learning problems in each section in Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking by applying Qualitative and Quantitative methods, and then, the research result and findings will be greatly beneficial for not only my students learning Japanese language as a second language, but also other learners of Japanese language. Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, (2012) argues that the introduction of a new Japanese language textbook has contributed to improving Japanese language education at higher education in Thailand and China. According to Japan Foundations' Survey Report on Japanese Language Education Abroad 2009, 1) problems and concerns in Japanese Language-Teaching in the World as a whole, and a survey conducted by Japan Foundation in 2009, "inadequate teaching materials" showed the highest response rate at 34.6%, followed by "inadequate facilities and equipment" at 31.1% and "students show insufficient interest" at 23.3%, "inadequate teaching methods" at 21.6%, and teachers with inadequate Japanese language abilities at 19.0% (Japan Foundation, 2009, p 12). Furthermore, (2) Problems and Concerns in Japanese-Language Teaching by Level of Education in Japan Foundation Report (2009) stated that, at the university level, the highest response rate was "inadequate teaching materials" (45.2%), and then "inadequate information on teaching materials and methods" (36.6%), "inadequate information on Japanese culture and society" (31.9%), and "inadequate number of teachers" (31.0%). But in contrast, the response rates were relatively low for "declining number of students" (14.3%), and "students showing insufficient interest" (15.5%) (p. 13). According to the Japan Foundation survey report (2009), problems managing Japanese language education in Thailand were 1) inadequate textbooks; 2) lack of teachers; 3) lack of students' enthusiasm; 4) lack of equipment and tools; 5) inadequate Japanese knowledge and capability of teachers. Furthermore, Sirisuwan (1992) pointed out that the problem in Japanese language studies is the shortage of teachers, as well as teachers' qualifications, lacking the right teacher training and never studied in Japan themselves, a lack of appropriate Japanese language textbooks, and no academic associations to join for Japanese language teachers in Thailand.

About the shortage of Japanese language teachers, the primary reason is that many of those people who studied and majored in Japanese language at university level would rather prefer to work for private sectors at Japanese companies due to the compensation and the social value. About the lack of appropriate Japanese language textbooks, Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, (2012) conducted a survey for basic Japanese language textbooks introduced in Thailand, and the popular ones are as follows: 1; Nihongo shoho, 2; Minna no Nihongo (1-2), 3; Shin Nihongo no Kiso (1-2), 4; Nihongo Yoroshiku (p. 112). In the year 2004, a Japa-

nese textbook called “Aiko no Tomodachi (1-6)” was introduced and used at the high schools in Thailand. This textbook was produced by, and with the cooperation between the Japan Foundation and the Ministry of Education Thailand for teaching Japanese language at high school level in Thailand. Approximately, 80% of the high schools in Thailand have introduced all these textbooks mentioned above including “Aiko no Tomodachi” in their teaching and learning Japanese language (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 112). Since the late 1990s, the Ministry of Education of Thailand has been promoting the Japanese language as a basic educational requirement, and thus, it has increased significantly in terms of quantity. Therefore, so much efforts have been made by the Japan Foundation and the Ministry of Education Thailand to cooperate for the development of Japanese language teachers and Japanese language textbooks together with teaching materials of Japanese language in order to improve their quality (Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, 2012, p. 112). Kaewkitsadang, P, Srisattarat, S, (2012) state that the introducing and using those basic Japanese language textbooks mentioned above including “Aiko no Tomodachi” at high school level has greatly contributed to improve Japanese language education at university level education in Thailand (p.112).

The learning of Kanji characters is also seen as one of the hardest and challenging in learning Japanese language as a second language for the Japanese language learners except Chinese students whose native language uses Kanji Chinese characters. Because of the increasing number of non-Kanji character background learners of Japanese language around the world, there needs to be better understanding of individual differences among Japanese language learners (Gamage, G, H, 2003, pp. 1, 2). Gamage (2003) further argues that Japanese language learners with no prior knowledge of Chinese Kanji characters often find it harder to learn Kanji characters than those learners who have background in Kanji characters such as Chinese students (p.2).

### 3. Research method

The Methodology of the research has been completed in macro groups and also micro groups in order to study the correlation of individuals’ language aptitude to their belief system, social background, cultural background, and various perspectives to achieve an accurate result for our study. This method will be useful for examining the various testing groups with the utilization of digital and analog trackers that could measure the data appropriately. The test groups were divided into different categories based on their gender, age, nationality, marital status, living with their families and the year of study.

In addition, the students in the Japanese 1 language classes were labelled as Good students who were awarded a grade A, and Bad students who were awarded a grade B plus or below to find the best possible solutions for the problems in learning Japanese as a second language for the learners. As a Japanese language teacher, I would like to find their problems in learning Japanese as a second language, and improve their Japanese language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). The assessments for Good students and Bad students were based on their scores that they were awarded on their midterm, final and oral exams.

### **Mixed method research: A research method to be used in this study.**

In this research paper, a mainly quantitative research method was used in order to collect data and questionnaire samples from my current and former students who studied IJP 101 Japanese language 1 of my class. Another supplementary research method used is Qualitative research method.

In order to find the learning problems and obstacles for my students who are learning Japanese as a second language, it is very important to use both Quantitative and Qualitative research. For the Quantitative part, I conducted samples of Questionnaire surveys from 119 students from my Japanese classes in the years 2018 and 2019, and used SPSS statistical analysis in order to find out answers for their learning problems and obstacles in Japanese language.

For the Qualitative part, I conducted an in-depth interview of twelve students from both Good and Bad Thai students, and Good and Bad Chinese students.

These are the questions of an in-depth interview:

1. Why did you choose to study Japanese as a second language?
2. Did you experience any problems during your Japanese 1 language classes?
3. If you experienced problems, what were they? How did you try and overcome these challenges?
4. Did you seek support from your teacher if you experienced any problems learning Japanese?
5. Please provide some reasons for why you did not seek support from your teacher?
6. Did you follow the teacher's instructions to review your learning at the end of each class? If you did follow instructions, please explain why you chose to do so? If you did not follow instructions, please explain why you chose not to do so.
7. Did you find the group work and presentations productive? If you answered yes, please provide details. If you answered no, please provide details.
8. Please provide details of your overall experience of learning Japanese?

### **Qualitative Method Research**

The qualitative data result shows that Good students who were awarded a grade A would achieve optimal levels of performance with full-scores of attendance, being productive in class, continuously planning to make self-improvement and providing support to other classmates. Bad Students who were awarded a grade B plus or below had a higher language barrier did not necessarily engage with conventional methods and therefore, did have an impact on their overall learning. Overall, this assessment provided students with an opportunity to perform to their potential strengths. There were a number of students who performed very well, and were awarded A grades, and a small number of students who were awarded a grade B plus or below. All students were assessed midterm with a written exam, the final and oral exams plus the outstanding performance of the Japanese 1 module by the teacher.

And then, I wrote the Content Analysis report based on an in-depth interview of these twelve students. In studying the problems of Japanese learners of Thai and Chinese students, using mixed method research, the researcher used the total population of 199 students who

studied my IJP101 Japanese 1 language classes, 117 students in 2018, and 82 students in 2019 academic years respectively. From this group, the researcher used those students' grades in Japanese 1 language class to randomly select the key informants for the qualitative part. The research instrument that the researcher used is Questionnaire.

The researcher collected data by using a Questionnaire consisting of six questions: the first two are multiple choice selection to fill in the space. Another two questions are Yes or No questions, the fifth one is multiple choice questions and the last one is the short answer question. All 199 Questionnaires were distributed to 199 selected students by hand in my IJP101 Japanese 1 language classes, via Facebook and via email. All the answers were checked, and there were no missing answers. All the data from Questionnaires were coded, and typed in the SPSS input file to create the data file. Then, the input data file was analyzed using frequency distribution and cross tabulation with the SPSS program.

### **Quantitative Method Research**

The sample of the quantitative method research consisted of 199 students (117 students in 2018, 82 students in 2019) who decided to choose my Japanese 1 language classes as their elective course. Since they decided to study the elective based on their personal requirement, therefore, they can be treated as a random sample in studying the elective course in Japanese language. The key informants for the qualitative part of mixed method research were randomly and proportionally selected from the quantitative sample of 117 students in 2018, and 82 students in 2019 academic years respectively. They consisted of 12 students divided into four groups of three good grade Chinese students, three good grade Thai students, three bad grade Chinese students, and three bad grade Thai students in terms of their grades in Japanese 1 language classes. Classifying the key informants on the year of studying in a ratio of 2 to 1 for each of four groups of key informants. Therefore, from the total group of key informants of 206 students, 120 students studying Japanese 1 language class in 2018, and 86 students studying in Japanese 1 language class in 2019.

The data collection and its reliability are very important in order to conduct this research. As mentioned above, in total, there were 206 students who studied my Japanese 1 language class, more precisely, 120 students studying Japanese 1 language class in 2018, and 86 students studying in Japanese 1 language class in 2019. However, the researcher was able to select only the total population of 199 students, who studied my Japanese 1 language class, 117 students in 2018, and 82 students in 2019 academic years respectively due to the fact that three students from 2018, and four students from 2019, dropped before the researcher sent out Questionnaire to the students in class, or via Facebook or via email. The researcher distributed the Questionnaire to 117 students in Japanese I language class at a private university in Bangkok on Saturday, the 29th September, 2018, and for those students who were absent on the day of distribution of Questionnaire, I sent out via email and Facebook message soon after the class on Saturday, 29th September, 2018. The researcher distributed Questionnaire to 82 students in Japanese 1 language class at a private university in Bangkok on Wednesday, the 13th March, 2019, and for those students who were absent on the day of distribution of Questionnaire, I sent out via email and Facebook message soon after the class on Wednesday,

13th March, 2019. Therefore, due to its accuracy of date, month and year of the Questionnaire results from both 2018 Japanese I language class students and 2019 Japanese I language class students, the Questionnaire results that the researcher gathered, are very reliable source of information to find out learning problems and obstacles of those students encountered while learning beginner's level Japanese as a second language, as well as their background association and their familiarity with Japanese language and culture.

#### 4. Research findings and results

The analysis results were that Good Chinese students tend to use more serious methods to their solution to the problem such as asking a teacher, researching information, and studying Japanese language every day. In contrast, Bad Thai students tend to use less serious methods in their solution such as learning Japanese language from TV shows, Video games and Japanese anime. An interpretation of the Content Analysis in comparing answers on "Problems in learning Japanese language" in relation to Nationality of Chinese students and Thai students and Competency of Good and Bad students. Therefore, the content analysis of the interview results on "Problems in learning Japanese language" between Thai and Chinese students can be divided into two groups. The Qualitative Content analysis result revealed that Chinese students seem to have a better and deeper understanding of their specific learning problems and obstacles in Japanese language because they gave extended answers in every question in the in-depth interview as compared to Thai students. Chinese students do analyze their learning problems much better than Thai students. Therefore, Chinese students write their comments or especially quotations much longer than Thai students, whose comments are only one sentence or phrase.

For example, "I found that honorifics are difficult to remember, and it's hard to improve oral communication since there's no language environment" (Good Chinese Girl 1). In contrast, Thai students gave one word or one sentence simple answers in each question. For example, "Kanji characters are too difficult for me" (Bad Thai boy 2); and "Remembering vocabulary" (Good Thai Girl 2); and "words are hard to pronounce" (Good Thai Boy 1). The Content analysis revealed that both Thai and Chinese students have difficulty in remembering Japanese vocabulary, and Kanji characters are hard to learn, especially for Thai students.

Good Chinese students tend to implement more serious methods to their solution to the problem such as asking a Japanese teacher, searching information online, studying Japanese every day, whereas Bad Thai students tend to use less serious methods in their solution such as learning Japanese from TV drama series and TV shows, Video games and Japanese anime. Also, both Thai and Chinese students tend not to seek help from their classmates on their learning problems, but rather review by themselves. Therefore, Good Chinese students tried to solve their Japanese language problems more seriously compared to the Bad students. Furthermore, Chinese students are more likely to ask teachers for help to solve their learning problems than Thai students. Chinese students tend to rely on a teacher, and seek help from a teacher to solve their problem of learning Japanese much more than Thai students. "A good teacher can solve all the problems. In addition, passion makes learning easier" (Good Chinese Girl 1). I think the teacher will help me a lot and practice is also important

(Bad Chinese Boy 1). Both the online search and the help from the teacher helped me a lot (Good Chinese Girl 2). In contrast, Thai students tend not to seek teacher's help, but instead they choose to study by themselves or from the textbook. For example, "Because I can review by myself" (Good Thai Girl 2); "I thought it will disturb personal time" (Bad Thai Girl 1); "No reason in particular" (Bad Thai Boy 2). Both Thai and Chinese students tend not to seek help from their classmates to solve their learning problems, but many of them have listened to teacher's advice to review after the class and before their Japanese exams.

For example, "Yeah I tried to solve the problem. Most of what I did is about reviewing after the class. I seldom ask for help from classmates. I mean, they are students too. If I could ask someone who is professional, why would I give some advice?" (Good Chinese Girl 1); "Yes, reviewing after class" (Good Thai Girl 1); "I did, by reading some new article and review some word from the book" (Bad Thai Girl 1); "Yes, I try by review after the class" (Bad Thai Boy 1); "I did review every time and I'm satisfied with my grade" (Good Chinese Girl 1); "Yes, I did. I've got a good grade" (Good Thai Girl 2). Furthermore, many Chinese and Thai students have answered that they have listened to a teacher's advice to review before the exams. For example, "Yes, I was reviewing for a long time to remember vocabularies" (Good Chinese Boy 1); "Definitely, I studied hard before the exams. I transcribed the content of the examinations on papers and carried them with me before the exam days so that I could check and memorize the content as much and frequently as I can" (Good Chinese Girl 2); "Yes. So that I could get a good grade" (Good Thai Girl 1); "Yes, I did. I've got a good grade" (Good Thai Girl 2); "Yes, the same as previous" (Bad Thai Boy 1).

Furthermore, all the Chinese and Thai students have equally answered the question that they were well prepared for their Group in class presentation. For example, "Yes. We did prepare well, and chose the different topics to present" (Good Chinese Boy 1); "Yes, I think I prepared well" (Good Chinese Girl 1); "Yes. We have a clear division of labor, we practice together before the group presentation, both of us want to get high grade from this class" (Bad Chinese Girl 1); "Yes, I've well prepared" (Good Thai Girl 2); "I prepared well" (Good Thai Boy 1); "Yes, I prepared very well because it is the only thing that I can make research understand it easily and not to stress" (Bad Thai Girl 1).

In contrast, the following section presents the descriptive presentation concerning opinions of 17 variables of Japanese language learners' study. The researcher employs frequency distribution analyses using SPSS to obtain frequencies and percentages of students in each category of each variable. The analyses outcomes have been organized into the following three categories pertaining to background variables, the level of Japanese language skills, and students' learning problems, respectively, as follow:

#### **4.1 Frequency Distribution of Students' Background Variables**

The frequency distribution of students' six background variables indicated that the majority of 199 students consisted of female gender (68.800%), age group of 21-25 years old (77.900%), Thai nationality (58.800%), single marriage status (95.000%), living with family (52.000%), and Year of study (58.500%). In conclusion, of six background variables, there were only three variables that might help students learn Japanese: single group of marriage,

Table 1: Frequency distribution of students' six background variables

Variable name	value	frequency	percentage	Variable name	value	frequency	percentage
gender	Male	62	31.200	Marriage	single	190	95.000
	Female	137	68.800		married/live together	10	5.000
age	16-20	22	11.100	Live with family	Yes	104	52.000
	21-25	155	77.900		No	96	48.000
	26-80	22	11.000	Year of study	2018	117	58.500
Nationality	Thai	117	58.800		2019	82	41.500
	Chinese	50	25.100	Sample	Total	199	100.000
	others	32	16.100				

Note: Total population of students is 206, and in the years of 2018 and 2019=120 and 86.

16-20 age younger group, and Chinese nationality students. However, the frequency distribution indicated that the only variable of marriage (single group), had the majority percentage of 95.000%, whereas the variable age and nationality did not help because majority were 21-25 age group, and Thai nationality students.

#### 4.2 Frequency Distribution of Students' Level of Japanese Language Skills

The frequency distribution of students' nine variable on level of Japanese language skills could be divided into two groups: the first group consisted of two variables that helped students to learn Japanese, and the other seven variables did not help students to learn Japanese as follows: for the first group, the frequency distributions indicated that for 1) the variable 'any Japanese friends, boyfriend or girlfriend', there were 61.5000% of students who said Yes; and 2) the variable 'watching Japanese movies, drama series and anime', there were 41.000% of students who said they watched Japanese movies, drama series and anime. The second group consisted of seven variables that did not help students to learn Japanese indicated that the highest frequency for each variable as follows: 1) the first three variables were under the variable 'Family member (mother, father, and other family members) who do not speak Japanese', and there were 98.000%, 96.000%, and 85.930% of students whose mother, father, and other family members, respectively do not speak Japanese; 2) the variable 'Living in Japan', there was 93.000% of students who had never been to Japan; 3) the variable 'Traveling to Japan', there was 54.744% of students who had never traveled to Japan; 4) the variable 'Similarity of your language with Japanese', there was 53.300% of students who said Japanese is not similar to their language; and 5) the variable 'Emphasis on Japanese language education', there was 45.200% of students who said their country did not emphasize on Japanese language education. In conclusion, the only variable that helped students to learn Japanese was the variable 'any Japanese friends, boyfriend or girlfriend'.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of students' level of Japanese language skill

Variable name	value	frequency	percentage	Variable name	value	frequency	percentage	
Family member	speaks Japanese			Traveling to Japan	0	109	54.774	
Father	Yes	8	4.020		1	32	16.080	
	No	191	95.980		2	20	10.050	
Mother	Yes	4	2.000		3	6	3.015	
	No	195	98.000		4	5	2.513	
Other member of family speaks Japanese	no	171	85.930		5	5	2.513	
	1 person	18	9.045		6	10	5.025	
	2-3 person	10	5.025		7	1	0.502	
Emphasis on Japanese language education	Yes	71	35.700		8	1	0.503	
	No	90	45.200		9	9	4.522	
	Don't know	38	19.100	10	1	0.503		
watching JP movies, drama series and anime	Never	36	18.100	Living in Japan	Yes	14	7.000	
	1-2 times/month	81	40.700	No	No	185	93.000	
	3-5 times/month	35	17.600	Any JP friends, boyfriend or girlfriend	Yes	122	61.300	
	More than 5 times/month	47	23.600		No	77	38.700	
Total				Similarities with your language	Yes	72	36.181	
					No	106	53.266	
					Don't know	21	10.55	
				Total			199	100.000

### 4.3 Frequency Distribution of Students' Learning Problems

The Quantitative analysis result revealed learning problems of both Thai and Chinese students. The Frequency distribution of the students' learning problems on two variables revealed the hardest one and the most problematic one for both Thai and Chinese students in learning Japanese is Writing activity (57.300%), and then Speaking (16.600%), Reading (14.100%), and the least problem is Listening activity (12.100%). And then, my students' biggest of learning problem in Japanese is grammar (47.700%), and then, Kanji characters (32.200%), Pronunciation (10,100%), Hiragana characters (5.000%), Katakana characters (3,000%), and the least problem is others (2,000%).

Therefore, the Quantitative research above proved that it is a significant and useful research method to find the learning problems and obstacles of my students who are learning Japanese as a second language.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of students' two variables on students' learning problems

Variable name	value	frequency	percentage
The hardest one and the most problematic one	Speaking	33	16.600
	Listening	24	12.100
	Writing	114	57.300
	Reading	28	14.100
The problems of learning Japanese	Hiragana	10	5.000
	Katakana	6	3.000
	Kanji	64	32.200
	Pronunciation	20	10.100
	Grammar	95	47.700
	Others	4	2.000
Total		199	100.0

## 5. Discussion

When I started planning to write this research paper to find the learning problems and obstacles for my students from Thailand and China who are studying Japanese as a second language, I realized that it is very important to use both Quantitative and Qualitative mixed method research approaches. First of all, I conducted and collected samples of Questionnaire surveys from 119 students from my Japanese classes in the year 2018 and 2019, and used SPSS statistical analysis in order to find out answers for their learning problems and obstacles in Japanese language. The summary of the results are divided into the good and bad language learning students that were subjected to the study from the Japanese 1 language classes. Good students had more language aptitude, and they studied through more conventional means while the bad students had a higher language barrier through bad language-learning avenues causing them to not be agile in their language use.

I did mainly use quantitative research methods in order to collect data and questionnaire samples. However, there were some problems when I was collecting questionnaire samples from my students. Those of my students that I sent Questionnaire samples via email and Facebook did not complete and reply promptly. Therefore, it takes several weeks to collect all the necessary Questionnaire sample data to be coded and typed in for the SPSS input file to create the data file. Another supplementary research method which I used is Qualitative research method because without qualitative results, it cannot be obtained to get delicate solutions for the students' problems in learning Japanese as a second language. Therefore, my second research objective is to conduct an interview to get delicate in-depth findings to compare between Good and Bad both Thai and Chinese students. The key informants for the qualitative part of mixed method research were randomly and proportionally selected from the quantitative sample of 117 students in 2018, and 82 students in 2019 academic years re-

spectively. They consisted of 12 students divided into four groups of three good grade Chinese students, three good grade Thai students, three bad grade Chinese students, and three bad grade Thai students in terms of their grades in IJP 101 Japanese language 1 class.

For interviewing those randomly selected 12 students, I did personally meet and interview each one of them. I did use my smartphone to record their interviews usually after the class or outside of the Japanese class. All of them did kindly cooperate with my interview. However, there were many papers of a macro level study using units of analysis as institutions such as a paper by the Japan Foundation conducting research for the Japanese language education as second language in university level education worldwide. In contrast, there is a few researchers conducted a micro level study for the Japanese language education as a second language in class at universities abroad, and published research papers in the academic journals. Therefore, I struggled to find useful academic journals and research papers to read and to analyze the beliefs, problems and solutions for the students learning Japanese as a second language at universities abroad. Gamage (2003), Fujiwara (2018) and Osumi (2019) are very few researchers who conducted research and published an article on the beliefs, problems and the solutions for Japanese language learners. Their research papers were useful for me to understand the research significance to the problems, obstacles and the solutions for the Japanese language learners as a second language. Therefore, the main limitation of this study is that there are very few researchers who have previously conducted research on the beliefs, problems, and the solution for the Japanese language learners in a classroom level at universities, it is very hard to find literature reviews in this research topic.

Furthermore, the research target in this research paper is for those who are my students who belong to Japanese 1 class in the years 2018 and 2019, and they were all at beginner's level in Japanese language class. However, for my next research paper, the research target will be an intermediate to an advanced level Japanese language learners in a private university in Bangkok, Thailand. Those students at the beginner's level Japanese 1 class at a private university in Bangkok Thailand, their reason, motivation, expectations, aim and aptitude might not be the same as those students in the intermediate and in an advanced level Japanese language in class at university level. Therefore, I will be able to compare and contrast various differences in beliefs, problems and solutions in learning Japanese language between beginner's level Japanese language learners and intermediate/advanced level Japanese language learners. For the next research paper, I would conduct further research on the beliefs, problems and solutions of Japanese language learners to find out if an intermediate level and an advanced level learners have the same beliefs and the problems for learning Japanese language as the beginner's level learners.

In addition, data results collected from 2018 to 2019 are still relevant and useful in 2021 and beyond. This is because the results from the quantitative analysis on learning problems of the Japanese as a second language (e.g., speaking with correct pronunciation; listening and understanding correctly; memorizing, reading and writing Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji characters) will not significantly change over the course of two academic years. Moreover, the assessment method for students learning Japanese as a second language remains the same - written midterm, final and oral exams. It should be noted that the qualitative data re-

sults show that those students who were awarded a grade A had more language aptitude, and they studied through more conventional means. In contrast, those students who were awarded a grade B plus or below had a higher language barrier did not necessarily engage with conventional methods and therefore, did have an impact on their overall learning. With this in mind, the quantitative and qualitative data analysis over the last two years remains relevant in 2021, and it could be applied moving forward to explain and understand the challenges of learning and teaching Japanese as a second language.

## 6. Suggestion :

To compile some different study suggestions for learning or improving your Japanese language in both formal and non-traditional ways. There are suggestions for all levels of Japanese language learners. There are different methods for learning Japanese as a second language that would be useful to students.

### WHY SHOULD YOU LEARN JAPANESE?

Japanese is an official language of Japan. Whether you are visiting Japan as a tourist or on a business trip, the Japanese language is going to be helpful in navigating the streets, finding hidden gems, and making friends with Japanese people. Learning the Japanese language can expand your mind to a replacement world of various cultures, food, literature, games, anime, and much more. It also can provide you with job opportunities either in Japan or help set you aside from other candidates during your job search in your home country.

### **Japanese Language Study Suggestion 1 : Start and Master the Basics**

There are three different alphabets within the Japanese language : Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji. Mastering both Hiragana and Katakana characters is a crucial initiative in fully reading and writing in Japanese language, and it can be the baseline knowledge needed to continue advancing on your Japanese language level. While it is going to be daunting, taking this initiative will assist you learn vocabulary more easily. Hiragana and Katakana are often easily learned through flashcards, and may be memorized within a few days counting on what proportion of time you are taking to recollect each character. I definitely suggest not only recognizing the Hiragana and Katakana characters but also writing them in order to memorize them. Learning a number of the essential Kanji characters will certainly be needed as you progress onto subsequent levels of Japanese language. Then, you simply learn a couple of them after mastering both Hiragana and Katakana characters.

### **Japanese Language Study Suggestion 2: Set Goals**

Establishing goals for learning is important for you to stay yourself on target and continuously motivated. It is often very easy to offer to withdraw your studies when not sticking to non-public goals that you simply have set for learning a replacement language. Coming from personal experience, if you outline concepts, vocabulary, and grammar points to find out throughout the months during a calendar, which makes it easier to understand what exactly you would like to master within the week or month. By setting a deadline, you are more

likely to be determined to figure towards studying before that set time. Otherwise, it is very easy to procrastinate and drag on a particular topic or concept for months. As a beginner, I suggest ending hebdomadally by first learning Hiragana characters, and then Katakana characters the following week. Afterwards, if employing a textbook, try breaking every fortnight by each lesson, so you will have time to master vocabulary and basic grammar points which will be essential building blocks for advancing your Japanese as you progress through each lesson. By doing so, you are ready to see which lessons and grammar points you have learned over time which makes it easier for you to travel back and review. The simplest part about having textbooks to guide your learning is that they are going to often feature a kanji section for every lesson's vocabulary. This makes it easier for you to plan out what kanji to find out and therefore, the time-frame during which you will be ready to memorize it.

### Japanese Language Study Suggestion 3: Learning through You tube Videos

Learning a language is much easier when you are learning about something you are interested in. You tube is a complementary and useful way for everyone to learn new languages in general and Japanese language in specific. An example of how you can learn through your interests is by watching YouTube videos of contents that interest you, in Japanese language. For example, if you enjoy cooking, find a YouTube video on Japanese cuisine where the chef is speaking in Japanese, and read the subtitles in your native language or also English subtitles (to upgrade your both English and Japanese language skills). You could also learn by watching Japanese Youtubers who also have subtitles available in your native language. YouTube also has a variety of formal Japanese tutorials that teach you important terms, phrases, and sentence structures. There are also many videos featuring songs or graphics that make it easier to remember Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji characters.

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