

## The Spread of Japanese Language Education in Thailand

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### Abstract

Japanese language education in Thailand has developed with historical background and support from educational institutions, the government, and the private sector. Since the early 20th century, its significance has grown alongside stronger diplomatic ties between Japan and Thailand. This paper reviews the historical background and examines the current state of Japanese language education in Thailand across various institutions. It also explores key factors contributing to its development, including learners' motivations and public-private sector support. In particular, the study highlights efforts in secondary and higher education, the influence of Japanese subculture, and corporate educational support from Japanese companies. Additionally, this paper discusses the benefits of Japanese language education and the challenges it faces, focusing on three major issues: the shortage and quality of teachers, the lack of teaching materials and curriculum development, and the maintenance of learners' motivation. Possible solutions to these challenges are explored to improve the effectiveness of Japanese language education. Finally, the study concludes by summarizing the role of Japanese language education in strengthening Thailand-Japan relations and considers future prospects. This paper aims to enhance understanding of the current state, challenges, and importance of Japanese language education in Thailand.

**Keyword:** Japanese language education, The Spread Cultural, Cultural exchange

Japanese language education in Thailand has been developing with historical background and support from various educational institutions, the government, and the private sector. Starting in the early 20th century, its importance has increased along with the strengthening of diplomatic relations between Japan and Thailand.

This essay will first review the historical background of Japanese language education in Thailand and then discuss the current state of Japanese language education in various educational institutions. Next, it will explore the educational institutions and learners' motivations supporting Japanese language education, as well as the actual support from the government and the private sector. In particular, it will explain the efforts of Japanese language education in secondary and higher education institutions in Thailand, the influence of Japanese subculture, and the role of educational support by Japanese companies. Furthermore, it will address the benefits of Japanese language education and the challenges faced in the field, analyzing three major issues: the quality and shortage of teachers, the lack of teaching materials and curriculum development, and the maintenance and enhancement of learners' motivation, and exploring solutions to these issues.

Finally, it will conclude by summarizing how the spread of Japanese language education contributes to strengthening the relationship between Thailand and Japan and considering future prospects. This essay aims to deepen the understanding of the current state and challenges of Japanese language education in Thailand and its importance.

## **History and Current State of Japanese Language Education**

### **Historical Background**

The history of Japanese language education in Thailand dates back to the early 20th century. Following the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and Japan, the importance of learning Japanese in Southeast Asia, especially in educational institutions, was recognized with Japan's economic development from the 1960s to the 1970s, and Japanese language courses increased.

### **Current Situation of Japanese Language Education**

Currently, Japanese is taught in many secondary and higher education institutions across Thailand. Particularly, the demand for learning Japanese has increased among students who wish to advance to Japanese universities or seek employment in Japanese companies. Recently, Japanese has become a common second language option in Thai middle schools. According to a 2022 survey, there were 431 public secondary education institutions teaching Japanese. Many universities also have Japanese language departments, where Japanese literature and culture are studied, but the number of such institutions, both public and private, totals 80, which is less than in secondary education. There are few institutions offering Japanese language education at the elementary level, limited to teaching it as an elective subject from the fourth grade in schools with foreign language programs.

## **Educational Institutions Supporting Japanese Language Education**

### **Secondary Education**

The Japanese language program in middle and high schools started with the establishment of a Japanese language course at Bophitphimuk Secondary School in 1947. Today, Japanese is offered as an elective subject in many high schools across Thailand. Some schools have classes specializing in Japanese, with students majoring in Japanese from the time of admission. Recently, the number of schools in central Bangkok offering Japanese as an elective subject from the first year of middle school has been increasing

### **Examples of Representative Schools:**

“Triam Udom Suksa School” A famous preparatory school in Bangkok, known for its strong emphasis on Japanese language education.

“Satriwitthaya School” A long-established girls' high school in Bangkok, recognized for its longstanding Japanese language education

### **Higher Education**

“University Japanese Language Departments: The foundation of full-fledged Japanese language education in universities began in the mid-1960s with Japanese courses at Thammasat University and Chulalongkorn University. In 1971, Chulalongkorn University established Thailand's first major in Japanese. Many universities now have Japanese language departments, increasing the number of students majoring in Japanese, leading to the training of many professionals such as Japanese language teachers, translators, and interpreters.

“Representative Universities:” The first introduction of Japanese language education in Thailand began at Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, the oldest and most historic universities in Thailand. Japanese courses were established at Thammasat University in 1965 and at Chulalongkorn University in 1966. Chulalongkorn University opened Thailand's first major in Japanese in 1971, and in 1999, a master's program in "Japanese Language and Literature" was established. Thammasat University set up a Ph.D. program in Japanese studies in 2020, producing many researchers. Gradually, Japanese language education spread to national and private universities in the provinces. In 2004, a Japanese language program was launched at Khon Kaen University in northeastern Thailand.

### **Motivations for Learning Japanese**

#### **Employment Purposes**

According to a 2020 survey, there were 5,856 Japanese companies operating in Thailand. The abundance of job opportunities that utilize Japanese is why many students choose to study Japanese at university.

#### **Influence of Subculture**

Recently, Japanese subculture has been extremely popular in Thailand, serving as a motivation for many to learn Japanese. Anime, manga, J-POP, games, and Japanese movies and dramas are familiar to many young people. The desire to enjoy these media in the original language has increased the number of people learning Japanese. Additionally, those interested in Japanese fashion and cosmetics learn Japanese to directly obtain information. Furthermore, the motivation to understand Japanese culture more deeply through Japanese subculture is also significant.

#### **Tourism Purposes**

One of the motivations for learning Japanese among Thais is tourism to Japan. Since July 2013, a visa exemption system has been in place for up to two weeks for tourism purposes, encouraging more and more Thais to visit Japan each year. Japan, with its four distinct seasons, offers experiences such as cherry blossoms and autumn leaves, making it a popular destination for Thais looking to escape the year-round heat. Learning Japanese makes communication on site smoother and helps understand Japanese customs and traditions through tourism. It also facilitates the use of transportation and booking accommodations, reducing stress during travel. This is why many Thais are learning Japanese to make their stay in Japan more comfortable and enjoyable.

#### **Support for Japanese Education in Thailand**

Cooperation from the Ministry of Education: The Thai government recognizes the importance of Japanese language education and is working to expand it through the Ministry of Education. Japanese are particularly valued in the tourism and business sectors, and educational programs are being developed to meet this demand.

Japan Foundation, Bangkok (JF): The Japan Foundation Bangkok, established in 1974, supports Japanese language education and cultural dissemination activities, serving as a hub for deepening mutual understanding between Thailand and Japan. Its main activities include cultural and artistic exchanges and Japanese language education. Specific initiatives

include various contests, exhibitions, Japanese film festivals, karaoke concerts, and symposiums held throughout Thailand. The center also actively supports Japanese language education in Thailand by dispatching Japanese language teachers, providing teaching materials, and organizing various seminars and workshops.

**Embassy of Japan in Thailand:** The Embassy of Japan in Thailand engages in numerous initiatives to support Japanese language education. Specific activities include providing online educational opportunities and materials to remote learners and supporting the administration of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), which evaluates Japanese language learners' abilities. The embassy also collaborates with universities and high schools to develop Japanese language education curricula and support educational activities.

**Japanese Language Partners (NP):** Implemented by the JF, this program started in May 2014 with the aim of supporting Japanese language education. Japanese volunteer teachers are dispatched from Japan to secondary education sites in Thailand. They assist local Thai teachers in running classes, creating teaching materials, and introducing Japanese culture. This program, now in its 11th year, has extended support to many public schools in regional cities across Thailand.

#### **Private Sector Initiatives**

##### **Cooperation by Japanese Companies in Thailand**

Many Japanese companies have been active in Thailand since the 1960s, and these companies have been actively involved in Japanese language education within their organizations. They collaborate with local schools and universities, offering scholarships and internship opportunities to Japanese language learners. Large corporations like Toyota and Honda support Japanese language education programs within Thailand, helping to improve Japanese language skills in preparation for future employment. Additionally, they focus on training personnel with Japanese language skills through internal Japanese language training in preparation for overseas assignments.

#### **Community Activities**

**Homestay Program "Ruamcai"** This homestay program, run by volunteers from Japanese families living in Bangkok, targets Thai high school and university students learning Japanese in rural areas. Participants stay with Japanese families for a short period, learning about Japanese family culture and customs. Activities such as calligraphy, tea ceremony, origami, and cooking classes with host families provide participants with a deeper understanding of Japanese culture. This program promotes mutual understanding between Thai students and Japanese residents in Thailand. Association of Japanese Language Education in Thailand (AJLET) and Regional Teachers' Association Activities

Japanese teachers in Thailand are engaged in activities aimed at enhancing their understanding of Japanese language education. They conduct monthly meetings and annual seminars, either online or on-site, to exchange information and contribute to the development of Japanese language education in Thailand. Additionally, there are also Northern Japanese Teachers' Association and Southern Japanese Teachers' Association, which serve as valuable learning platforms for teachers in regional areas.

## Benefits and Challenges of Japanese Language Education

### Benefits

The spread of Japanese language education offers many benefits to Thai students. Firstly, learning Japanese expands opportunities for studying abroad and employment in Japan. Furthermore, understanding Japanese culture and business practices fosters a global perspective. The most significant benefit is the enhanced economic and cultural exchange between Japan and Thailand, deepening the relationship between the

### Challenges

Japanese language education in Thailand faces the following three main challenges.

**Insufficient Quality and Quantity of Teachers** Despite the support of NP (Japanese language partners) in sending Japanese teachers to secondary schools in Thailand, there is still a shortage of teachers. In particular, in rural areas, there are few well-trained Japanese language teachers, resulting in inconsistent quality of Japanese language education. Additionally, even when qualified Japanese teachers are present, their contracts often have fixed terms, making it difficult to maintain long-term continuity in education.

**Insufficient Development of Teaching Materials and Curriculum** Another major challenge in Japanese language education is the lack of materials that suit the needs and proficiency levels of local learners. Many materials are designed for foreigners living in Japan, business Japanese texts for employment in Japanese companies, or cumulative grammar texts for university students. These materials are not always suitable for secondary education in Thailand, where Japanese is taught as a second foreign language. There is also a lack of consistent educational programs.

**Maintaining and Enhancing Learning Motivation** It is also challenging to maintain the motivation of Japanese language learners. While many students start learning Japanese with interest at the beginner level, it becomes difficult to continue their studies at the intermediate and advanced levels due to the increasing difficulty of the material and the challenge of balancing other academic and work responsibilities. Support and environments that help to boost and sustain learners' motivation are needed.

### Solutions

To address these challenges, it is essential to support teacher training and qualification acquisition, develop and disseminate materials suitable for the local context, and implement measures to enhance and sustain learners' motivation.

### Conclusion

The spread of Japanese language education in Thailand plays a significant role in strengthening the relationship between the two countries. Improvements in the education system, along with support from the Japanese government and Japanese companies and the use of digital technology, are needed. This will allow Thai students to receive higher quality Japanese language education and foster individuals who can succeed on the international stage in the future.

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