

A Study of the Problems of Japanese Language Education in Thai High Schools

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ABSTRACT

This research is a survey of Thai teachers' opinions towards problems relating to Japanese language education in high schools. The aims of the study are to investigate: (1) the characteristics of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools; (2) the expected standards of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools; (3) the opinions of Thai teachers' towards problems in Japanese language education in high schools; and (4) the needs for development among Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools. The findings will be used as a guideline to improve the standards of Thai teachers and to prepare students for Japanese language education at universities.

Concerning the characteristics of Thai teachers, most respondents were older than 41 years old, held a Bachelor's Degree, and did not major in Japanese. The study reveals that the expected standards of high-school Japanese language teachers should include: (1) a Japanese major degree; (2) Japanese language teaching experience; (3) participation in training, seminars or field trips both locally and abroad; (4) the ability to apply creativity and technology in teaching; (5) the ability to develop and encourage student-centered learning activities; and (6) the ability to improve teaching by conducting research and writing textbooks. Regarding problems with teaching Japanese language in high schools, the findings reveal a moderate level of problems. In the teachers' opinions, the most important problems were: (1) problems relating to students; (2) problems relating to learning and teaching support; and (3) problems relating to teachers, respectively. In terms of needs for learning and teaching development, the teachers reported high levels of needs in every aspect, especially field trips abroad and information technology (IT) training.

In conclusion, it is recommended that Thai teachers should improve their Japanese language competence as well as research skills to better their learning and teaching. The teachers were enthusiastic to improve their teaching, especially through the use of IT. However, it is reported that teachers did not receive sufficient support in terms of personnel development and learning-teaching equipment. As such, the management of high schools and universities should provide support by means of budgeting, personnel development and knowledge in order to increase efficiency of Japanese language education in high schools which, in turn, will prepare students for their study at a university level. As a result, quality of Japanese language education in Thailand will be promoted at all educational levels.

Keywords: *Japanese language education, standards of Thai teachers, needs for development*

I. INTRODUCTION

From Japan Foundation conducted a survey in 2009, and found that Thailand has 78,802 students who study Japanese language across the country and 1,240 teachers who teach Japanese. It is estimated that half of students who studied Japanese in Thailand were at the high school level and the number of students attending high schools is obviously increasing. Thus, the study of Japanese language at high school level is important because it provides the educational foundation for continuous learning at higher education. However, the opinions of teachers at the university level, revealed through in-depth interviews, that qualifications of some students who had studied Japanese language since the high school level do not

reach the expected standard. It shows from the placement test result which affect to the managing of studying and teaching Japanese language at the university level. Why students who are the outcome of the Japanese language education in high schools were evaluated to be not qualifying for the expected criterion when they study in the university level? Some universities require students to undertake a Japanese intensive course in their first year.

The researchers aim to study the problems and obstacles in the managing of Japanese language education at the high school level by focusing on teachers because they are the most influential factor. Any educational plans or policies cannot achieve their goals if they do not have adequate teachers. These circumstances surrounding both the problems and obstacles have an affect on the standard

and quality of teachers and finally impact on the qualifications and standards of the students. Therefore, the qualifications and opinions of teachers are key to driving up educational standards. This research studies the circumstances of problems in Japanese language education at high school level by focusing on Thai teachers who teach Japanese language and their opinions towards such problems. This research will yield valuable information for use in the improvement of teacher qualifications. The findings give strong indications as to how the standard of Japanese language education at Thai high schools can be improved and thus will have benefits when those students study further at universities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Japanese language education in Thailand began to be taught in a systematic way around the 1960s with support from the Japanese government. In 1965, Thammasat University's Faculty of Liberal Arts began teaching Japanese language. Subsequently, public and private universities launched Japanese language courses and began Japanese language major programs. For example, Thammasat University launched a program majoring in Japanese language in 1982.

Not only Japanese language teaching-learning rapidly expanding at university level, but also at high school level. Since 1999, Japanese language has been included as an elective subject for university entrance examinations. This expansion is the result of demand from Japanese companies in Thailand who have invested heavily in the country as well as due to increased demand for personnel who are proficient in Japanese language as the economy has expanded. Funding for Japanese language education has been supported by the Japan Foundation.

In the late 1990s, Japanese language education was first taught at master's degree level. Thammasat University's Faculty of Liberal Arts launched a master's degree program in Japanese Studies in 1997. Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts launched more master's degree program in 2007. Naresuan University launched a master program in Japanese Studies in 2009.

In 2004, Khonkaen University's Faculty of Education launched a course in teaching Japanese. Subsequently, Burapha University's Faculty of Education launched a similar course in 2005. In 2007, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology opened a Japanese language programs in the Faculty of Information Technology and the Faculty of Business Administration's Industrial Management major in order to prepare their students for entering the industrial sector.

In 50 years, Japanese language education has grown both in term of quantity and quality. It should be noted that half of the students of Japanese language in Thailand were students in high school level in 2009, and this num-

ber is continuously increasing. While students in higher education accounted for 27.8 percent of the total number of students who study Japanese in Thailand, the growth rate is rather stable. Thus, the managing of Japanese language education at the high school level is of most consequence.

2.2 Japanese language education at the high school level

2.2.1 Policy, Curriculum

In 1981, Japanese language was assigned into the curriculum of high schools as a foreign language. The cabinet announced that Japanese was one of the 17 areas of shortage in Thailand. It was specified in policy of the Ministry of Education on the study of foreign languages in 1996 as:

"To produce GLOBAL CITIZENS for the 21st century in order to solve the problem of shortage of manpower competent in languages. Priorities regarding foreign languages to be promoted are:

1. English
2. Languages of neighbouring countries
3. Chinese, Japanese, Korean
4. Other Western and Eastern languages"

(Cited in Skulkru 2007)

Since 2008, the Ministry of Education adopted the core curriculum of basic education. The content for the group of learning foreign languages in summary includes: (1) aims to provide students with a positive attitude towards foreign languages; (2) have the ability to use foreign languages for communication in any situation; (3) increase of knowledge, for occupational use and further study at higher levels; (4) increase knowledge and understanding among people and the cultural diversity of the world community; and (5) can convey ideas and Thai culture to the world creatively.

Currently, the managing of Japanese language education at high school level is operated under a framework of core curriculum of basic education as above mentioned. The Japanese language education at high schools can be divided into three types:

Teaching Japanese language as a foreign language with a plan and requirement for studying sessions of 5-6 periods per week (50 minutes per period).

Teaching Japanese language as an elective subject with sessions of 2-3 periods per week (50 minutes per period)

Teaching Japanese language as a class activity with 1 study session per week (50 minutes per week).

Though the core curriculum is mutual, the studying and teaching may vary depending on several factors such as the management policy of each high school, individual teachers, numbers of students and supporting factors.

2.2.2 Textbooks

Jongsutjarittam, Skulkru, Sattayapong (2004) conducted a survey for basic Japanese textbooks used in Thailand and found that the most popular included: (1) Nihongo Shoho; (2) Minna no Nihongo (1-2); (3) Shin Nihongo no Kiso (1-2); and (4) Nihongo Yoroshiku (1-4), respectively.

In 2004, a Japanese textbook named 'Akiko to Tomodachi (1-6)' which produces only for Thai high school students was released. This textbook was developed with the cooperation of the Japan Foundation and the Ministry of Education for teaching Japanese language at the Thai high school level. Approximately 80 percent of high schools used these textbooks in their studying and teaching. (Sangthongsuk and Hatta, 2006)

Since the late 1990s, Japanese language has been one of foreign languages which the Ministry of Education has promoted as a basic educational requirement and it has increased significantly in terms of quantity. There are efforts by many agencies to cooperate for the development of teachers and textbooks together with teaching materials in order to improve their quality.

2.2.3 Japanese language and university entrance examination

In 1998, Japanese language was included in the university entrance examination as elective subject. The first examination was in October 1998. The examinations were held in October and March of each year until it was replaced by the admissions system or the central university admissions system. This newer system uses the results of high school for calculation and organizes Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) and Advanced National Educational Test (A-NET). Japanese language is an elective subject for A-NET, which is held once a year. In 2009 it changed to be the Professional and Academic Aptitude Test (PAT). PAT is organized three times a year and allows students in Mathayom 5 (grade 11) to participate.

Since the inclusion of Japanese language as an elective subject in the examination for higher education in October 1998 until 2010, the number of candidates increased steadily as shown in Table 1

Table 1 – Number of Japanese language candidates for university entrance examination

Source : Jongsutjarittam, Skulkru, & Sattayapong (2004), Chirasombutti (2006) and information from National Institute of Educational Testing Service (2010)

Month	Year	Number of candidates
October	1998	424
March	1999	409
October	1999	745

March	2000	656
October	2000	1,452
March	2001	1,338
October	2001	1,984
March	2002	1,491
October	2002	2,240
March	2003	2,054
October	2003	2,982
March	2004	2,516
October	2004	3,802
March	2005	3,390
March	2006	2,918
March	2007	3,418
March	2008	3,697
March*	2009	3,791
1/2009 (March)	2009	4,827
2/2009 (July)	2009	6,662
3/2009 (October)	2009	3,460
1/2010 (March)	2010	2,629
2/2010 (July)	2010	2,920
3/2010 (October)	2010	3,460

*Remark : The last A-NET test in March 2009 and the first PAT testing

The changing of the selection system for higher education and the changing of Japanese language education system of high school level has contributed to the model of managing Japanese language education in higher education. Some universities are starting to come through the admissions system which means that students who prefer to study in higher education must have studied Japanese language previously. Some universities accept students who have passed Japanese language testing in the admission system and students who never studied Japanese language before entering university. Thus, the management of education in higher education is more diverse.

2.2.4 Number of institutes, students and teachers

The 2009 Japan Foundation survey found that there were 242 high schools that taught Japanese language and the numbers of students was 38,685 with 415 teachers. Approximately 73.5 percent are Thai teachers. When the ratio of teacher and students at high school is calculated using this survey, 1:93.2 is the result.

2.2.5 Characteristics of teachers

Nohata & Ngamchantakorn (2006) state that most teachers at the high school level were not Japanese major graduates. Because of the shortage of manpower, they have to teach Japanese language parallel with other subjects.

In 1994, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Japan Foundation began the Secondary School Japanese Language Teacher Training Program for teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools. Partici-

pants were teachers who lacked basic knowledge of Japanese language. They were trained in Japanese language at Japan Foundation, Bangkok for 10 months and then went back to teach Japanese language in their schools. During that period, they must continuously adhere to the training of the Japan Foundation. They were required to participate in training at Japan Foundation in Japan for seven weeks. Approximately 200 teachers were produced and returned to their high schools between 1994 and 2008.

2.3 Problems in Japanese language education in Thailand

Sitasuwan (1992) found that the problem in Japanese language studies in Thailand was the shortage of teachers. In addition, it found a problem in terms of teacher's qualifications because teachers were not professional in teaching languages, lacked the right training, and never went to Japan. Regarding the problem of manpower shortage, the main reasons were compensation and social values and changing to work with private companies. Others were the lack of appropriate Japanese textbooks and no association for teachers who teach Japanese language in Thailand to join.

The result of a Japan Foundation survey in 2009 showed that problems in managing Japanese education in Thailand were: (1) inadequate textbooks; (2) shortage of teachers; (3) lack of students' enthusiasm; (4) shortage of equipment and tools; and (5) inadequate Japanese knowledge and capability of teachers, respectively.

2.4 Problems in Japanese language education at the high school level

Chirasombutti & Kitamura (1996) state that the important elements that should be developed for the management of Japanese language education at the high school level were the development of textbooks and teaching methods together with the development of knowledge and Japanese ability of teachers.

The 2009 survey indicated that problems in Japanese language education at the high school level in Thailand were: (1) inadequate textbooks; (2) shortage of equipment and tools; (3) shortage of teachers; (4) inadequate knowledge and teaching ability of teachers; and (5) inadequate information about textbooks and teaching methods. Banchongmanee (2009) stated that problem issues towards Japanese language education at the high school level were the shortage of teachers and they were not qualified. In summary, the teacher is the main problem in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

In addition, Maeda et al., (2001) also discussed the problem related to questions in the entrance examination for higher education and the problem associated with Japanese language education at the high school and university level.

2.5 Nature and the development for teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools

The National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (2003) conducted a survey of nature and opinions of teachers who teach Japanese language in Thailand and found that 90.2 percent of teachers who teach Japanese language in high school had experiences in attending training courses which taught Japanese language. And the number of courses in which they participated was 1-3. The most important factor in the development of knowledge and Japanese using ability of teachers were experiences, training, talking with teachers from different institutes, using of textbooks and teaching media. For the requirement, Thai teachers needed a teaching manual, a grammar descriptive book, and voice media for Japanese learning.

Japanese language at the high school level has expanded significantly. The study at high schools is fundamental for higher education. However, the study of Japanese at high school still has its problems including: (1) teachers (inadequate knowledge and ability of using Japanese and teaching skill, shortage of teachers); (2) learning sources (textbooks, information for textbooks, teaching methods); (3) equipment and tools; and (4) students (lacking of students' enthusiasm). However, the teacher, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, remains the highest priority of problems.

III. THE STUDY

3.1 Objectives

- 1) To study characteristics of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools
- 2) To study expected standards of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools
- 3) To study Thai teachers' opinions towards problems in Japanese language education in high schools, and
- 4) To study needs for development among Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

Two methods of data collection were used including documentary research and in-depth interviews with university lecturers who teach Japanese in universities. It has interviews with high school teachers who teach Japanese language as well.

3.2.2 Quantitative Research

A questionnaire was created and developed from data from qualitative research.

- 1) Population: Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools. Those schools must have the teaching of Japanese language as a core or elective subject in Thailand.

2) Sample: The population is 415 teachers who teach in 242 high schools across Thailand. Approximately 73.5 percent of the 415 teachers are Thai, or 305 teachers. Therefore, the sample size was specified by using 20 percent of those 305 teachers. Thus, the sample size for the study is 61 teachers.

3) Sampling: Purposive Sampling was used by specifying Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools. Data collection by using questionnaire was done directly in the 3rd seminar of studying and teaching Japanese language 2010 and 13th seminar of Japanese Language and Culture Teachers Association of Thailand (JTAT) for 2010. In addition, the distribution of questionnaire via post and electronics mail was applied.

4) The test of tools used in research: Researchers developed a questionnaire for this research by studying guideline of questions from data obtained from interviews with experts in teaching Japanese language and relevant research papers. Then, they were applied to the hypothesis of this research. Researchers tested validity and reliability of questionnaire before distribution for reliable data collection as follows:

Test Validity: Experts corrected the questionnaire by considering its accuracy.

Test Reliability: It has Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for 0.97 which indicates with confidence that it can be used for asking questions.

3.3 Results and discussion

3.3.1 Quality standards and criteria of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools.

It finds that criteria which experts consider as appropriate to measure the quality of teachers as follows:

Table 2 – Criteria for measurement of teacher's quality

Quality of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools
1. Teachers should be Japanese major graduate.
2. Teachers should have experiences which have affect on the expertise in teaching and quality of teaching.
3. Teachers should attend seminar, training or participate in both domestic and overseas observation which affects the quality of teaching.
4. Teachers should develop teaching by conducting research and writing textbooks which affect the improvement of teachers.
5. The development of creative thinking and using technology to enhance the quality of teaching is necessary.
6. Teachers should promote activities in the classroom that allowing students to be variable.
7. The promotion and support of institutes and management can help improve the quality of studying and teaching.

3.3.2 Characteristics of Thai teachers

More than a half of Thai teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools are 41 years of age and above. They use existing teachers in other subjects to train with a Japanese training program to teach Japanese in high schools. Therefore, most of teachers are older and may be slower at studying a new language. Thus, the production of a new generation of teachers in parallel with the improvement of the previous generation is absolutely necessary.

In addition, approximately 68 percent of teachers graduated in other majors. The objective of a training program for Japanese teaching at the high school level is to establish a basic foundation in the language. Thus, most of teachers have sufficient knowledge at the beginner's level. For the studying and teaching in high schools, teachers must teach students the beginner's level and teach skills which are defined in the learning content. But if teachers only have knowledge at the level near to that of the students, obstacles to studying and teaching may emerge. Thus, the development in terms of knowledge and Japanese language ability is necessary and essential for teachers. If teachers have more knowledge in Japanese language, they will be more correct when using the language. The instruction will also be more correct. This will increase confidence in both the language and teaching. Ninety percent of teachers had attended training courses and half of them had participated in training at least once a year. This demonstrates the commitment of the teachers to constant self-improvement. This is an important factor in leading to change and development. They will have more confidence in their teaching, which is a key concept in human resource development (Amornrattanasak, 1995).

From in-depth interviews, it was found that some schools have some circumstances that may not be conducive such as workload or having to leave the government to be trained. But teachers are also keen to develop themselves. Therefore, if agencies or executives or related personnel provide support, teachers will be more able to improve themselves.

3.3.3 Opinions of Thai teachers towards circumstances of problems in the management of Japanese language education in high schools.

The problem of teachers

Teachers are lacking in skills to conduct research for the development of studying and teaching the most because teachers in high schools have numerous obligations and many teaching periods. In addition, they have a limited knowledge of Japanese language as aforementioned. In fact, support for conducting researches will help to improve the overall quality of studying and teaching of teachers. The research unit and institutes at university level can support and foster the development of research

Table 3 – Mean and standard deviation of teacher's opinions towards circumstances of problems in the managing of Japanese language education in high schools.

Circumstances of problems	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The problem of teachers	3.14	0.73
2. The problem of students	3.65	0.53
3. The problem of curriculum and textbooks	2.51	0.87
4. The problem of supporting factors	3.27	0.81
5. The Needs for developing of studying and teaching	4.06	0.66

* Remark : Total mean from 1-4 is 3.14 (Opinion towards problem is fair)

and the production of textbooks for teachers in high schools such as in the fields of human resources and collaborative research. The key problem of teachers in teaching Japanese language is the pronunciation issue. There are also problems in the teaching of Japanese writing with correctness being the main problem. They have problems in teaching listening and speaking too. These problems result from the teachers' limited knowledge of Japanese. The short-term training in Japan only 1-2 times in 10-15 school years, and cannot possibly create the confidence to listen, speak, pronounce correctly in Japanese, let alone develop adequate writing skills. If native teachers were to join in teaching with Thai teachers, this may help to ameliorate the shortage and workload of teachers. If schools can establish cooperation with the Japanese agencies or other voluntary organizations to send Japanese teachers in short-term, it may go some way toward solving the problem.

The support the production of Thai Japanese language teachers at high schools, including opening a course for teachers training can diminish the shortage of high school teachers at this level. Though the production of a new generation of teachers is important, the development of existing teachers is also essential as well.

The problem of students

Most of teachers are of the opinions that the biggest problem facing students is the lack of opportunity to use Japanese language outside the classroom. This is because students are studying Japanese language outside of Japan. Vongvanich (2004) states that the real life, actual environment outside the classroom is the key factor in determining knowledge, ability and skills of students. The story of a real event, situation, real condition or similar condition encountered in daily life will be a stimulus for students to express themselves through action, especially in the study of language. Language needs the opportunity to be used. Students who study Japanese language in

Thailand are lacking the opportunity to practice or test the use of correct communication. Therefore, activities which take advantage of modern IT media to develop studying and teaching will open more opportunities to use Japanese language, as a virtual situation can make the learning experience more practical and provide practice.

In addition, teachers think that students have problems in listening and speaking Japanese together with Kanji. The problems of teachers with speaking and pronunciation were passed through to their students, resulting in students' having the same listening and speaking problems. Teachers believe that students have problems in Japanese language skills at the high level (average 3.94). Those problems cannot be solved within classes of only 50 minutes duration. Thus, the application of IT media in self-learning is important to resolving this problem (Methapisit 2009).

However, teachers do not agree with the belief that students lack of success in studying Japanese language is caused by the teacher (Jitbantao 2010). Therefore, changing the attitude and belief in education are important. Even though teachers hold a degree in education, continuous training is still essential.

In the case of students themselves, it has not showed problem of unlike for Japanese language. So teachers can gain attraction from students easily. However, it was found that students were lacking in patience with the practice of Japanese. From in-depth interviews, it was found that this trend among teenager may be related to the computer age.

The problem of curriculum and Japanese textbooks

The majority of the sample stated their opinion regarding the curriculum as having the least level of problem overall. However, most of participants think that content was not appropriately sequenced from easy to difficult. This may be the result of unprofessional teachers who created the curriculum, as well as learning contents and budget limitations.

Teachers need to apply textbooks and methods in managing studying and teaching to be more suitable for their circumstances. They do not need to teach from the beginning to the end of curriculum or textbook. They can adapt the ordering of activities. They need to take into consideration timing, human resources and budget. However, teachers need to understand the key elements of contents before adapting them to attain maximum results. Furthermore, the contents of the curriculum need to consider the linkage to the university level.

The problem of supporting factors

The majority of the sample group were of the opinion that the lack of funding to support the school's activities was the most significant problem, followed by lack of teachers who are native speakers, which is in according with the interviews with experts who also considered native

speakers should be encouraged to volunteer in teaching Japanese in schools.

Sirimanakul (2001) found the importance of activities in schools to be supported by executives to improve teaching and learning; and the lack of funding and the support are critical to the management of Japanese language education. This researcher also found a problem of lack of proper funding is a major problem in English education as well.

To resolve these problems, executives will have to be aware of the problems and listen to teachers. Regarding the study of educational problems, it was found that students lacked the opportunity to use Japanese outside the classroom. The teachers realize this and prefer to set additional activities, but there is a lack of funding to support such activities. Education is an investment so the management at both the school level and national level must be aware of such problems and be active in their search for solutions. Otherwise, Japanese language education in Thailand will not reach world class standard, which is a target of the Ministry of Education.

The needs for developing of studying and teaching

Most of those sampled preferred to have observation overseas and would like to have training in Japanese both domestically and overseas with a time frame of less than one month, to include training in production and use of teaching media. Teachers need to participate in training or continue studying in Thailand and abroad, and need to be specifically trained in the country of the native language which they are teaching as language exists as a integral part of culture. It can be said that the language and culture are the same thing. This type of training has the most benefits for the development of higher quality teachers.

In addition, teachers realize the importance of adaptation of IT media to solve the limiting factors in teaching Japanese language. The topic of IT media and the use of teaching media for learning should be first priority for training. Methapisit (2009) conducted a survey to ascertain the attitude of teachers who teach Japanese language in high schools. She found that teachers preferred to improve their skills in using of innovative and electronic media in order to develop efficiency and keep the attention of students and stimulate their learning and understanding. She also stated that 89 percent have a computer that can connect to the Internet at school and 61.5 percent have a computer that can connect to the Internet from home.

Although Internet penetration is still at a lower level, teachers have expressed their readiness and eagerness to learn how to use it in their teaching. They have a demand for various electronic media to improve teaching and learning. Thus, it is necessary to promote the development of teachers in this regard.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Japanese language education in Thailand on curriculum and textbooks has been developed and teachers who use them do not think that this is the central problem facing teachers and students. What management agencies and stakeholders need to consider are the problems of teachers and external supporting factors. The characteristics of teachers have to be developed in terms of knowledge, ability to use and teach Japanese, including their skills to conduct research for the development of studying and teaching. Furthermore, teachers were also keen to improve their teaching especially in regards to the application of IT media to increase the attention of students. However, they find a lack of support in improvement of knowledge, equipment and tools. Thus, executives managing high schools and universities can improve their support through budget, human resources and knowledge. If these findings are addressed, it will have a significant impact on Japanese language education in high schools, which in turn will create good quality students ready for higher education and can be a factor in reducing the problem of learning Japanese language in higher education arising from differences in the quality of students from different high schools. If the educational foundation at high school level is of good quality, the Japanese language in Thailand will improve at all levels.

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