

## **Research For Some Solutions to Access Japanese Efficiently: A Case of Japanese Students FPT University**

**Mai Huynh Thanh Nhi<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Thi Ha Chau<sup>2</sup>, Pham Tien Loc<sup>3</sup>, Nguyen Hoang Lam Vu<sup>4</sup>**

Department of Japanese Language, FPT University, Viet Nam

E-Mail: [nhimhtsa160061@fpt.edu.vn](mailto:nhimhtsa160061@fpt.edu.vn)

---

### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, Japanese language majors are being formed at many large and small universities in Vietnam, and Japanese language centers are also being expanded and developed. In the two years when the Covid epidemic raged, the number of Japanese language learners showed no sign of decreasing. It proves that Japanese can be considered as a common language along with English and Chinese. Japanese is not as difficult as it seems if it is learned and approached in the right and scientific way. There are 3 Japanese alphabets including hiragana, katakana and kanji. However, recently Japanese music has begun to develop in the Vietnamese music market, there are many cases where it is possible to sing with the romaji version, so accessing katakana and hiragana is still a challenge if learners get used to reading romaji (a way of translating the Japanese language into Latin words for people who cannot read Japanese characters). This article uses data analysis methods by quantitative and qualitative research with the aim of finding the most effective solution for students to approach and learn the Japanese alphabet effectively. Our target audience is FPT University students who are approaching the hiragana and katakana alphabets. This study was conducted at FPT University. Most of this research focuses on analyzing methods to improve Japanese language learning ability for new learners. The results show that a reasonable combination of technology application and traditional methods is a possible solution to improve learners' capacity.

**KEYWORDS:** Apps, Experience, Student, Study, Japanese

---

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Japanese is an extremely interesting language, consisting of 3 alphabets Hiragana, Katakana, and Chinese characters. Each alphabet has its own character. People often joke that Hiragana is a word for women because the handwriting is very flexible and graceful, and Katakana is a word for men because the handwriting is very strong and definitive. It is impossible not to mention that it is Kanji. - a type of ideogram that is also very popular in Korea and China. In Vietnam, until the early 1990s, Japanese was only taught in two universities: Foreign Trade University and Hanoi University of Foreign Languages. However, by 2009, there were more than 39 universities nationwide with Japanese language departments. According to statistics, the number of people learning Japanese in 1990 was about 3,000 people, by 2009 it had increased to 44,000 thousand people learning Japanese and ranked 8th in the world. And by 2018, in Vietnam, there were 818 Japanese language training units (ranked 7th in the world), the number of teachers was 7,030 (ranked 3rd in the world), and a total of 174,461 learners (ranked 3rd in the world). Compared to the survey results in 2015, the growth rate of the number of Japanese learners in Vietnam ranks first in the world.

At FPT University, students who have the opportunity to interact with Japanese will be divided into two groups: specialized students and non-specialized students. The major students are those who pursue the Japanese language major at the school, and the non-specialized students are those from the technology and graphics sectors. You will all be starting from zero, from simple to advanced alphabets. Japanese majors will last 9 semesters and upon completion, students will have Japanese language level N2 and confidently work in Japan or with Japanese businesses in Vietnam. As for non-specialized students, they will start contacting Japanese from the 3rd semester and end in the 5th semester. After completing the course, you will have a Japanese language level equivalent to N5 and can confidently communicate in basic Japanese with related partners.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Nguyen (2020) through research indicated that practice such as listening and speaking helps to remember faster and longer, along with comprehensive skill development that creates interest in learning Japanese. Besides, according to Yamaguchi (2020) who regularly practices, memorizing grammar, words or phrases will be better than usual. Not only that, the study participants also commented that sticking to practice every day has a significant effect on many other skills. Along with that Ca et al. (2021) proved that standard pronunciation is one of the things that cannot be taken lightly when learning Japanese. It also provides methods to improve speaking and pronunciation for more accuracy. However, Huang et al. (2020) argued that vocabulary proficiency is directly related to Japanese language proficiency. Moreover, the ability to identify and evaluate vocabulary is also an equally important skill in learning this language. Cui et al. (2021) thanks to the survey have produced results on the problems students face and how to use electronic media in learning Japanese. In addition, the use of applications or electronic communication can stimulate the motivation to learn Japanese, making the most of free time to use it more effectively and accurately. Tan (2019) asserted that if it is possible to exploit the potential of artificial intelligence and then apply it to learning Japanese, it will achieve unexpected results in an increasingly developed society today. Beyond that, the study by Teo et al. (2019) showed that things like products, job opportunities, and activities related to Japan also contribute to creating a significant motivation for Japanese language learners to be able to exchange and absorb the quintessence between different cultures. On top of that, learning Japanese can be improved if learners have specific strategies that suit their desires and personalities (Rorong & Tengker, 2019).

## **3. THE STATUS OF JAPANESE LEARNING IN VIETNAM**

In recent years, Japan is a country that invests a lot in Vietnam with a total investment of more than 4 billion dollars per year. By the end of 2019, Japan had 4,190 investment projects in Vietnam with a total registered capital of 57.9 billion USD, ranking second among countries and territories investing in Vietnam. With the jobs that are most recruited by Japanese enterprises, such as Japanese translation and interpretation; secretary, assistant director; Administrative staff, office; general staff, human resources; IT engineers know Japanese. Along with an attractive starting salary, more and more people are studying Japanese in Vietnam.

In 2018, the number of Japanese learners in Vietnam reached nearly 175,000, ranking 6th in the world. It can be seen that Vietnam is among the Southeast Asian countries with the largest number of Japanese learners. This is an impressive number because after only 3 years (from 2015 to 2018), the number of students in Vietnam has increased from 64,863 students in 2015 to 175,000 students in 2018. Compared to the results of the previous survey in 2015, the growth rate of the number of Japanese learners in Vietnam ranked first in the world.

In addition to popular forms such as self-study, studying at a Japanese language center, college or university, the number of Vietnamese people coming to Japan as international students and technical interns is also increasing.

In 2018, there were 818 Japanese language training units in Vietnam (ranked 7th in the world), and the number of teachers was 7,030 (ranked 3rd in the world). In 9 provinces and cities out of 63 provinces across the country, there are 2 elementary schools, 81 junior high schools and 36 high schools teaching Japanese (only those schools that the International Japanese economy has information). The number of Japanese language learners in Vietnam is about 174,000 people, of which 31,200 are university students, 26,200 are high school and junior high school students, 2,000 are primary school students, and 115,000 are students from training centers for interns (According to a survey by the Japan Foundation for International Exchange in 2018).

Since 2003, when the Japanese language has not developed as hot as it is now, under the direction of the two governments, the Project on Teaching Japanese at Vietnamese Middle Schools and High Schools has been launched and performed for 10 years. As a result, from 1 pilot class for 6th grade students at Chu Van An Secondary School - Hanoi (then piloted in Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hue), by 2018 there were 25,000 nationwide. Middle and high school students learn Japanese at school as a foreign language 1 or foreign language 2 (according to a 7-year program).

According to the survey data on foreign students studying in Japan published by the Japan Student Support Organization (JASSO), as of May 1, 2018, the total number of Vietnamese international students in Japan numbered 72,354

people. In addition, in 2019 the number of Vietnamese in Japan as "technical interns" is increasing sharply, currently about 190,000 people.

#### **4. THE STATUS OF LEARNING JAPANESE AT FPT UNIVERSITY**

With the trend of world economic development and the deepening and widening impact of Japan on the world economy and Vietnam-Japan cooperation, students majoring in the Japanese language at FPT University have great career prospects and careers in many fields. But besides those opportunities, FPT university students also must go through many difficulties before stepping out into society. More specifically, students have to go through a total of 9 semesters, including 8 training periods at the school and 1 internship period at an enterprise.

In semesters 1 and 2, students get acquainted with basic Japanese letters, sentence patterns, and kanji. Students can read and write basic Japanese sentences, greet and communicate in some daily conversations. Besides, students are continuously provided with further knowledge of basic Japanese, helping students to increase their vocabulary and be able to read, write, and communicate in many different situations.

Semesters 3, 4, and 5 enhance foreign language ability through different business situations and practical learning resources on general knowledge of Japanese phonetics. Students understand the characteristics of sound (rhythm, beat, etc.) and note pronunciation so that they can correct their own pronunciation as well as serve as a basis for future research activities. Not only that, students are also equipped with knowledge and skills specialized in communicating in Japanese in many different communication situations (office, communication via email, phone), basic knowledge of translation activities, necessary skills when conducting Japanese interpreting activities and soft skills such as teamwork in complex situations, effective leadership of members.

One of the semesters that students consider the most interesting is the 6th semester, the internship period at companies and businesses. In order to be able to better assess their own capabilities and apply specialized knowledge to specific jobs, FPT students can apply for an internship abroad or at home depending on their needs and expectations.

Being provided and perfected with general knowledge about Japan (geography, climate, culture, festivals...) equips students with the foundational knowledge to live and study in Japan safely, Fast integration will take place in the 7th semester. In addition, students are provided with basic management issues and the basic knowledge of the major. Students will be active in learning and absorbing knowledge, promoting a positive spirit in group activities in semester 8.

The last semester is also the graduation thesis, students know how to successfully manage projects and after graduating, they reach the N2 level of Japanese, confidently working in Japan and Japanese enterprises in Vietnam.

#### **5. METHODOLOGY**

The article was completed based on quantitative and qualitative methods, data collection was conducted within 1 week with a carefully designed survey with 20 questions related to learning the Japanese language sent to students who have been studying Japanese at FPT University at the elementary level. These subjects were selected based on criteria such as convenient geographical distance, suitable for research subjects, and ease to produce the most objective results. In addition to the paper survey, the results are also concluded based on online surveys through tools such as Zalo, Facebook, Instagram, etc. The results are obtained through analysis, collection, and charting.

#### **6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

According to our survey and data collection, about 80% of students at FPT University agreed that Japanese is really difficult.

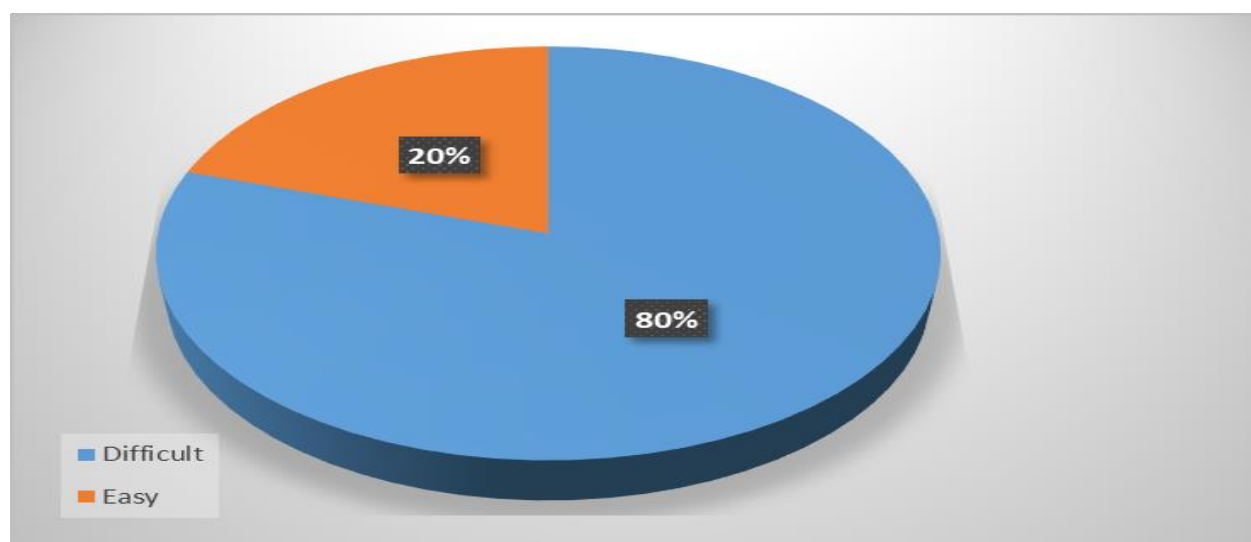


Figure 1. FPT students' attitudes toward Japanese

Studying Japanese is not easy if learners just use only a single way. Understanding that problem, several individuals and organizations are considering finding a new method or tool to assist students in learning more easily and effectively. The more apps are created, the higher competitiveness is in the market. To win the market and attract the attention of users, creators are trying to enhance their products as much as they can. As a result, many qualified apps are created which bring an easy studying experience to learners (Figure 1).

And from this survey, the majority of FPT University students, not only Japanese language major but also other majors, are using both traditional methods and supported apps in learning Japanese.

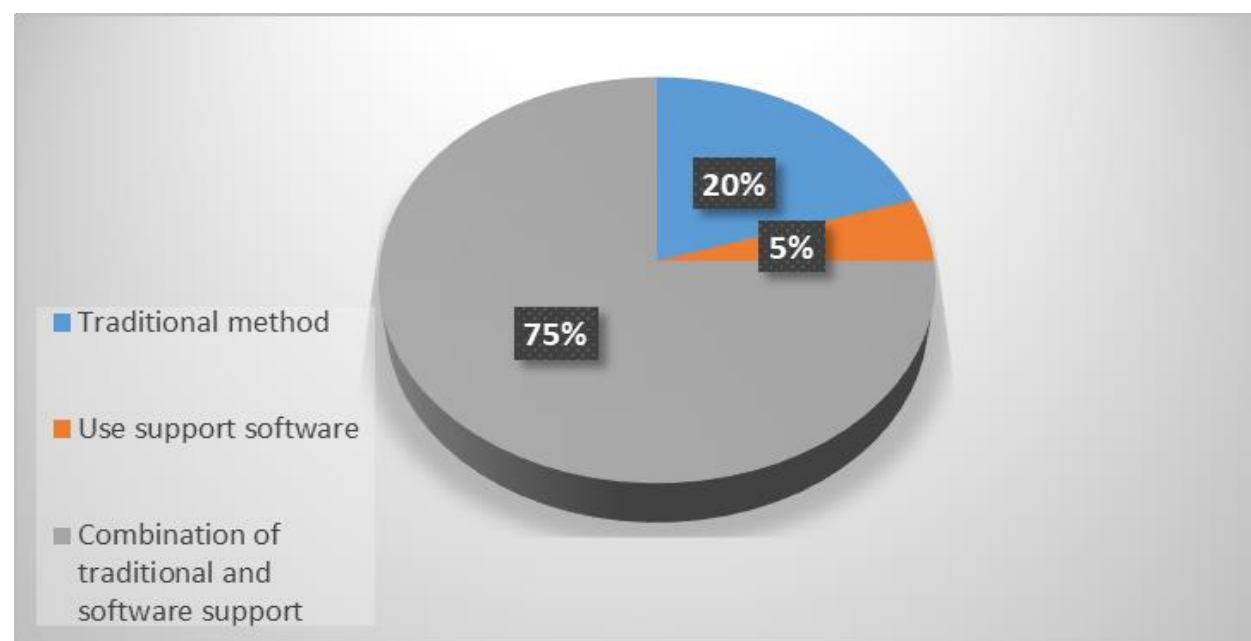


Figure 2. Japanese studying methods of FPT University students

Based on the results, up to 75% of students said that a combination of traditional methods and supported apps are effective. Meanwhile, about 20% of students choose the traditional one, and only 5% use only apps. However, there are also several problems that need to be solved when using Japanese learning apps (Figure 2).

Table 1. Difficulties when using self-study Japanese software

No	Difficulties	Percentage
1	Difficulty in handwriting	70
2	Difficulty in defining the right choice when there are too many softwares	62,5
3	Difficulty of not being motivated	57,5
4	Difficulty in concentrating when using electronic devices	52,5
5	Difficulty of not being able to solve the questions	47,5
6	Difficulty in not being able to pay for self-study softwares.	47,5
7	Difficulty in lacking of electronic devices to study.	25

First of all, using apps to learn the Japanese alphabet could help students to remember characters easily. However, it would lead to bad effects on handwriting if learners overuse supported apps. Therefore, this reason had a major percentage

(70%). Because traditional learning methods would be boring and cost more time, students tend to stop and focus on studying apps instead. That is the reason why students are able to read the hiragana and katakana alphabet but have some difficulties in writing on paper. This would lead to some constraints in higher education and limit the future job opportunities related to handwriting, such as translation or director's assistant.

In addition, there are a lot of learning apps now, but students do not know which one to choose. Paying for these apps is also a problem. In terms of not knowing which one is right for second place, it accounts for 62.5%, and the problem of not being able to buy software also accounts for 47.5%. At the same rate of 47.5%, learning on software also has a problem in lacking interaction. In particular, learners cannot ask for explanations when they have any questions. When learners go to the immediate level, a lack of interaction causes some problems, and it cannot help learners improve their communication skills to be more likely native speakers. Moreover, software learners who are not clearly explained will sometimes overlook some knowledge and make mistakes in the use of language. Learning through software will surely force students to use electronic devices, which leads to being easily distracted and delayed. This problem accounts for 52.5%, which is also a worrying figure. For example, receiving a notification from YouTube or a new message would make learners unable to focus on learning or stop them from learning. Therefore, it would waste more time and effort than the traditional way (Table 1).

Table 2. Opinions on the relevance and effectiveness of Japanese studying methods

No	Japanese learning method	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally agree
1	Learning in class	2,5	0	15	50	32,5
2	Learning by flashcard	2,5	0	22,5	45	30
3	Learning by writing and reading repeatedly	0	0	12,5	35	52,5
4	Combining with self-study software	5	0	17,5	35	42,5

Opinions are divided into 5 levels: Totally disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and totally agree. In which, for the "learning by writing and reading repeatedly" opinions, there is no total disagreement or disapproval. It accounts for 52.5% of totally agree, the highest percentage in this table. This percentage proves that learning a new language should be combined with new learning methods, not ignore the traditional learning methods. Being in the second place with the percentage of totally agree (42%), but also having the highest percentage in totally disagree (5%) compares to other methods, it shows that the "combining with self-study software" method could provide quite enough of the learner's requirements, but this is also a double-edged knife with its many difficulties attached. The method of learning by flashcards is considered the least effective, with only 30% of the rate of giving opinions being completely agreeable. Flashcards also have a high application but are not a favorite method compared to others because they are also partly combined by several apps. Finally, with a rate of 30% giving complete agreement and the highest rate of agreement (50%), is the method of learning in class. With this method, it can be said that it is the traditional method for not only the Japanese language but also all industries. Currently, in all of the learning methods, this is the safest way but may not be effective, so the combination is easy to happen.

Finally, the vast majority think that the combination of learning Japanese by traditional methods and learning through software is the most effective. Then, before applying, it is necessary to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each method and find a way to thoroughly solve the fastest and most effective learning. Currently, there is a lot of highly reliable Japanese learning software, there is also some software that has time for us to try out before buying, which helps those who want to learn without hesitation when buying software. and feel secure. But this is also a double-edged sword, so learners need to be careful and should only apply software as a learning method to make learning easier, not as the main learning method (Table 2).

## **7. DIFFICULTY AND ADVANTAGES OF ACCESSING JAPANESE**

The first is the difficulty in accessing the Japanese alphabet. Different from the Latin alphabet that Vietnamese and English use, Japanese uses hieroglyphic characters, just one wrong stroke will turn into a completely different word, so pay close attention. Moreover, Japanese has up to 3 alphabets, which are Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji with a very large volume of letters, which easily makes learners bored because it is easy to be confused and difficult to remember. However, Japanese is very easy to learn in pronunciation because there are only 5 vowels: U, e, o, a, i. Other sounds are read by adding consonants such as: K, m, n, s, g, .. before the vowel and read the same way. You just need to remember the word face and the meaning of that word is enough. Vietnamese people have a great advantage when learning Japanese. In Japanese, the Kanji set is derived from Chinese characters. In Vietnamese, a lot of Sino-Vietnamese words are also derived from Chinese characters, so Vietnamese has a lot of words that have the same or similar pronunciation as Japanese such as: The word "ý kiến" which is pronounced "i ken" or the word "thái độ" which is pronounced: "tai do".

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

Japanese has 3 alphabets. For many people, this beginning has become a huge challenge and is one of many reasons why they give up learning Japanese. So we need to determine how to learn the Japanese alphabet clearly for ourselves. There are many methods to learn Japanese effectively such as: "Learning the alphabet according to the traditional method". This is the most basic method of learning, but extremely effective. This method requires your ability to memorize and hard work. You need to prepare pencils, erasers, notebooks, and related documents. Then, look at the document to remember the font and practice writing strokes according to the instructions. When writing words, you should go with the image association. Learning while associating helps you immediately remember the characteristics of that word. While writing, you should read aloud the pronunciation of the letter, you will both remember the face of the letter and remember the pronunciation of that letter. You can learn both Hiragana and Katakana at the same time by using sheets of paper with Hiragana on the front and Katakana on the back with the same pronunciation. With this method, you can memorize both Katakana and Hiragana characters at the same time. In addition, you can use flashcards in the process of learning the alphabet. This is a fairly common learning method in some Japanese language teaching centers today. This method helps you to form a reflex when looking at the face of the letter. Moreover, flashcards are also very convenient to carry with you, making them easy to review anytime, anywhere. During the learning process, you can also use Japanese learning software to make the learning process more effective. You can use software

like Powerpoint, Quizlet, Kahoot, Mazii, MochiMochi, and Duolingo,... to create your own coursework. This method not only increases the interest in the learning process but is also extremely convenient because you can easily access your coursework anytime, anywhere with just your phone or laptop. However, this method still has limitations because it is easy to distract and you can only remember the face of the word, but cannot practice writing. When learning Japanese, you should join Japanese language groups and associations. Learning with others helps reduce knowledge gaps and gives you the opportunity to actively discuss the content and materials in the learning process. These opportunities will help you to better understand the knowledge learned. You will learn the knowledge and abilities of the people in your group and they will also learn from you.

If you want to study Japanese intensively, you should find a reputable and quality Japanese language center. Here, your reading and writing will be learned more quickly and easily with the guidance of professionals. In addition, when studying at the center you can participate in the discussion of class activities. From there, It helps you improve your ability to communicate in Japanese. When learning Japanese, you should find for yourself an experienced person to guide the learning process effectively. If you study on your own, in the learning process some problems will often arise that you cannot solve on your own, which will make it easy to give up. Having a mentor by your side to communicate and exchange knowledge will help you overcome challenges in the learning process. In the end, learning Japanese is a very long and challenging road. Therefore, you need to have the will to progress, perseverance, and effort to achieve the desired results.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In short, when you learn any new language, It's always going to have a hard part and an easy part. Especially one of the most difficult languages in the world like Japanese. The difficulty in accessing the alphabet is one of the reasons why many people give up learning Japanese before even starting. However, it is difficult or easy depending on the learning method you have chosen. The more you try, the more rewarding the results you get. You need to determine for yourself a scientific and effective learning method. An effective learning method will bring you excitement in the learning process, thereby improving learning results. Through the research process, realizing that the learning method using software brings very good results in learning, you can use the software to monitor and record your learning process in a timely manner. You can also easily review the lesson anytime, anywhere. In addition, an instructor is one of the decisive factors, they will help you set up the direction and learning path to suit your ability and learning conditions. In addition to Japanese in particular and languages in general, will and determination is an indispensable factor to conquer languages that are not your mother tongue, especially a difficult language to learn like Japanese. Finally, hopefully this article will help everyone to build their own scientific and reasonable learning method.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in the paper.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all the students who participated and completed the survey, as well as the instructors who helped us complete this article.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Yamashita, J. (2020). What Makes Difficult to Keep Learning Japanese? Demotivational Factors Affecting on Indonesian University Students. *JAPANEDU: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengajaran Bahasa Jepang*, 5(1), 1-8.
- [2] Kaur, N., Othman, N. A., & Adli, H. W. (2020). The Development of a Multimedia Application in Learning Japanese. *Journal of Emerging Economies and Islamic Research*, 8(3), 40-61.
- [3] Nguyen, Đ. (2020). The Role of Experiential Learning Method in Japanese Study Process at University. *Solid State Technology*, 63(6), 3267-3274.
- [4] Yamaguchi, K. (2020). The influence of audiovisual materials on listening comprehension skills in learning Japanese as a foreign language.
- [5] Cui, X., Honda, H., & Nagai, Y. (2021). The Application of Japanese Electronic Media in Japanese Learning. In *E3S Web of Conferences* (Vol. 251). EDP Sciences.



- [6] Huang, D. H., Chueh, H. E., Huang, H. T., Ho, H. F., & Kao, C. Y. (2021). Method of Information Technology Enhanced Japanese Vocabulary Learning and Evaluation. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 16(12), 233-245.
- [7] Rorong, F. D., & Tengker, D. M. (2019). Learning Japanese "Kaiwa" Based on Strategy. *Budapest International Research and Critics in Linguistics and Education (BirLE) Journal*, 2(4), 594-602.
- [8] Teo, T., Hoi, C. K. W., Gao, X., & Lv, L. (2019). What motivates Chinese university students to learn Japanese? Understanding their motivation in terms of 'posture'. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(1), 327-342.
- [9] Firmansyah, D. B., Rahmawati, R. S., & Tanzil, A. Q. (2018). Instructional media development for teaching Japanese language. *Journal of Education Research and Evaluation*, 2(2), 89-98.