



MODERN METHODS OF TEACHING JAPANESE

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Abstract

As Japanese continues to attract global interest due to its unique culture, economy, and media, the methods employed in teaching the language have significantly evolved. Traditional methods that focused mainly on rote memorization have been supplemented by modern approaches emphasizing communicative competence, technology, and immersive learning. This article explores the contemporary methods of teaching Japanese, examining how technology-enhanced tools, communicative language teaching, task-based methods, and immersive learning environments have reshaped Japanese language education. By focusing on these modern techniques, this article provides insight into the changing landscape of teaching and learning Japanese.

Keywords: Japanese language, language pedagogy, communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, technology, immersive learning, global education

Introduction

Japanese is the official language of Japan, spoken by over 120 million people. With Japan's global cultural, technological, and economic influence, there has been an increasing global demand for learning the Japanese language. The popularity of Japanese media, including anime, manga, films, and video games, has further fueled this demand. Consequently, language educators have adapted their approaches to meet the needs of a diverse student base. Historically, Japanese language instruction relied heavily on grammar drills and rote memorization. However, as the field of language acquisition evolved, more dynamic methods were introduced. The 21st century has seen a transformation in Japanese language teaching with an emphasis on communicative competence, technology-enhanced learning, and immersive experiences. This article examines several modern teaching methods that have gained popularity in recent years, analyzing their effectiveness and application in Japanese language education.

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a dominant method in the 1970s and 1980s, prioritizing communication and practical use of language over grammar instruction and memorization. CLT is based on the premise that language learning is most effective when students are given opportunities to use the language in authentic communication. In a CLT-based classroom, students focus on acquiring language skills through interaction, rather than memorizing rules in isolation. In Japanese classrooms, CLT practices might include real-life simulations such as ordering food at a restaurant, discussing weekend plans, or role-playing a visit to a doctor. Students might work in pairs or groups to engage in meaningful dialogues, providing them with the opportunity to practice vocabulary and structures in context. A key feature of this approach is the emphasis on fluency over accuracy. While grammatical correctness remains important, the primary goal is for students to communicate effectively in real-world situations. The benefits of CLT in Japanese language teaching are clear: learners develop their speaking and listening skills in a dynamic, interactive environment. For example, an activity where students work together to plan a trip to Japan encourages them to use new vocabulary, practice pronunciation, and deepen their cultural understanding.

2. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) focuses on the use of meaningful tasks that require the use of the target language to achieve specific outcomes. Unlike traditional methods where language is taught through isolated exercises, TBLT emphasizes learning through context-driven tasks that are based on real-world situations. The central tenet of TBLT is that language is best learned when students are engaged in tasks that mirror real-life communication. A typical task in a Japanese language class might include planning a cultural event, writing an itinerary, or discussing a current issue in Japan. For instance, students could be asked to work in groups to organize a Japanese-themed festival, where they would need to research Japanese food, traditions, and language, and then present their findings in Japanese. The task-oriented nature of this approach helps students actively use Japanese, improving their ability to produce the language in a structured but practical way. TBLT has proven to be particularly effective in enhancing students' problem-solving and critical thinking abilities while fostering cooperative learning. This method requires students to engage with the language in context, which enhances retention and makes learning more relevant. The emphasis on collaborative tasks also mirrors the collaborative nature of modern Japanese society, where teamwork and communication are highly valued.

3. Technology-Enhanced Learning: The rapid advancement of technology has drastically changed the landscape of language teaching. In the case of Japanese, the rise of language learning apps, online resources, and virtual platforms has made the language more accessible and engaging.

Tools such as Duolingo, Anki (a flashcard app), and Rosetta Stone allow learners to practice vocabulary, kanji, and grammar in an interactive manner.

These tools have made learning Japanese more convenient and adaptable to individual learning styles. Online resources have also facilitated interaction with native speakers through platforms such as HelloTalk, iTalki, and Tandem. These platforms connect learners with Japanese speakers from around the world for conversational practice, enabling students to improve their speaking skills and cultural understanding outside the classroom. By engaging with native speakers, students gain authentic language experience that would otherwise be difficult to obtain in traditional language classrooms. Furthermore, the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) is gaining momentum in Japanese language teaching. In a VR-based classroom, students can immerse themselves in simulated Japanese-speaking environments, such as virtual tours of Japanese cities or attending virtual cultural events. These technologies enhance language learning by offering a more immersive, interactive, and engaging experience that closely approximates real-world scenarios.

4. Flipped Classroom and Blended Learning: The Flipped Classroom model has become increasingly popular in modern education. In this model, traditional lecture-based instruction is reversed. Students engage with content outside of class—such as watching pre-recorded lectures, reading articles, or completing online exercises—and then participate in interactive activities during class time. This method encourages active learning and allows for more personalized instruction. In the context of Japanese, students might watch videos explaining grammar points or vocabulary usage before class. In class, they could then practice these concepts through role-playing exercises, group discussions, or even games. The flipped classroom fosters a deeper understanding of the material by encouraging students to engage with content at their own pace before applying it in a practical setting. Blended learning, which combines online learning with face-to-face instruction, has similar advantages. Blended learning allows students to access digital resources and materials at their own pace while benefiting from the structure and support of traditional classroom settings. For Japanese learners, this model offers flexibility, allowing them to learn vocabulary and kanji through apps or videos and then apply this knowledge in group activities or in conversations with their peers.

5. Immersive Learning: Immersive learning is considered one of the most effective ways to acquire a new language. Full immersion in a Japanese-speaking environment allows learners to pick up language and culture simultaneously, reinforcing their learning experience. While complete immersion in Japan may not be feasible for everyone, educators are adopting various strategies to simulate immersion within the classroom. Teachers use authentic Japanese materials such as TV shows, movies, music, and newspapers to expose students to natural language in context. Japanese-language films, for instance, provide an opportunity for students to hear native speakers and become familiar with colloquial expressions, intonation, and accents.

The use of culturally relevant materials also helps students gain insights into Japanese customs, traditions, and societal norms.

Furthermore, study-abroad programs or language immersion camps in Japan offer an unparalleled experience for students who wish to gain firsthand exposure to the language and culture. These experiences enable students to practice speaking and listening in real-life situations, accelerating their language acquisition process and providing valuable cultural insights.

6. Gamification: Gamification, the application of game-like elements to educational settings, has also become a popular strategy for language teaching. By integrating points, levels, badges, and leaderboards, gamification motivates students to engage more deeply with their learning. This approach fosters competition, but more importantly, it encourages continuous practice and rewards progress. For Japanese language learners, gamification might involve using language apps that track students' progress, reward them for completing tasks, or provide fun challenges that make learning kanji, grammar, and vocabulary more enjoyable. Classroom games such as kanji bingo or vocabulary quizzes also help reinforce learning in a fun, interactive way. Gamification provides instant feedback, which is crucial for language learners as it helps them monitor their progress and stay motivated.

Conclusion

The evolution of language teaching methods reflects the changing needs and preferences of learners in the modern world. As global interest in Japanese continues to grow, innovative approaches that emphasize communication, technology, and immersion are proving to be highly effective. Methods like Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, and the integration of digital tools offer students dynamic, engaging ways to learn Japanese. Moreover, flipped classrooms, blended learning, and immersive experiences allow students to deepen their understanding of the language and culture, creating well-rounded language learners. As we look to the future of Japanese language education, it is clear that these modern methods will continue to shape the way Japanese is taught and learned, providing learners with the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world.

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