Malaysian Undergraduates' Beliefs and Motivation for Learning Japanese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is not a unique phenomenon in today's globalised world. A survey by Japan Foundation indicates that Japanese language is one of the most popular foreign languages with approximately 2.98 million students studying Japanese language in over 133 countries around the globe. Despite ranking at number 10 in Southeast Asia, studies on Japanese language learning with a focus on Malaysian learners is scarce. This study explored the beliefs and motivation of Malaysian undergraduates taking Japanese as a foreign language. The study involved 150 undergraduates who were studying Japanese as a third language at a Malaysian university. The study employed a survey design using questionnaire which consisted of four sections focusing on participants' demographic information, beliefs about language skills, self-efficacy beliefs related to the language skills, and reasons for learning the Japanese language. The findings indicate that most of the students are of the belief that listening and speaking are more difficult to learn compared to reading and writing skills. Similarly, most of the students are not confident with their ability to speak in Japanese. As for reasons for choosing to learn Japanese language, although a mix of integrative and instrumental reasons were mentioned, integrative motives seem to take priority among the students. The paper also discusses the pedagogical implications of the findings on the teaching and learning of Japanese as a foreign language at tertiary level.

Keywords: Japanese as a foreign language, instrumental motivation, integrative, foreign language learning, students' belief

1. Introduction

The Japanese language education in Malaysia can be divided into four major phases. The first phase is from 1941-1945 during the Japanese army occupation in Malaya. During this phase, Japanese language started to be taught as the main language. The second phase refers to the time from the Japanese army departure from Malaya until 1960s. During this time frame, the expansion of Japanese language halted for a while. The third phase started in mid 60s until 1981. During the third phase, Japanese language started to be taught in local universities with University Malaya being the first to offer the language in 1966. The fourth phase started in 1982 after the launching of the 'Look East' policy and it continues until the present time (Watanabe 2008).

In Malaysia, the Japanese language programmes offered can be divided into 3 major categories. The first category is the degree programmes in Japanese studies; for example, the Bachelor of Languages and Linguistics specializing in Japanese offered by University Malaya. The second is the preparatory programmes which aim to equip students with Japanese language skills in order to enable them to pursue their studies in Japan. The Special Japanese Language Preparatory Programme offered by University Malaya (The Japan Foundation, 2010) and INTEC Universiti Tekonolgi MARA (UiTM) (International Education Center, 2010) are examples of such programme. The third is the Japanese proficiency courses offered by tertiary institutions to equip students with the necessary language skills for social, academic and work related purposes such as the courses offered at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Multimedia University and others (Ainol Madziah Zubairi, Isarji sarudin, & Mohamad Shari Nordin, 2007; Rafek, 2009; The Japan Foundation, 2010;). Japanese proficiency classes are also conducted in Malaysian schools. Under the 'Look East Policy' which urges Malaysians to acquire aspirations from Japan, the teaching of Japanese as a second foreign started in 1982 in six residential secondary schools and it was then expanded to daily schools in 2005 (Abdul Jabbar, 2012; The Japan Foundation, 2010).

A survey by the Japan Foundation (2015) shows that there are about 176 institutions in Malaysia offering Japanese language to 33,224 students and this figure places Malaysia at the 10th position on the list of countries with the most number of students learning the Japanese language. In 2018, while maintaining the position, the number of institutions offering Japanese language in Malaysia increased to 212 and the number of students also increased to 39,247 (The Japan Foundation, 2018).

Besides other contributing factors especially business relationship between Japan and Malaysia (Kim, Mori, Abd Rahman Abdul Rahim, 2018; Su, Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi, & Singh, 2016), the education policies put in place at the national level also play an important role in the positive development in learning Japanese language. The Malaysian National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007) states that "proficiency in the third language is vital for developing human capital that drives the k-economy as well as gears the country towards competitive innovation in the international arena," (p. 62). Malaysian universities are also encouraged "to provide learning opportunities for students to be proficient in a third language such as Mandarin, Tamil, Japanese, French or Spanish," (p. 66). This is further emphasized in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2015-2025. The MEB highlights that in addition to being proficient and Bahasa Melayu and English language, one of the primary attributes under student aspiration is the learning of an additional global language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

Although Malaysia ranks number 10th in the list of most number of students learning Japanese language worldwide and 5th in Southeast Asia (The Japan Foundation, 2018), empirical studies on the students learning the language is rather scarce. Although several recent studies have attempted to address this gap, the focus of the latest studies were on the Japanese language needs of Malaysian graduates at workplace (Yeoh & Singh, 2020; Yeoh, Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi, & Singh, 2016;). Thus, the earlier calls for more research particularly concerning Malaysian students learning foreign language at institutions of higher learning (Ainol & Isarji, 2009; Isarji, Ainol & Sahari, 2007) have not been sufficiently addressed. In an effort to address this need, this study attempted to discover the students' beliefs in relation to the four fundamental language skills and the motivation for learning Japanese language as a foreign language (JFL) at tertiary institution in Malaysia.

 Among many individual differences, beliefs are considered as crucial constructs in every discipline that deals with human behaviour (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Loewen, 2009). According to Mercer (2011), learners bring individual beliefs to the learning contexts and it influences their engagement with the learning activities. Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) further elaborated this with an example in the language learning context. They highlighted that second or foreign language students may hold strong beliefs about the nature of the language that they are studying, its difficulty, the process of acquisition, the success of certain language strategies, expectations about achievements. Ellis (2008) further added that identification of these aspects and reflections on their potential impact on language learning and teaching in general, as well as in specific areas, can better inform future syllabus design and teacher practice in the language course.

Since the pioneering study by Horwitz (1985) and Wenden (1986), many studies have investigated learner beliefs on language learning in different contexts (Abedini, Rahimi, & Zare-ee, 2011; Diab, 2004; Loewen et al 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Rieger, 2009). For example, Rieger (2009) studied

language beliefs of Hungarian students learning English and German. They reported that the target language of the learners affects their perception about the difficulty of the language and the importance attached to the language learning approaches. Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) examined Turkish exchange students' beliefs about English language learning before and after their stay in a native country. They found that the students' beliefs were bidirectional and that they shifted their focus from accuracy to intelligibility of the language based on their experience. Similarly, Abedini, Rahimi, and Zare-ee (2011) studied the language beliefs of Iranian EFL university students. They reported that the learners with optimistic and realistic beliefs about the language, use more learning strategies and possess higher level of proficiency. These studies suggested that learner beliefs about language learning are underlying factors of their learning behaviours and context-specific. They also support the fundamental arguments raised by previous researchers that the understanding of learner beliefs can enhance the language learning process. They concluded that teachers consciousness of learners' beliefs can "contribute to a more conducive learning environment and to more effective learning" (Chawhan & Oliver, 2000, p. 25) and contribute to better performance.

Although previous studies indicate concerted view that context and different cultures play an important role in learners' beliefs about language learning, most of the studies have focused on English language. Also, beliefs of learners of other languages including Japanese have not received much attention (Rifkin, 2000). Moreover, most studies explored general aspects of language with little or no focus on specific aspects of language especially the 4 four major skills of language learning, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Furthermore, in relation data collection instrument, most of the studies on learner beliefs have utilized the "Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1985) or its variation to assess students' about opinion on multiple issues and controversies related to language learning" (Altan, 2006, p. 47). The inventory consists of 5 categories, which are, nature of language learning, difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, learning and communication strategies and motivation and expectations. Over the years, some issues have been raised about the validity of the instrument especially concerning its dimensional structure (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Reiger, 2009). Fujiwara (2011) added that the lack of empirical evidence makes it rather difficult to use the inventory to examine the cultural differences in the language learning beliefs. Also, BALLI does not seem to address specific areas of the language learning beliefs such as beliefs about the four fundamental language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Thus, the present study aims to address these issues by utilizing a less confining but focused approached to data collection.

Diab (2006) explored the beliefs of university students in learning English and French with a focus on general beliefs and motivation. Again, a modified version of Horwitz's BALLI questionnaire was administered to university students in Lebanon. They reported that the students' beliefs about the difficulty of language learning and their motivations for learning English and French seem to be especially contextualized to the language learning situation. The student also viewed that English is easier to learn compared to French and showed a strong instrumental motivation for learning English.

Early studies have highlighted the importance of motivation as in any learning situation, including learning a foreign language. Motivation in education is generally understood as 'a trigger of students' thought of engaging in a particular subject and maintains the intensity of acquiring the knowledge' (Matsumoto & Obana, 2001, p. 49). Motivation is also considered as one of the most important requirements for learning. Hilgard, Atkinson, and Atkinson (1979) stated that motivation gives direction to learning of the subject matter. Logan (1969) mentioned that motivation influences what and how learners learn. According to Matsumoto and Obana (2001) when learners start learning, they may already have some motives and these motives may have strong implications on their expectations and performance. Thus, just like in the case of beliefs, an understanding of learners' motives for learning can be very helpful in planning teaching and learning activities that would have more meaningful impact on students' learning.

Over several years, based on Gardner and his associates' (1959, 1972, 1975, 1976) extensive studies on language learning motivation, two distinct motivation categories were suggested, they are, integrative and instrumental oriented motivations. The former means that the learner wishes to be recognised as part of the community in which the target language is spoken. The latter occurs when the learner finds the functional value in learning a language, such as career perspective. Integratively motivated individuals experience enjoyment in the pursuit of their interests and in the absence of external rewards or controls (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pintrich,

2000). Gardner and his associates (1959, 1972, 1975, 1976) concluded that it is integrative motivation which promotes second/foreign language acquisition. However, this proposition has been criticised and considered not to be applicable universally to language learning. Many studies have pointed the lack of evidence for integrative motivation particularly for foreign language learning contexts (Dörnyei, 1990; Lukmani, 1972; Skehan, 1991; Strong, 1984; Wenden, 1987). In relation to Japanese language learning, Gonzales (2010) reported that Filipino learners were more motivated by career and economic enhancement.

Closer home, Ainol and Isarji (2009) investigated Malaysian undergraduates' motivation to learn a foreign language. The findings reported they were motivated for both integrative and instrumental purposes. They also called for further investigation along the same lines. Thus, the present study also intends to examine whether instrumental, integrative or both types of motivation drive the desire to learn Japanese as a foreign language among Malaysian undergraduates.

Knowledge of students' individual differences especially beliefs and motivation in foreign language learning contexts have been pointed out as crucial for teachers, curriculum designers and policymakers (e.g. Matsumoto & Obana, 2001; Chawhan & Oliver, 2000; Ainol et al., Isarji et al., 2007). Despite extensive search, no study has been undertaken to explore the context of Malaysian students' with direct emphasis on the four fundamental components of language learning which are listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Thus, the present study aims to investigate these aspects in relation to JFL learning context in Malaysia.

Given the importance of the metacognitive factors in language learning, three pertinent questions that the present study aimed to address are;

1) What are the Malaysian JFL learners' beliefs about the learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills?

2) What are the Malaysian JFL learners' beliefs about their self-efficacy in listening, speaking, reading and writing ability?

3) What motivates the Malaysian undergraduates to choose to learn the Japanese language as a third language?

2 Materials And Methods

This exploratory research employed a survey research design using a questionnaire for the purpose of data collection.

2.1 Participants

A total of 150 undergraduate students who were taking Japanese as an elective course at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) participated in this study. They were of different ethnic groups of Malaysian population and faculties of study as shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Only students who were enrolled in the Japanese Level 1 course were included in the study because students continuing to Japanese Level 2 course may have different beliefs and motives as suggested by Matsumoto and Obana (2001).

Table 1. Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnicity	%
Chinese	51
Malay	26
Indigenous	20
Indian	3

Table 2. Participants' field of study

Faculty	%
Resource Science and Technology	29
Economics and Business	25
Engineering	13
Cognitive Science and Human Development	13
Social Science	9

Applied and Creative Arts	5
Computer Science and Information Technology	5

2.2 Context of the Study

Japanese language learning in UNIMAS is offered as one of elective subjects by the Faculty of Language and Communication, and it is open to all undergraduate students. During the study, two levels of Japanese language courses were offered. The first level is for students who do not have any basics in the Japanese language and the second level is offered to students who have basics in the language and it is also open to undergraduates who have passed the Japanese Level 1 course. The courses are taught by native Japanese and non-native instructors with suitable qualifications in teaching Japanese.

Both Japanese Level 1 and Level 2 courses focus on developing four language skills that are listening, speaking, writing and reading for communicative purposes. The courses aim to develop students' social communication skills in the Japanese language by providing them with opportunities to use the language for various spoken purposes in a wide range of everyday situations. The course also helps to develop students' understanding of the Japanese culture. At the end of the Level 1 course, the students are expected to be able to read and write simple texts in Hiragana and Katakana, two of the three types of Japanese characters. They should be able to carry out simple everyday conversations and have a certain knowledge of Japanese culture. Meanwhile, after completing the Level 2 course, students are expected to be able to comprehend and write short texts and communicate needs and ideas in everyday situations.

2.3 Instrument

The study employed a survey design using questionnaire. While most similar previous studies have used a standardized questionnaire particularly BALLI, due to the limitations of the inventory mentioned above and the focus of this exploratory study, a less confining approach was employed. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of four sections. The first section asked about the participants' demographic information. The second section focused on the participants' beliefs about the Japanese language in relation to the four fundamental language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Similarly, the third section concentrated on the participants' self-efficacy beliefs about their personal ability in the four fundamental language skills. Each item in the second and third section was followed by a 4-point Likert scale with options labeled strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.   Instead of asking respondents to respond to a set of items, the fourth section which enquired about the participants' reasons for taking the Japanese language course, required them to list down three main reasons for choosing to learn the Japanese language. The questionnaire was distributed to the JFL students during their penultimate class in the semester.

The responses to the first 3 sections of the questionnaire were analysed descriptively using percentage. The data obtained from the fourth section were analyzed thematically and matched to the two categories of motivation which are integrative and instrumental, before calculating the percentage.

3 Results

The study was conducted to explore Malaysian learners' beliefs about the Japanese language in relation to listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, as well as their motivation for learning the language.

3.1 Undergraduates' beliefs about the learning of Japanese language skills

Table 3 shows the results for the Malaysian JFL learners' beliefs about the difficulty in learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. As shown in Table 3, the level of agreement distribution reveals a higher moderate belief ranging between 22% to 48% for agree and between 39% to 68% for disagree. On the other hand, the percentage ranges from between 3% to 13% for strongly agree and between 3% to 10% for strongly disagree.

Table 3. Learners' beliefs about the learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is listening skill	13	45	39	3
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is speaking skill	9	48	39	4
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is reading skill	3	22	68	7

The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is writing skill	8	32	50	10

In order to determine the results for bilateral distribution i.e. level of agreement and disagreement, the responses for strongly agree and agree were merged and the average was calculated. The same was done for the percentage for disagree and strongly disagree. Table 4 shows the average results for bilateral distribution (agreement and disagreement). The distribution shows rather high agreement for difficulty in acquiring listening (58%) and speaking (57%) skills, moderate agreement for writing (40%) and lower agreement for reading (25%). Figure 1 shows the graphical representation of the results in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution patterns of agreement and disagreement

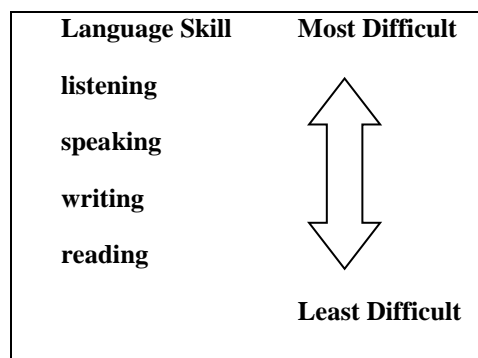| Item	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is listening skill	58	42
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is speaking skill	57	43
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is reading skill	25	75
The most difficult skill to learn in Japanese language is writing skill	40	60

Figure 1. Difficulty level according to language skill

Overall the findings on the JFL learners' beliefs about the difficulty in learning Japanese suggest that among the four language skills, listening is believed to be the most difficult, closely followed by speaking, then writing and lastly reading, as shown in Figure 1.

3.2 Undergraduates' belief about their self-efficacy in learning Japanese Language skills

Table 5 shows the response patterns of the JFL learners on their personal ability in the four fundamental language skills. The level of agreement distribution ranges between 43% to 74% for agree and between 23% to 56% for disagree compared to between 0 to 7% for strongly agree and between 1% to 3% for strongly disagree. The results also seem to indicate a higher agreement level compared to the disagreement level.

Table 5. *Participants about their personal ability in Japanese Language*

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
My listening ability in Japanese language is good.	1	61	37	1
My speaking ability in Japanese language is good.	0	43	56	1
My reading ability in Japanese language is good.	2	74	23	1

My writing ability in Japanese language is good.	7	53	37	3

Table 6 shows the average results for bilateral distribution (agreement and disagreement). The merged bilateral distribution shows higher agreement for having good ability in reading (76%), followed by listening (62%) and writing (60%). On the other hand, the level of agreement for having good speaking ability is comparatively low (43%).

Table 6. Distribution patterns of agreement and disagreement

Item	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
My listening ability in Japanese language is good.	62	38
My speaking ability in Japanese language is good.	43	57
My reading ability in Japanese language is good.	76	24
My writing ability in Japanese language is good.	60	40

The overall findings on students' beliefs about their personal ability in Japanese language suggest that among the four skills, students are more confident about their reading ability, followed by listening, reading and lastly speaking ability in Japanese, as shown in Figure 2.
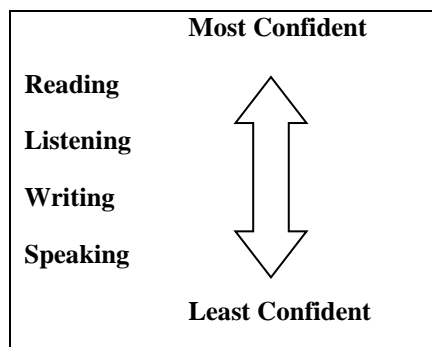
Most Confident

Reading

Listening

Writing

Speaking

Least Confident

Figure 2. Confidence level according to language skill

3.3 Reason for learning Japanese language

Table 7 shows the list of reasons given by the undergraduates for deciding to learn the Japanese language. The ranking of each reason is listed according to its percentage. As shown in Table 7, a total of 13 reasons were mentioned by the students for choosing to learn the Japanese language.

Table 7. Students' motivation for learning JFL

Reason	%	Ranking	Type
Learn extra language	95	1	Integrative
Interest in Japanese language	94	2	Integrative
Increase job opportunity	89	3	Instrumental
Learn Japanese culture	88	4	Integrative
Liking towards Japanese products	79	5	Integrative
Communicate with Japanese	78	6	Integrative
Visit Japan for tour	73	7	Instrumental
Want good grades	58	8	Instrumental
Study in Japan	39	9	Instrumental

Friends' influence	36	10	Instrumental
Japanese language is challenging	31	11	Integrative
Similarity with mother tongue	19	12	Instrumental
Family encouragement	17	13	Instrumental

A huge majority of the students (95%) mentioned that they are taking Japanese language because they want to learn an extra language and have interest in the language (94%). Within the 80% range are better employment opportunity (89%) and interest in the Japanese culture (88%). In the 70% range are liking toward Japanese products (79%) and desire to visit Japan (73%). About 58% of the students mentioned wanting to obtain good grades as their reason. Desire to study in Japan was only mentioned by 39% of the participants and this reason is within the same range as friends' influence (36%) and the challenge that Japanese language pose in relation to learning (31%). The Mandarin language written scripts are viewed as similar to the Japanese scripts to some extent. However, this reason was only mentioned by 19% of the students although 51% of the participants were of Chinese ethnicity. This could be because, although there are similarities between the two languages' written scripts, only students who went to Chinese medium schools would be able to transfer this knowledge. Family encouragement ranks at the bottom of the list with only 17% mentioning it as their reason for learning the Japanese language.

4 Discussion and Implications

This study attempted to discover the Malaysian undergraduates' beliefs about learning JFL, their self-efficacy in the language skills, as well as the reasons for learning the language. First, it was found that the undergraduates believe that listening and speaking skills in Japanese language are more difficult to learn compared to writing and reading, with reading being viewed as easier to acquire compared to writing. Secondly, the study also found that the students are least confident with their speaking ability followed by writing, listening and lastly reading.

The consistency in the findings on the beliefs on listening and speaking skill whereby students indicated that the two skills are more difficult to acquire and at the same time they are least confident especially with their speaking ability. Yeoh and Singh (2020) in their study on the use of Japanese language in intercultural context among Malaysian Japanese speaking employees in Japanese companies also reported that listening and speaking pose major challenges compared to reading and writing. The findings from the present study seems to suggest that the Malaysian students' belief about learning the four core skills in Japanese language is consistent with the actual happenings at workplace while communicating with Japanese colleagues and employers.

Similarly, there is also consistency in the findings on reading skills that students generally find this skill easier to acquire and are more confident with their reading ability. In this course, only Hiragana and Katakana, which are two of the three types of Japanese characters were introduced. Both characters are syllables made up of fifty sounds-symbols. This finding is probably due to the fact that reading skill in this level one course only requires the ability to recognize the Hiragana and Katakana character and it is a form of receptive skill. *Kanji* which is the third type of Japanese character, is considered as the most challenging component of Japanese learning (Yamashita & Maru, 2000) is only introduced in the second level course. The findings on reading skills supports the previous researchers suggestions that learners beliefs are context specific (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Rieger, 2009).

As for writing, although students believe that writing skills is not that difficult to acquire, they are not so confident with their writing ability. This could be because of the same reason mentioned for reading skills, that is the fact that only Hiragana and Katakana, are covered in the course. Also, writing skill is a productive skill which requires the ability to copy or reproduce and write from memory, making it more difficulty. Thus, more practice in writing the Japanese characters and writing exercises would help improve the students' writing ability and at the same time boost their confidence in writing.

The results also show that Malaysian students are motivated to learn Japanese for integrative and instrumental reasons. This finding is consistent with Ainol and Isarji (2009) findings that the Malaysian undergraduates tend to learn a foreign language due to a mix of both integrative and instrumental reasons. However, the present study also shows that integrative motivations seem to rank higher, indicating a stronger inclination towards toward integratively motivated reasons. This finding seem to support the suggestion that integrative motivation plays a more important role and disagrees with Dörnyei's (1990) suggestion that instrumental motivation is more obvious than integrative motivation for foreign language learners. However, the findings is in contrast to Gonzales's (2010) reported that Filipino learners were more motivated by career and economic enhancement. This difference could be due to the influence of the 'Look East Policy" implemented since mid-1980s and the fact that Japanese language is also taught in certain schools in Malaysia.

As for motivation in learning JFL, the results show a mixture of both integrative and instrumental factors. However, integrative motivation like interest in learning an additional language, interest in Japanese language and culture seem to rank higher in the list compared to instrumental motivation. In order to address the learners' desires, there is a great need to have a combination of integrative and instrumental oriented learning activities but with slightly more activities which are integrative in nature. For example, inclusion of texts related to the history of Japanese language, food, clothing, and festivals for integrative motivated students. Work related situations and tasks like formal conversations and writing short emails would certainly meet the needs of instrumentally motivated students. These pedagogical adjustments would help increase students' interest, get them to be more involved and may improve their performance in learning of JFL.

Implication for teaching and learning

Language learning is a process and the language teachers play a crucial role in facilitating the process and making it meaningful for learners. The incorporation of student' language learning beliefs and understanding of their motivation into the pedagogical practice would facilitate students' learning and eventually, improve their command of the target language. In addition, Ellis (2008) stated that although language learners' beliefs is a strong mediator for language learning and thus emphasized that language teachers especially foreign language teachers need to address them in their pedagogy. The findings from the present study indicate that JFL learners need more help in building a positive view about speaking skills and it can be achieved by providing them more pronunciation practices and creating opportunities for them to practice the language in and outside the class. Several studies have highlighted the benefit of using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in improving language learners' pronunciation, listening and speaking ability (Rajab, 2013; Trazo & Abocejo, 2019). In line with this, introduction to phonetic alphabets that represents the sounds in Japanese language would also help in improving the learners' pronunciation. Authentic classroom activities as well as performance based assessment like role-play, oral presentations would help in providing the students' more opportunities to practice the language. These strategies and engaging experiences with the language, in turn are likely to develop a more positive view about listening and speaking in Japanese.

On the other hand, although students seem to be quite confident with their listening ability, they are of the view that it is the most difficult skill to acquire. The students might be confident with their listening ability in the classroom due to the fact that the instructors speak slower than in a normal situation and uses simple words and sentences. However, the language spoken by the native speakers such as in animes, dramas, video games, or at workplace are much more faster and they use various types of syntax and words. Their exposure to spoken Japanese outside class might have influenced their belief about the difficulty in listening in Japanese. In order to address this discrepancy, there is a need for the teachers to use more authentic listening tasks like audio visual materials in the classroom. Also, there instructors should speak in a more natural way as the course progresses.

Conclusion

This study examined the Malaysian undergraduates' beliefs about learning JFL with a focus on the four fundamental language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well their motivation for learning the language. Although bele study does not claim to be an exhaustive one, the results generated do provide an awareness of what JFLs bring to the classroom. Besides providing evidence supporting the view that learners' notion of language learning plays an important role in learning the Japanese language, the study also

has discussed how the identification and understanding of these aspects about learners can be utilized to provide more meaningful learning tasks and activities.

Since notions about language learning or metacognitive matters may be context specific and influenced by other variables; for example, age, first language and education background, further studies could investigate whether students from different demographic backgrounds have different beliefs, and motivational orientations. In addition, future research could also look into the relationship between the students' beliefs and motivation with the students' actual performances with a focus on the four language skills, as well as the match between students' and teachers about what constitute Japanese language learning and how the pedagogical approaches could be organized. Also, the present study is based on questionnaire data, further studies could utilize direct observation of teaching and learning in classroom.

Acknowledgement

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