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## Migrant-oriented Japanese language programs in Tokyo



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### Abstract

Language proficiency is identified as one of the most important factors for successful migrant integration. Japan has had a sizeable increase of migrants in the past few years, and these migrants needed to build their Japanese proficiency. Focusing on municipalities in the 23 Tokyo wards, we surveyed what types of Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) programs are available, and how this information is disseminated to the public. It was encouraging that the central government and the government agencies of Tokyo have created language policies and produced handbooks for JSL teachers. All except one ward in Tokyo offer information about JSL programs in their respective ward, and many programs were run by the municipalities or by volunteer groups, suggesting an institutionalized move for supporting language education for migrants. We also identified two points that need to be considered for a better language education system for migrants: (a) a need for a certification program for JSL teachers and (b) a need for developing a language proficiency test that does not assume studying in an academic program.

**Keywords:** migrants in Japan, language proficiency, Japanese as a Second Language (JSL), language policy, Tokyo wards

### Introduction

Keys for the successful integration of migrants into society are multi-faceted, but language proficiency is often identified as one of the most important factors for stable integration. Lower language proficiency presents challenges accessing basic services in the host country. As language is

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inherently a complex system, migrants not only need to learn the vocabulary of a new language, but also acquire the grammar and the pronunciation as well as pragmatic nuances to fully function as a member of the community. Developing language proficiency is time-consuming and migrants often have limited time and resources to invest in improving their language skills. In many cases, migrants must develop linguistic proficiency for their work which is critical for communicating with local residents.

This paper explores findings from a survey examining migrant-oriented Japanese language programs in Tokyo. Japanese language programs for adult migrants and children are promoted by a majority of the 23 wards in Tokyo. Given the influx of migrants who fill the domestic labor shortage market, Japanese language education programs are essential for migrants integrating into Japanese society. This study examines how current programs in municipalities in Tokyo are operated and what opportunities migrants have in improving their Japanese proficiency.

Japan is not unique in accepting a large number of migrants, and migrant programs in European countries provide a useful comparison. The experience from European countries is comparable to Japan because of their acceptance of diverse migrants into a society that members considered as being homogenous. Germany has been accepting migrants called guest workers (*Gastarbeiter* in German) due to the shortage in the labor force during the booming post-war economy. Since the 1950s, migrants have been coming to Germany from southern and eastern European countries (Italy, Greece, Portugal, Yugoslavia) as well as northern African countries (Morocco and Tunisia) based on bilateral agreements between the German government and the other governments. Although these migrants were essential in the story of building the modern German society, they are often not included in the curriculum offered in German departments (cf. Veteto-Conrad, 1992).

The status of these guest workers was supposed to be temporary, and returning to their home country was expected, but many of the guest workers stayed in Germany. To communicate with the native population, the guest workers developed a type of a contact language that soon became a topic of several studies. (Clyne, 1968, 1977; Fennell, 1998; Gökçe, 1990; Hinnenkamp, 1982; Hüllen, 1981; Keim, 1978, 1982; Pfaff, 1981).

In recent years, different types of migrants have entered Germany. The refugees from the Middle East and other areas have the goal of settling down in Germany, which means that they must learn the German language to survive in the new environment. As such, German language education has become a major point for these migrants as the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (in German: BAMF) stated and local organizations took this responsibility (Bommes, 2008: 210). These migrants are different from the repatriates in the 90s who are ethnic Germans coming from Eastern Europe and Russia (Ortloff & Frey, 2007), but they received a similar type of support concerning German language education. Even in the presence of such policies, a school in Berlin recently reignited the debate about whether the German language proficiency of migrants is sufficient or not (Martin, 2008).

Studies that examine integration patterns of migrants with the local community in European countries have repeatedly argued the importance of local language education: France (Gardin, 1976; Noyau, 1976), Norway (Gjerstad *et al.*, 2015), European Union (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017; Maxwell, 2010), Finland (Masoud *et al.*, 2020), United Kingdom (Ryan *et al.*, 2010), Hungary (Rusu, 2011), and Iceland (Innes, 2020). Countries that have a long history of migration such as Australia also emphasizes English language education (Clyne, 2011). Refugees in the USA often settle down with the help of charity organizations. They offer basic English education before placing refugees in work programs. Language proficiency is usually measured via a standardized test. The

language benchmark model in Canada is such a case (Jezak, 2017). Migrants take a placement test in Finland (Tammelin-Laine *et al.*, 2018), and migrant children with a Muslim background are reported to integrate better when they are bilingual in their parents' language and the local language (Nachmani, 2017, p. 8).

Of course, not all migrants undergo the same experience. Migrants who serve as an augmented workforce in a country experience higher pressure for integration evidenced by a requirement for language proficiency. Professional expats often experience less strict language requirements given their specialized expertise demanded by society. In European countries, job advertisements requiring local language proficiency within three years are not uncommon. In Quebec, migrants are offered public education in the French medium schools, but not in English medium schools.

In Asian countries, requirements for proficiency in local languages are more flexible. The long-term residency visa program in Korea has higher points if an applicant has Korean proficiency based on a standardized test, but the Korean language is not necessarily required. A recent study reports the Korean language proficiency of migrant women in Korea (Yang *et al.*, 2020), and length of residence as well as the degree of exposure to the Korean language predicted their proficiency levels. Before the change in the naturalization law, marriage migrants simply demonstrated their Korean language proficiency (H. Lee, 2015), however, currently, marriage migrants are required to take the naturalization test or to attend 650 hours of Korean language and culture programs (J. Lee, 2010). Migrant language education is also needed when a migrant group comes from different socio-economic backgrounds. Based on an analysis of discrimination experienced by immigrants, Seong (2019) frames language proficiency of migrants as a human right issue and suggests a development of multicultural human rights programs in Korea. When defectors from North Korea settle down in South Korea, they need to learn vocabulary and expressions that are used in various social contexts; a textbook was developed to help such migrants to embrace their new life in South Korea (National Institute of Korean Language, 2013).

The highly skilled professional program in Japan does not have a Japanese language requirement, though education credentials in Japan translate into points that are beneficial for entering Japan under this program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). Language policies toward migrants changed in Japanese history. Government-funded language centers were established to assist families returning from Manchuria after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War or refugees from Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). Such institutionalized government support in language education was not available for migrants from South America who were Japanese descendants living in Brazil and Peru; these migrants received permanent residence visas regardless of their Japanese proficiency, and systematic support for their Japanese language proficiency was absent (Ortloff & Frey, 2007). In a comparative study, Ortloff & Frey (2007, p. 465) summarize the differences that returnees experienced in Germany versus in Japan. While the German returnees were given a variety of social benefits, the Japanese returnees were not. Despite these differences, both countries commonly neglected formal language education for returnee migrants; instead, both countries heavily relied on volunteer teachers.

Being a non-native speaker is challenging to anyone, but it is particularly so if one's socio-economic level is not high in the migrated society. Marked grammatical errors and not fully understanding pragmatic situations can exacerbate these difficulties. As such, identifying and reviewing migrant-oriented language programs in Tokyo where the migrant population is high serves as a measure for estimating the current status of language learning opportunities for migrants in Tokyo. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: First, an overview about migrants in Tokyo is presented, followed by the methods of collecting data regarding migrant-oriented Japanese language

education programs in Tokyo. After summarizing the results based on Japanese learning opportunities and organizations that run language programs, we discuss three further issues concerning Japanese language education in the 23 inner wards of Tokyo.

### Migrants in Tokyo

Migrants who are integrating into Japanese society are known as “Seikatsu-sha” (生活者), which literally means a person who cohabits. The term Seikatsu-sha was used in Japanese government documents as early as 2006. In a document entitled *Seikatsusha toshite no gaikokujin ni kansuru sougouteki taiousaku* [Comprehensive plan for accommodating with foreigners as residents] published by a liaison board composed of several ministries, measures to improve foreign residents’ lives were compiled. This document reported that since 2006, the government has been promoting volunteer groups to establish Japanese language classes and develop Japanese teaching materials. It proposed to improve the provision of public information in multiple languages and “Yasashii Nihongo” (simple/easy Japanese). It also announced that the JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) curriculum had been developed for elementary and junior high schools, and outlined the plan to assign teachers for JSL education and implement workshops for the teachers (Gaikokujin Roudousha Mondai Kankei Shouchou Renraku Kaigi, 2006).

It is only in the past few years that migrants’ language education has received more attention from the central government. In 2019, the law “Basic Policy for the Comprehensive and Effective Implementation of Measures to Promote Japanese Language Education” (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2019) was enacted; until then no legal obligations for Japanese language education for their migrant residents were imposed on municipalities. In 2020, the central government issued a report with six parts that promotes Japanese language education for non-native speakers. The six areas are (i) opportunities at the workplace, (ii) understanding by members of the society, (iii) teacher training, (iv) curriculum development, (v) Japanese proficiency assessment, and (vi) promotion of research on Japanese language education (cf. Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2019).

In an overview of the history of migrants and their situation in Japan, Haines *et al.* (2007) observe that the Japanese society expects migrants to culturally assimilate although opportunities for such assimilation are rare due to the non-compulsory schooling of migrant children, and less support for adult migrants. Menju (2015) provides an overview of recent immigration into Japan and describes challenges that migrants face in Japanese society. He identifies how Japanese language education is mostly carried out by initiatives funded by Civil Society Organizations (Menju, 2015, pp. 35-37), which is similarly reported in European countries (Cullen, 2017).

In sum, migrants in Tokyo form diverse groups based on their contexts of reception (economic reasons, professional reasons, political reasons, etc.), the country of origin, or the ancestry relationship with Japan. What these groups of migrants have in common is the need to learn the Japanese language to successfully integrate into Japanese society. The next section describes the methodologies that were adopted in this paper to investigate the current status of Japanese language programs in Tokyo.

### Data Collection and Results

To examine the status of immigrants and the Japanese language education in Tokyo, we first collected pilot data to understand the types of available data and also the number of non-Japanese residents in the inner Tokyo area. Based on this data, we formulated research questions when researching on individual wards concerning the present situation on Japanese language learning opportunities.

## **Pilot data collection and results**

Under the assumption that the number of foreigners in a ward would correlate with the opportunities for Japanese language learning, the number of foreigners based on nationalities<sup>1</sup> in each special ward of Tokyo<sup>2</sup> was collected from the website of the Statistics Division of the Bureau of General Affairs. Among the 23 wards, Shinjuku, Edogawa, and Adachi were selected for an in-depth pilot investigation because they show the highest numbers of foreigners. Shinjuku is located in the central west, and both Edogawa and Adachi are located in the northeastern part of Tokyo wards. During this stage of the study, the opportunities for Japanese language education for foreigners were searched through the information available on official ward websites and the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (TMBE, 2019).

The official ward-run websites of Shinjuku and Adachi have pages devoted to introducing Japanese language learning opportunities for foreigners living in the wards. Shinjuku (Shinjuku City, 2021) has government-funded and voluntary Japanese classes varying in levels, target learners, class frequency, and the amount of registration fee. The full information of these classes is available in four languages: Japanese, English, simplified Chinese, and Korean. Adachi does not offer government-funded Japanese classes but offers Japanese classes through multiple voluntary groups (Civil Society Organizations in Menju, 2015). The list of Japanese classes is accessible in Japanese, English, simplified Chinese, and Korean. Although Edogawa had a sizeable number of foreign residents from China (15,328), India (5,029), and Korea (4,169) in 2020, the ward does not provide information for Japanese learning opportunities as a local government; however, a link to an external website directs migrants to a public interest incorporated foundation that offers a list of voluntary Japanese classes. In all three wards, the minimum age requirement for attending the Japanese language classes was high school; Japanese language education for students up to junior high school is supervised by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT).

The results of the pilot data collection from the three wards (Shinjuku, Edogawa, and Adachi) revealed that the number of foreign residents does not correlate with the quality of information available on ward websites, or the number of languages that is used in disseminating information for the local foreign residents.

## **Research questions**

After learning about types of Japanese language programs and Japanese learning opportunities based on the pilot data from three wards (Shinjuku, Edogawa, and Adachi), we formed the following research questions to expand data collection to all the 23 wards so that we better understand Japanese language education opportunities in inner wards of Tokyo.

- What type of information is available regarding Japanese learning opportunities in each municipality?
- Who are the main organizations (public or private) in running these JSL learning opportunities?

First, if Japanese language learning opportunities are available, we expect that the content of the information is created for the target population: non-Japanese speakers. In addition to information in Japanese, relevant information would be available in English or other non-Japanese languages. The information could also be available in “Yasashii Nihongo” (simple/easy Japanese) that allows low proficiency speakers to gain access to available information. Second, the Japanese language learning opportunities can be provided by public or private organizations. Who is running these Japanese

classes, and what is the role of municipalities in offering Japanese learning opportunities? Whether the organizers of Japanese language classes are municipalities is a non-trivial issue. Language programs that are run by public municipalities and private organizations need to coexist, and identifying the organizers in the case of Tokyo will allow us to understand the current situation that migrants face when they want to improve their language proficiency by enrolling in Japanese language programs.

### Data collection

Since the number of foreigners in all 23 wards in Tokyo has been identified during the pilot study, data addressing the Japanese language education opportunities were collected for adult learners. The main methods were examining and analyzing information available on official websites of the wards or local NGOs. A Google Form with questions in (1) was used to organize the data taken from the websites, which are summarized in Table 1.

- (1) Questions leading to data organization during the main study
  - a. Does the ward's webpage offer direct information about Japanese language education? (direct information includes: name, contact, meeting dates, level, etc.)
  - b. What is the type of Japanese classes offered in the ward? (Direct classes offered by the ward, or classes offered by volunteer organizations)
  - c. In what languages is information available?
  - d. Is information available in “Yasashii Nihongo” (simple/easy Japanese)?

**Table 1** *Information of Japanese language learning opportunities available on official ward websites or external websites*

Ward	Information of Japanese language learning opportunities
Shinjuku	Information available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. A public interest incorporated foundation offers weekly Japanese classes at ten locations in the ward as well as classes for families. In addition, there are 11 Japanese classes taught by volunteer groups targeting all levels. (Shinjuku City, 2021; The Shinjuku Foundation for Creation of Future, n.d.)
Edogawa	No information or link available. Public interest incorporated foundation lists classes on an external website. There are 13 classes taught by volunteer groups. (Edogawa Volunteer Center, n.d.)
Adachi	Information available in Japanese, and English. There are 16 classes taught by volunteer groups. Lists are available in Japanese, English, Korean, and Simplified Chinese. (Adachi City, 2021)
Koto	Information available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. Seven classes up to advanced level with the possibility of private sessions are taught mostly by volunteers who completed a year of the training program offered by the ward. (Koto City, 2020)
Itabashi	No information or link available. The website of a public interest incorporated foundation provides information in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. In addition to classes offered by the foundation, nine volunteer groups are varying in levels from beginner to advanced with classes for elementary, junior high, and high school students, private classes, exam preparation classes, and classes offered in English, Chinese, Spanish, and Indonesian. (Itabashi Culture and International Exchange Foundation, 2021)

Toshima	Information available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. There are eight classes taught by volunteers, including two classes taught by students of Rikkyo University and Gakushuin University. Maps of Japanese classes are available in Japanese, English, Korean, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, Nepalese, and Burmese. (Toshima City, 2020)
Ota	Information available in Japanese and English. There are 18 classes taught by volunteer groups, including three classes specifically for elementary and junior-high-school students. Two of them provide academic support to foreign students. Lists are available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Nepalese, and Vietnamese. The lists include the top nationalities of students and textbooks used in each class. The ward website also provides links to a local NGO and online Japanese learning resources. (Ota City, 2021)
Katsushika	Information available in Japanese. There are nine volunteer classes taught including one class for elementary and junior-high-school students. Information on types of students and volunteers is provided. The same information is available on an external page in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, Korean, and Tagalog. (Katsushika City, 2021; Katsushika Symphony Hills, n.d.)
Setagaya	Information available in Japanese and English. The ward offers beginner-level classes every semester, and two of the four volunteer groups offer classes every weekday at different locations. (Setagaya City, 2021)
Kita	No information or link available. No local foundation provides information. One has to go to a non-ward-specific website to find classes taught by volunteer groups. Six volunteer groups are listed for the Kita ward. (Tokyo Nihongo Volunteer Network, n.d.)
Nerima	Information available in Japanese. The ward offers beginner classes and classes for elementary and junior-high-school students. There are 17 classes taught by volunteer groups. The list of volunteer classes is available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. (Nerima City, 2021)
Minato	Information available in Japanese. The ward offers two beginner levels of classes and a salon focusing on speaking. The leaflets are available in Japanese and English. There are twelve classes taught by volunteers including one class specifically for elementary and junior high schools. The lists of volunteer classes are available in Japanese and English. (Minato City, 2021)
Arakawa	A link to a public association website is available. It offers Japanese classes and a salon taught by volunteers. The information is only available in Japanese. (Arakawa City, 2021; Arakawa International Communications, n.d.)
Nakano	No information or link available. A public association website provides information in Japanese, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. It offers two classes to adult learners and elementary and junior-high-school students. The classes are taught by volunteers who completed a training program. (Association for Nakano International Communications, n.d.)
Suginami	A link to an external website is available. It lists three classes taught by volunteer groups. The information is available in Japanese and English. The ward website also provides links to the Handbook of Learning Japanese and Life in Japan published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and a link to the Tokyo Nihongo Volunteer Network. (City Suginami, 2019; Suginami Association for Cultural Exchange, n.d.)
Taito	Information available in Japanese. The ward offers three levels of free Japanese classes every semester. A list of six Japanese classes from beginner to advanced levels taught by volunteer groups are available in Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. Taito also publishes city newspapers, which include information about the Japanese classes in Easy Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. (Taito City, 2021)

Shinagawa	No information or link available. A public interest incorporated foundation offers three beginner levels of classes twice a year. The information is only available in Japanese. (Shinagawa-ku International Friendship Association, n.d.)
Sumida	Information available in Japanese. There are ten volunteer groups including one class for junior-high-school students, one class for parents of elementary and high school students, and one online class. The list is partially available in English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean. (Sumida City, 2021)
Shibuya	Information available in Japanese. The ward offers three beginner levels of classes taught every semester. Application forms and consent forms are available in Japanese, English, Traditional Chinese, and Korean. (Shibuya City Office, 2021)
Bunkyo	A link to an external website is available. There are seven classes taught by volunteer groups including one class for children taught by students of Toyo University and one class on weekends. The information is available in Japanese and English. (Bunkyo City, 2021; Bunkyo Tabunka Net, n.d.)
Meguro	No information or link available. Public interest incorporated foundation lists classes on an external website in Japanese and English. In addition to a salon offered by the foundation, there are six classes taught by volunteer groups. (Meguro International Friendship Association, n.d.)
Chuo	A link to a public association website is available. In addition to three beginner classes offered by the association, there are six classes taught by volunteers from beginner to advanced levels. (Chuo City, 2014; Chuo Cultural and International Exchange Association, n.d.)
Chiyoda	Information available in Japanese and English. A volunteer group offers classes to beginner-level students over 16 years old with the support of the ward. (Chiyoda City, 2021)

## Results

This section presents results from Japanese language programs designed for adult migrants offered by the 23 wards in Tokyo. Each ward has a different policy as displayed in Table 1, so we first display a general overview of information for Japanese learning opportunities available on official municipality websites in Table 2.

**Table 2** *List of wards based on information access and Japanese language classes*

Type	Wards
a. Availability on the municipality website	Shinjuku, Adachi, Koto, Itabashi, Toshima, Ota, Katsushika, Setagaya, Nerima, Minato, Arakawa, Suginami, Taito, Sumida, Shibuya, Bunkyo, Chuo, Chiyoda (18)
b. Multi-lingual	Shinjuku, Adachi, Koto, Itabashi, Toshima, Ota, Katsushika, Nerima, Nakano, Taito (10)
c. No information	Edogawa, Itabashi, Kita, Nakano, Shinagawa, Meguro (6)

Most wards (18 out of 23) provide information for Japanese learning opportunities on their official municipality websites. In case this information is not directly available on the ward website, the website lists either links to the Japanese learning organization or links to public organizations that



display Japanese learning opportunities on an external website. The Kita ward is an exception as it provides no online information about Japanese learning opportunities for its foreign residents.

The information regarding the Japanese learning on the municipality websites was mainly in Japanese and/or English, rendering it difficult for non-English speaking foreigners to access publicly available information. Versions in non-English foreign languages were available only in ten out of 23 wards. Other wards indicated that the versions in non-English foreign languages were generated by automatic translation. Some wards offer information regarding Japanese language learning opportunities in Japanese only; we stipulate that those wards use an assumption that someone who knows Japanese would help non-Japanese speaking foreigners to find and register to Japanese classes for migrants. No wards listed information about Japanese learning opportunities in “Yasashii Nihongo” (easy/simple Japanese); Japanese that uses words that are readily understandable by non-native speakers. The non-use of Yasashii Nihongo, though initially a surprising finding, was most likely a choice by municipalities because they offer courses for migrants who are not proficient enough in reading Yasashii Nihongo.

Japanese language classes are offered directly by the municipality, or indirectly by public-interest groups that are incorporated or by volunteer groups. Regardless of the sponsor of Japanese classes, all types of classes are taught by volunteers, rather than trained and certified teachers. Japanese language classes offered by public institutions often have small capacities, which limit the number of classes that are offered for each proficiency level. Some wards only offered beginner-level classes. Two wards, Koto and Nakano, also offer training programs for volunteers who want to teach JSL; only those who successfully complete the program teach classes for the wards. Japanese language classes run by volunteer groups offer various levels based on learners’ proficiency, and these volunteer groups also offer JSL for specific purposes. Some of these classes also provide private tutoring sessions and preparatory classes for Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).

The survey results show that most of the wards in Tokyo are aware of migrants who need JSL education. Adult migrants in Tokyo face varying degrees of Japanese language learning opportunities. The ward that they reside in may or may not offer language classes (either free or with a nominal fee). The language of communication chosen by each ward usually is Japanese and English. This choice of language does not reflect the number of foreign residents who come from non-English speaking countries. In the next section, we examine the decision-making bodies in JSL education.

As shown in Table 3, twelve out of 23 wards in Tokyo offer municipality-run Japanese language classes in Tokyo. Two wards, Koto and Nakano, have provisions for volunteers to be trained in JSL.

**Table 3** *Organizers of Japanese language classes*

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a. Municipality	Shinjuku, Itabashi, Setagaya, Nerima, Minato, Arakawa, Nakano, Taito, Shinagawa, Shibuya, Meguro, Chuo (12)
b. Trained volunteers	Koto, Nakano (2)

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This result shows that most of the JSL courses listed on municipal websites are run by volunteers (in 21 wards) with or without training in Japanese language education. About half of municipalities offer JSL courses for migrant adults. These courses are popular because they are affordable, but in most municipalities these classes are limited to beginner or intermediate levels. The rest of the levels and

courses are mainly run by NPOs who fill the gaps that cannot be covered by the municipality.

We have shown that most but not all wards in Tokyo offer information related to Japanese language learning opportunities, but the means to spread that information were not always ideal for migrants themselves. For adult migrants, we found that NPOs in the Tokyo area initiate various programs that offer Japanese language learning opportunities for migrants, facilitating their integration into Japanese society.

### **Prospects for the Future of Japanese Language Education for Migrants**

The findings in the previous section lead us to reflect on the current situation of Japanese language education for migrants in Tokyo. As repeatedly shown in studies from other countries, language proficiency is vital for migrant integration. Effective language learning programs require trained language teachers who are aware of the needs of migrant learners as well as knowledgeable in issues on JSL. Earlier, six areas to promote Japanese language education for non-native speakers were listed: (a) opportunities at the workplace, (b) understanding by members of the society, (c) teacher training, (d) curriculum development, (e) Japanese proficiency assessment, and (f) promotion of research on Japanese language education.

To check the point in (f), we examined how Japanese language education research is being promoted. A database search of Kakenhi (Japanese government-funded research funds) revealed that research on Japanese language education is active: 345 projects are in the process of being carried out just between the 3-year period of 2019 to 2021. Among them, 88 projects target specifically Japanese language education for migrants: 59 of them focused on adult migrants, 24 projects on children, and five projects on both adult and children.

When these studies were categorized further, we found the following distribution: 26 projects on Japanese language education at workplace (area (a)), 18 projects on promoting societal understanding of the Japanese learners (area (b)), 10 projects on teacher training (area (c)), and 20 projects on curriculum development (area (d)). No study focused on Japanese proficiency assessment (area (e)).

In the rest of this section, we offer two discussion points ((c) teacher training, as well as (d) language learning resource management and (e) Japanese proficiency assessment) that could lead to better service for migrant language education. These discussions are based on circumstances in the 23 wards in Tokyo, a populous area in Japan.

#### **Implementing a national certification program for JSL**

Higher education institutions offer programs designed for JSL teacher training (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2019); in Tokyo alone, there are 43 such programs. For example, International Christian University offers a JSL teacher certificate program for undergraduate students when they complete the program. Waseda University furthermore has a graduate school for JSL education that offers both master and doctoral degrees. Graduates of these programs, however, teach at the university-level JSL programs or at Japanese language schools (Nihongo Gakko) operating for college-age group foreign students.

Although many university-level institutions offer JSL teacher training programs, migrant-oriented Japanese language policies do not utilize these graduates. The JSL education certificate is separate from the certification process that allows graduates to teach at public schools where migrant children

may need such support. As for Japanese language courses offered for adult migrants, JSL teaching certification is not required for prospective volunteers; this results in the offering of language courses that are not necessarily taught by teachers with the JSL education certificate.

A 2020 bulletin issued by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2020) outlines in the Criteria for Japanese Language Education Institutions that all Japanese language teachers are required to obtain at least one of the following qualifications to be able to teach at Japanese language schools (Nihongo Gakko):

- Completion of a Japanese language education program at a four-year university or a graduate school
- Graduation from a university or completion of a graduate school with 26 credits of Japanese language education courses
- Passing the Japanese Language Teaching Competency Test, conducted by Japan Educational Exchanges and Services
- Hold a Bachelor's degree and complete a 420 hours training program
- Have the skills equal to those who fulfill the above requirements

This requirement is lacking when it comes to JSL programs in classes offered by municipalities or volunteer groups.

To address this discrepancy, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has explored the establishment of a national qualification for Japanese language teachers since 2019. While the agency plans to create a final version concerning the qualification as early as 2024, there is an ongoing debate on the necessity of a national qualification, which will lead to a stringent requirement for all JSL educators including volunteers. Opposing the creation of a national certification program, some practitioners argue that raising the standards for becoming Japanese language teachers and those for hiring these teachers in Japanese language institutions would be sufficient in ensuring the quality of Japanese education (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2021).

Introducing a national qualification program for JSL educators may face its challenge given the current situation of Japanese language education. As reported above about information concerning Japanese language learning opportunities and main organizations in Japanese language education, programs for Japanese language education to migrants are heavily dependent on volunteers and NPOs. This trend is also reported in the annual survey targeting all Japanese language teachers in Japan conducted by the Japanese language division in the Agency for Cultural Affairs; more than half (53.3%) of the Japanese teachers are volunteers (Agency for Cultural Affairs Japanese Language Division, 2019).

As migrant populations continue to grow under the current education system, we expect that Japanese language education will take a central role in their integration. Even so, teaching has not been institutionalized but rather it depends on volunteers. Establishing a national certification for JSL teachers as part of the general teacher certificate program could improve the current status.

### **Improving resource management in migrant language education**

As language education is an important element for migrant integration, effective management of available resources for JSL education becomes an integral part of improving Japanese language proficiency. This section presents an outlook for improving resource management in JSL programs for adult migrants.

Offering JSL learning opportunities is equally important for adult migrants. Most but not all wards in Tokyo are possibly aware of language education being a central part of integration to Japanese society and provide information about Japanese language learning opportunities on municipality websites. Disseminating relevant information in multilingual websites is found in the majority of the wards, but we also found that some wards only offer information in Japanese. If the creation of a multilingual website by translation is costly given limited budgets, alternative methods such as using “Yasashii Nihongo” (simple/easy Japanese) or Japanese with hiragana readings would improve accessibility to necessary information. Also, information concerning JSL education would not vary from place to place, which means that multiple wards could collaborate to publish a website that provides information in a diverse group of languages.

Japanese language learning opportunities for adult migrants exist in the Tokyo wards, but they are entirely dependent on volunteers, unlike student migrants who have additional access to JSL teachers employed by their respective schools. The current system of learning Japanese by these migrants is often constrained by the small availability of classes. For instance, the Shibuya ward offers three types of beginner-level courses that rotate every three months, but each class has seats available to ten people only (Shibuya City Office, 2021), which means a fairly low possibility of enrolling in these courses. In 2020, Shibuya reported 10,597 foreign residents; if all of these residents want to complete the ward-sponsored courses, it would take more than 100 years.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan offers recommended guidelines to be used when creating JSL programs for Seikatsu-sha, which wards are free to adapt as needed. This program is of course helpful when volunteer groups design classes to assist migrant adults. Even so, no Japanese language tests designated for Seikatsu-sha exist. This contrasts with the European situation where most languages have proficiency tests based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Japanese language proficiency tests such as JLPT aim to measure Japanese proficiency for the purpose of using Japanese in academic settings, which is not the learning goal when Seikatsu-sha wants to improve their Japanese proficiency. While the CEFR could be considered ignoring the status of migrants because it is based on the monolingualism perspective of each national language (Krumm, 2007), we believe that establishing such a proficiency test would create a clear goal in migrant language education and this will in turn help organizations, regardless of being municipalities or volunteer groups, to establish tailored JSL curriculum for migrants (*cf.* Byrnes, 2007).

In sum, a JSL proficiency test will benefit all the stakeholders in migrant language education. Volunteer language teachers will benefit from a clear goal that they need to achieve in their classes. Learners could be divided into different groups based on their proficiency level measured by the proficiency test. Government agencies’ attention can be diverted to the development of teaching materials for such a proficiency test, which will lead to an increase of younger volunteers in the field.

## Conclusion

This paper examined language education for migrants in Japan focusing on issues with access to Japanese language learning opportunities (*cf.* Seong & Luef, 2020). While migrants are usually required to learn the language of the host country to integrate into the community, the current system in Japan expects particularly advanced language proficiency. Japan is linguistically homogeneous (Haines *et al.*, 2007; Seong & Luef, 2020; Takahashi, 2020), and systematic governmental support for improving Japanese language proficiency may prove crucial for migrant integration. Most wards in Tokyo offer language learning opportunities for adult migrants, often referred to as Seikatsu-sha,

and these JSL classes are organized by municipalities or volunteer groups. We also found that accessibility of language learning information to be difficult with migrants unable to take advantage of public learning services.

We suggest that the revision of current Japanese as L2 policies will be beneficial when migrants wish to learn Japanese. Specifically, we propose that a national certification program for Japanese as L2 be developed, and a comprehensive approach for teaching Japanese as L2 to migrant children be established. Moreover, we suggest that a Japanese language proficiency test should be modeled after a national certification such as CEFR be introduced. This proposal stems from the examination of publicly available materials taken from resources in the 23 wards in Tokyo. In future studies, additional information from different cities in other prefectures such as Nagoya in the Aichi prefecture or Kawasaki in the Kanagawa prefecture would be recommended. A need-based survey with migrants that investigates the migrants' perspective will also be able to expand our perspective on issues related to migrants and language education in Japan or in general.

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- 1 This number does not include naturalized residents who relinquished their foreign citizenship, nor does the number include Japanese nationalities who are non-native speakers of Japanese.
  - 2 In addition to the 23 wards, Tokyo has additional 26 cities, one district and two outlying island chains. Due to the low number of migrants in these areas, we excluded them from being further considered in this paper.