

# Addressing the Shortage: A Look into the Motivations of Japanese Language Teachers in Malaysia

## *Masalah Kekurangan Guru: Sorotan Terhadap Motivasi Guru-Guru Bahasa Jepun di Malaysia*

Azalia Zaharuddin<sup>1</sup> & Zoraida Mustafa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1 2</sup>Faculty of Major Language Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Negeri Sembilan.

### Article progress

Received: 22 October 2025

Accepted: 10 December 2025

Published: 30 November 2025

\*Corresponding author:

Azalia Zaharuddin

Faculty of Major Language  
Studies, Universiti Sains Islam  
Malaysia, Bandar Baru Nilai,  
71800 Negeri Sembilan,  
MALAYSIA;

Email:

azalia.zaharuddin@usim.edu.my

**Abstract:** Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP), launched in 1982, significantly influenced the development of Japanese language education. However, recent trends show a decline in the number of Japanese language teachers, raising concerns about the sustainability of the field. This study explores the motivations of Japanese language educators in Malaysia using the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) scale. Survey data from 70 teachers reveal that intrinsic career value, the desire to work with youth, and the aspiration to make a social contribution are the most influential motivators. In contrast, teaching as a fallback career and job transferability were rated lowest. Despite challenges, most respondents expressed satisfaction with their career choice. The findings suggest that the shortage of Japanese language teachers is not due to a lack of interest, but rather systemic barriers. These include limited certification pathways, unpredictable teacher training program intakes, and stringent hiring criteria in tertiary institutions. Additionally, while teachers perceive their work as requiring high expertise and emotional investment, they feel inadequately compensated, especially when compared to private sector roles requiring Japanese language proficiency. This study highlights the need for structural reforms in teacher training and recruitment policies to ensure the sustainability of Japanese language education in Malaysia. By addressing institutional constraints and improving career pathways, stakeholders can better support motivated individuals in pursuing and remaining in the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Japanese language education, teacher motivation, teacher shortage

**Abstrak:** Dasar Pandang ke Timur Malaysia, yang dilancarkan pada tahun 1982, telah mempengaruhi perkembangan pendidikan bahasa Jepun dengan ketara. Namun, trend terkini menunjukkan penurunan bilangan guru bahasa Jepun, yang menimbulkan kebimbangan. Kajian ini mengkaji motivasi pendidik bahasa Jepun di Malaysia dengan menggunakan skala Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice). Data tinjauan daripada 70 orang guru mendedahkan bahawa nilai kerjaya intrinsik, hasrat untuk bekerja dengan golongan muda, dan aspirasi untuk membuat sumbangan sosial merupakan pemangkin yang paling berpengaruh. Sebaliknya, faktor mengajar sebagai kerjaya cadangan dan kebolehpindahan kerja dinilai paling rendah. Walaupun menghadapi cabaran, majoriti responden menyatakan kepuasan terhadap pilihan kerjaya mereka. Penemuan kajian mencadangkan bahawa kekurangan guru bahasa Jepun bukanlah disebabkan oleh kurangnya minat, tetapi halangan sistemik. Antaranya termasuklah laluan pensijilan yang sukar, sistem pengambilan guru yang tidak menentu, dan kriteria pengambilan yang ketat di institusi pengajian tinggi. Selain itu, walaupun guru-guru merasakan bahawa kerja mereka memerlukan kepakaran yang tinggi, mereka berasa gaji yang diterima tidak setimpal, terutamanya jika dibandingkan dengan peranan di sektor swasta yang memerlukan kemahiran bahasa Jepun. Kajian ini menekankan keperluan untuk reformasi struktur dalam dasar latihan dan pengambilan guru bagi memastikan kemampuhan pendidikan bahasa Jepun di Malaysia.

**Kata kunci:** Pendidikan Bahasa Jepun, motivasi guru, kekurangan jumlah guru

## Introduction

The Look East Policy (LEP) has been ongoing for the past 40 years with minimal change. However, as Malaysia considers renaming or even reviving this policy, it is vital to thoroughly examine its effects. In the case of this paper, it is the implementation gap between what was envisioned by the policy, and what was achieved, specifically in the field of Japanese language education. The initial objective of the policy has always been to foster the values, ethics, and morales of the Japanese people (Md Akhir, Huda, & Hassan 2023), thus why in the beginning, much attention was given to education and training. There is, however, a major issue in regard to the language barrier. Before we could send students to obtain knowledge, it was necessary for them to learn the language, in which many of Japanese culture and nuance are imbued with. This saw the start of plentiful programs which were dedicated to producing Malaysians who were not only fluent in Japanese, but would be able to teach, grow, and sustain the field of Japanese language education in Malaysia. Programs such as the Japanese Language Program for Malaysian Teachers (JLMPT) in 1990, produced 156 Malaysian Japanese teachers in its 9-year run, is a clear example of the vision that was being put forth by the LEP. While most served in schools, the few teachers that continued their studies were able to land positions in higher institutions. That of which, were also just starting to offer Japanese language, and not many in numbers. Eventually *Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Bahasa Antarabangsa* (IPGKBA) was established in the country in 2005, and students were no longer sent to Japan for teacher training. The early days of the LEP supported many of these programs and initiatives, and it gave a bright outlook as it set the stage for the potential growth and development of Japanese language education in the country. However, data and literature over the years would show that Malaysia's Japanese language education has become stagnant, and even worst, risking a potential extinction of programs due to the shortage of teachers.

## Literature Review

According to the Survey Report on Japanese Language Education Abroad in 2021, the number of Japanese language teachers recorded in Malaysia were only 484 teachers, a decline from the 504 teachers recorded back in 2012 by the same survey. What seems most concerning, is when these numbers are put up against the Japanese language teachers in other Southeast Asian countries. As reported in Table 1, Malaysia has the lowest recorded number of teachers, in contrast to the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. An interesting aspect of this comparison is the realization that due to the LEP, Malaysia had a better head start compared to countries such as Vietnam, which only saw effect after The Vietnam-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJEPA) in December 2008 and came into effect in October 2009 (Sang, 2021). Vietnam was even able to establish the Vietnam-Japan University (VJU) in 2014, and to date records the second highest number of teachers in Southeast Asia, following closely behind Indonesia. Malaysia also had a plan similarly to setup Malaysia-Japan International University of Technology (MJIUT) in 2001, nearly 20 years since the LEP, and yet it did not come into full fruition and only came out as the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIIT), as part of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in 2010 (Md Akhir, Huda, & Hassan 2023).

Closest in comparison might be the Philippines, where the number of teachers also saw more growth, also partly due to bilateral relations that included the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) \$2-billion loan agreement to fund part of the construction of a Philippines' largest railway system in November 2015 (JICA, 2019). Philippines have managed to surpass Malaysia in terms of number of teachers, although upon closer inspection in can be concluded that this is also because the hiring qualifications in the country are much lower than in Malaysia (Zaharuddin and Mustafa, 2024).

**Table 1.0 Number of Institutions and teachers per educational level in five Southeast Asian countries**

		Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand	Vietnam	Indonesia
Primary	Institutions	2	4	24	22	31
	Teachers	11	19	41	57	49
Secondary	Institutions	140	64	521	130	2,275
	Teachers	157	141	1,040	303	3,011
Tertiary	Institutions	43	44	74	88	164
	Teachers	155	178	383	753	804
	Institutions	35	146	74	394	490

Other Educational Institutions	Teachers	188	872	593	4,560	2,756
Sum	Institutions	215	242	676	629	2,958
	Teachers	484	1,111	2,015	5,644	6,617

Source: Survey Report on Japanese Language Education Abroad (2021) by The Japan Foundation

The data reveals that numbers will spike when bilateral relations are involved. While this is common in any setting, why is it that other countries are able to continue to grow and sustain their numbers, even long after the policies have passed? The situation in Malaysia exposes how dependent Japanese language education in the country is to the LEP. But the more intriguing question is why is it so dependent? Why can't it grow authentically? Is the reality that there is actually not enough interest anymore in Japanese language in the country? In retrospect, the number of Japanese language teachers in Japan are also facing a decline with reports of stricter qualifications and decreasing number of applicants for teacher training programs. It should also be noted that nearly 87% of Japanese language teachers are only working as volunteers, and not in full time positions, leading to the high turnover rates (Hirahata, 2018). While many questions are left on the table, one aspect that can bring some answers to this matter is teacher motivation. Investigating teacher motivation in the context of Japanese language allows us to understand what motivates individuals to pursue a career in teaching, what contributes to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and ultimately why they stay or leave the profession.

### Teacher Motivation

According to Han and Yin (2016), teacher motivation is defined as the following:

*“-reasons that emanating from individuals’ intrinsic values to choose to teach and sustaining teaching, and the intensity of teacher motivation which is indicated by effort expended on teaching as influenced by a number of contextual factors.” (p.18)*

Research on teacher motivation initially gained traction due to the plaguing issue of teacher shortages, experienced in western countries such as the UK, US and Australia (Watt et al, 2012). Understanding teacher motivation is crucial as it is closely linked to factors like student motivation, educational reform, teaching methods, and teachers’ well-being. Thus, research on teacher motivation can provide valuable insights on strategies to recruit and retain teachers.

Richardson and Watt (2006) designed and employed the factors influencing teaching choice (FIT-Choice) scale to find out the motivations of teaching across three major established urban teacher provider universities in Australia. Initial results revealed that the highest-rated motivations for teaching were perceived ability, intrinsic value, and the desire to make a social contribution, while the lowest were teaching as a fallback career or due to social influence.

Hennessy and Lynch (2016) implemented the survey with pre-service teachers in the Mid-West region of Ireland. Results were similar to that of Richardson and Watt (2006) where prior teaching and learning experiences, as well as perceived ability, were found to be the strongest influential factors in participants’ decision to become a teacher.

In Turkey, Kılınç, Watt and Richardson (2012) reported that altruistic ‘social utility values’ were the most influential, followed by the desire for a secure job for. Shang et al (2022)’s results in China displayed similarities, where unlike in western studies, social altruism was the primary motivation, followed by prior experience, underscoring the role of teacher education.

The FIT-Choice scale was also used in South Korea, which is one of the countries with an oversupply of highly qualified teacher candidates, and teacher shortage is not a concern (Lee, Kang & Park, 2019). In South Korea, influencing others (social utility values), followed by Positive prior learning and teaching experiences (social influence), Benefits (personal utility values), and Qualification fit and desire to teach were the highest rated factors.

The FIT-Choice scale has been implemented and validated in various countries (Watt et al, 2012). Following the results of the survey, it provides valuable information on the characteristics of individuals who are motivated to choose teaching as a career, which in return can provide policy makers and institutions with a guideline in crafting hiring policies that are more attractive. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the motivations to teach of Japanese

language teachers in Malaysia in hopes of dealing with the teacher shortage issue at hand. The research questions that the paper aims to address are:

1. Who are choosing to teach Japanese language in Malaysia?
2. What are the highest rated factors influencing teaching choice for Japanese language teachers in Malaysia?

## Methodology

### *Sampel*

To investigate the motivation of Japanese language teachers in Malaysia, this study employed a mixed-method design which included a survey with closed and open-ended questions. Specifically, it utilized the factors influencing teaching choice (FIT-Choice scale) survey, which was adapted from Watt and Richardson (2007). The scale represents a well-grounded psychometric framework, firmly rooted in the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. It is commonly used in research pertaining to teacher motivation and career choice due to its comprehensiveness for explaining academic and career choices. Thus, it is the most suitable instrument to utilize in this study. The survey is divided into three parts, motivation for teaching (40 items), perceptions about the profession (14 items), and career choice satisfaction (6 items). The items were divided into 18 subscales, covering factors of motivation such as intrinsic values, personal utility values, social utility values and more. The survey was modified by adding items relevant to foreign language teaching. The modified items (a subscale that included cross cultural values such as interest in understanding different cultures and interacting with foreigners) were replicated based on the study by Zhang, Wu, and Zhu (2020). In the pilot study, the modified survey had a high reliability index (Cronbach alpha = .87). The participants were required to rate the importance of each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (absolutely). Prior to that in the same survey, participants are required to answer questions regarding their background such as their age group, gender, and educational background. At the end of the survey, a semi-structured interview question was inserted to further probe into challenges faced by Japanese language teachers in Malaysia.

The survey was digitized and distributed online using Microsoft Forms to Japanese language teachers in Malaysia. Convenience and voluntary response sampling method was utilized by sending the survey to members of the Malaysian Japanese Language Instructors Society (MAJLIS) and emailed to institutions in Malaysia that offer Japanese language. Participants were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the voluntary nature of participation. Before starting the survey, participants were required to read and agree to an informed consent statement, which included information about the study, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without any penalty. A total of 70 respondents answered the survey.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 31.0) to generate descriptive statistics. For each survey item, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated based on all participant responses. To provide an overall composite score for each multi-item factor (e.g., Intrinsic career value, make social contribution etc.), a factor mean was calculated by averaging the means of the individual items comprising that factor. For instance, the "Expertise" factor mean of 5.47 was derived by averaging the three individual item means (5.46, 5.37, and 5.58). All items used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely). No items required reverse-coding. Participants with missing responses to an item were excluded from the analysis for that specific item. The study's descriptive focus did not include inferential statistical tests for group comparison. The semi-structured section is analyzed using thematic analysis by utilizing ATLAS.ti software.

## Results

This paper will only focus on the results obtained from the demographic information and FIT-Choice scale. The demographic results reveal who chooses teaching in Malaysia, and the survey reveals why they choose teaching, as well as their perceptions and satisfaction ratings.

### *Who Chooses Teaching?*

The demographic in Table 2.0 reveals that there are more female than male teachers in the field of Japanese language.

This is not surprising considering that the number of women graduates in Malaysia have consistently surpass men and only saw a slight drop in 2024 (Graduates Statistics 2023, Department of Statistics Malaysia). At least 43% of the respondents are below 40, while 57% are either middle aged or seniors. Although subtle, this does reflect the age differences between the number of teachers coming in and out of service.

**Table 2 Demographic of Respondents**

Information	Group	Percentage
Gender	Male	23%
	Female	77%
Age Group	20-30	14%
	30-40	29%
	40-50	30%
	50-60	17%
	60 and above	10%
Teaching Status	Full-time	89%
	Part-time	11%
Educational Background	Social Sciences	68%
	Pure Sciences	32%
Institution	University	24%
	Private Tutor	9%
	Private Language School	6%
	Preparatory School	6%
	Secondary School	49%
Length of JSL Teaching	Less than 3 years	23%
	3 to 5 years	20%
	5 to 8 years	4%
	8 to 10 years	4%
	More than 10 years	49%

In contrast to Hirahata's findings, most of the Japanese language teachers in Malaysia work full time and are from social sciences background. This is an interesting finding, considering that most Malaysians are sent to Japan under the engineering program by the government, and there are not many programs offering social sciences. The highest number of Japanese language teachers in Malaysia are teaching in secondary schools (49%), followed by teaching at a university (23%).

#### *Why Choose Teaching?*

The results from the motivation for teaching (40 items) segment reveal that Japanese language teachers in Malaysia have a high intrinsic career value, followed by the desire to work with children and adolescents, and desire to make social contribution (Table 3).

**Table 3 Highest Rated Factors on Motivation for Teaching**

Factor	Item	M	SD	Factor M
Intrinsic career value	I am interested in teaching	6.22	0.954	
	I have always wanted to be a teacher	5.54	1.555	5.95
	I like teaching	6.08	1.209	
Make social contribution	Teaching JSL will allow me to provide a service to society	5.56	1.215	
	Teaching JSL can help eliminate foreigners' misunderstandings of Japan.	5.48	1.328	5.66
	Teaching JSL can help communicate Japanese culture to other countries	5.72	1.213	

	Teaching JSL enables me to give back to society	5.88	1.189	
Work with children and adolescents	I want a job that involves working with children/adolescents	5.50	1.446	
	I want to work in a child/adolescent-centred environment	5.56	1.445	5.67
	I like working with children/adolescents	5.96	1.049	
Prior Teaching & Learning Experience	I have had inspirational teachers	5.92	1.209	
	I have had good teachers as role-models	4.76	1.954	5.55
	I have had positive learning experiences	5.96	1.177	

In contrast, the lowest scoring factor is teaching as a fallback career (Table 4). Respondents also disagree that having a career in teaching Japanese will allow them more time for family, and that it does not influence job transferability

**Table 4 Lowest Rated Factors on Motivation for Teaching**

Factor	Item	M	SD	Factor M
Fallback Career	I was unsure of what career I wanted	2.72	1.906	
	I was not accepted into my first-choice career	2.24	1.869	2.22
	I chose JSL teaching as a last-resort career	1.70	1.216	
Time for family	Teaching hours will fit with the responsibilities of having a family	4.30	1.887	
	School holidays will fit in with family commitments	4.52	1.705	
	Teaching JSL can expose my family to foreign-ers and international cultures.	4.44	1.950	
	As a teacher I will have lengthy holidays.	4.80	1.750	4.14
	As a teacher I will have short workdays.	3.80	2.010	
		2.98	1.635	
Job transferability	Teaching JSL will be a useful job for me to have when travelling.	4.20	1.690	
	Teaching JSL can improve my job transfer ability.	3.92	1.700	
	JSL Teaching qualification is recognized everywhere.	4.24	1.744	4.11
	Teaching JSL will allow me to choose where I wish to live.	3.52	1.930	
	Teaching JSL can improve my foreign language proficiency demanded by other jobs.	4.68	1.834	

For the highest rated factors, these findings are similar to the findings of Richardson and Watt (2006) as well as Hennessy and Lynch (2016). The lowest rated factor, “fallback career” is so far unanimous across past research. This is important in highlighting that despite the negative connotations often associated with teaching such as low pay, and high workload, it is still the first choice of a career for the people who choose it.

The results for perceptions of the profession in Table 5.0 further reveal that they have good perceptions of their abilities. However, when it comes to the issue of salary, most respondents do not really agree that they are well paid or earn a good salary.

**Table 5 Perceptions of Teaching**

Factor	Item	M	SD	Factor M
Expertise	Do you think teaching Japanese language requires high levels of expert knowledge?	5.46	1.263	5.47
	Do you think Japanese language teachers need high levels of technical knowledge?	5.37	1.365	
	Do you think Japanese language teachers need highly specialised knowledge?	5.58	1.051	
Difficulty	Do you think Japanese language teachers have a heavy workload?	5.34	1.341	5.18
	Do you think teaching Japanese language is emotionally demanding?	4.87	1.483	
	Do you think teaching Japanese language is hard?	5.32	1.491	
Salary	Do you think teaching Japanese language is well paid?	3.38	1.580	3.39
	Do you think Japanese language teachers earn a good salary?	3.41	1.644	

This is not surprising, considering that most private companies in Malaysia would offer fresh graduates starting salaries from RM6000 to RM7000 for Japanese language speaking roles. If we compare this to the government schoolteacher pay grade, the starting salaries for teachers with a diploma (DG29) is RM1,698, and teachers with a degree (DG41) are RM2,188. In tertiary education, lecturers with a master's can start at Grade DS45 with RM3,070, and those with doctorates generally enter at DS51 with RM5,855. Since they believe that teaching Japanese language requires high levels of expertise, and is quite difficult, they should be compensated fairly for it as well.

**Table 6 Satisfaction of Choice**

Factor	Item	M	SD	Factor M
Satisfaction with Choice	How carefully have you thought about becoming a Japanese language teacher?	5.24	1.544	5.58
	How satisfied are you with your choice of becoming a Japanese language teacher?	5.96	1.139	
	How happy are you with your decision to become a Japanese language teacher?	5.93	1.150	

In the final part of the survey, as shown in Table 6.0, it is revealed that Japanese language teachers in Malaysia are fairly satisfied with their decision to become a teacher.

## Discussion

The overall response from the study reveals that Japanese language teachers in Malaysia have high intrinsic career values, and despite believing that they are not very well paid, are satisfied with the career choice that they have selected. If this is the case, then why are we facing the issue of teacher shortages? If anything, this survey allows us to remove the possibility of people not being interested in becoming teachers. It allows us to shift the focus and consider other obstacles that might be in the way of teacher candidates from pursuing this career.

### *Lack of Certification and Qualification*

Often discussed is the lack of certification and pathway to specifically become a Japanese language teacher. In Malaysia, teacher candidates are often reliant on the intake from the *Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Bahasa Antarabangsa*

(IPGKBA) if they wish to pursue teaching in primary and secondary schools. The intake for Japanese language teachers, however, is often unpredictable, and is dictated only when it is considered to have a need. Programs will open for one cohort, and will be closed after two years or so, leaving prospective teacher candidates nowhere else to pursue their passion. This system is highly unsustainable, and the current status quo clearly reflects how damaging it can be when teachers leave the profession and there are no immediate replacements.

For tertiary education, the issue revolves around the qualifications of teachers. Universities set extremely high standards when it comes to hiring policies of foreign language teachers. Lecturers need to be specialists in the language, having at least a master's or PhD in the related field, and will also need to have a bachelor's degree that reflects their specialty. While this might sound like a reasonable condition, it does not consider the real-life situation of foreign language lecturers, who often only begin specializing in language after their undergraduate studies.

For example, in line with the country's aspiration at the time that wanted more graduates with technical skills, scholarships to Japan under the LEP were only available for engineering programs. While there were some offers for social sciences, they pale in comparison to the numbers sent for the engineering programs. This results in graduates who are fluent in the Japanese language, but their first degree was in engineering. This is reflected in our respondents where at least 32% responded that their BA degree is in Engineering or Applied Sciences. These teachers will be questioned, and most times will be considered not qualified for a tenured lecturing post, despite pursuing their MA and PhDs in fields related to Japanese language.

On the other side of the coin, even though more 60% of respondents do have BA related to Japanese language education, the more difficult problem is pursuing their studies to the PhD level to qualify for a position at public universities. Only recently in 2024 did Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) started offering postgraduate degrees in Japanese language, which prior did not leave prospective students with many alternatives.

## **Recommendation**

A possible solution for these hiring concerns may lie in moving away from a competency-based approach. On July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2025, the Minister of Education, Fadhlina Sidek stated that teacher shortages are to be addressed through reforms. She further revealed that the Future of Malaysian Education 2026-2036 plan will involve the introduction of a curriculum that focuses more on values-based education. While it is undoubted that teachers do need a certain level of qualification to teach, a value-based recruitment approach could be more beneficial for prospective teachers, especially in the field of Japanese language education. According to Groothuizen, Callwood and Gallagher (2018), values-based recruitment (VBR) focuses on hiring employees based on the right fit between values needed to be effective in the jobs with the values held by the employees. VBR has been successfully implemented in healthcare, enforcement authority, and selected governmental departments in the United Kingdom (Klingenberg & Pelletier, 2019). If anything, the survey in this study has shown that teachers can be the next group to benefit from VBR due to their mission-driven nature and intrinsic career values.

## **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on a smaller sample, as compared to those in the literature. This limits the statistical power and generalizability of the results. The use of a voluntary survey may also introduce self-selection bias, as participants with stronger opinions may have been more likely to respond. Furthermore, the sample was not systematically distributed across all regions, meaning the results may not fully represent the broader population of Japanese language teachers in diverse geographical or institutional contexts. Future research should aim to employ larger, randomized, and more geographically stratified sampling methods to validate and extend these initial findings.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the motivations of Japanese language teachers in Malaysia. The key finding is that the current teacher shortage does not stem from a lack of passion; rather, educators demonstrate strong intrinsic career values, a genuine desire to work with youth, and a commitment to social contribution. This indicates that Japanese language teaching is, for many, a deliberate and meaningful vocation.

The practical and policy relevance of this finding is significant. To address the shortage, recruitment and retention strategies must align with these intrinsic motivations. Specifically, the study suggests a pivot from a purely competency-



based hiring model to one that also values and recognizes applicants' intrinsic drive and mission-oriented goals. Such a values-based recruitment (VBR) approach could be a powerful tool for attracting and retaining the passionate educators the profession needs.

To translate this suggestion into actionable policy, future research should investigate the institutional feasibility of VBR within the Malaysian context. This includes examining organizational barriers in schools and universities, analyzing how current policies are implemented, and identifying the specific values prioritized in existing hiring practices. By addressing these structural questions, stakeholders can develop sustainable, evidence-based reforms. These efforts are essential not only for strengthening Japanese language education but also for supporting a robust, multilingual educational landscape in Malaysia.

## Acknowledgement

This work was supported (in part) by Grant for Japan-Related Research Project from The Sumitomo Foundation

## References

- BERNAMA. (2025, July 3). Teacher shortage addressed through MOE, SPP reforms. <https://bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2440875>
- Groothuizen, J. E., Callwood, A., & Gallagher, A. (2018). What is the value of Values Based Recruitment for nurse education programmes? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 74(5), 1068–1077. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13519>
- Han, J., & Yin, H. (2016). Teacher motivation: Definition, research development and implications for teachers. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1217819. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1217819>
- Hennessy, J., & Lynch, R. (2017). “I chose to become a teacher because”. Exploring the factors influencing teaching choice amongst pre-service teachers in Ireland. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(2), 106–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1183188>
- Hirahata, N. (2018). 日本語教育へのインセンティブ-「働く女性」ロールモデルの重要性 [Incentives for Japanese language education: The importance of "working women" role models]. *国際文化コミュニケーション研究* [International Cultural Communication Research], 2, 89–110.
- Japan International Cooperation Agency. (2019, January 22). Signing of Japanese ODA loan agreements with the Philippines: Contributing to the alleviation of traffic congestion and flood damage in Metro Manila with Japanese technology. [https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen\\_loan/pdf/en/6994/20190122\\_01.pdf](https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/6994/20190122_01.pdf)
- Kılınç, A., Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2012). Factors influencing teaching choice in Turkey. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), 199–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2012.700048>
- Klingenberg, M. K. R., & Pelletier, C. (2019). The practice of selecting for values in nursing. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 8(3), 312–324. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-10-2018-0036>
- Lee, J. A., Kang, M. O., & Park, B. J. (2019). Factors influencing choosing teaching as a career: South Korean preservice teachers. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 20(3), 467–488. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09577-1>
- Low, E. L., Lim, S. K., Ch'ng, A., & Goh, K. C. (2011). Pre-service teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a career in Singapore. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 31(2), 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2011.567003>
- Md Akhir, M. N., Mohd Huda, M. I., & Hassan, A. (2023). Forty years of the Look East Policy. In M. N. Md Akhir, M. I. Mohd Huda, & A. Hassan (Eds.), *Evolution and multidimensional reflections of Malaysia's Look East Policy* (pp. 11–23). UKM Press.
- Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. (2006). Who chooses teaching and why? Profiling characteristics and motivations across three Australian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 27–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660500480290>
- Sang, H. T. (2021). Vietnam-Japan relations: Growing importance in each other's eyes. See “Vietnam-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJEPA),” Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), 2 December 2015.

<https://wtocenter.vn/chuyen-de/12772-full-text-of-vietnam-japan-economic-partnership-agreement-vjepa>

- Shang, W., Yu, T., Wang, J., Sun, D., & Su, J. (2022). Why choose to become a teacher in China? A large-sample study using the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice scale. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(4), 406–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2022.2066504>
- Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2007). Motivational factors influencing teaching as a career choice: Development and validation of the FIT-Choice Scale. *Journal of Experimental Education*, \*75\*(3), 167–202. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.3.167-202>
- Watt, H. M. G., Richardson, P. W., Klusmann, U., Kunter, M., Beyer, B., Trautwein, U., & Baumert, J. (2012). Motivations for choosing teaching as a career: An international comparison using the FIT-Choice scale. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(6), 791–805. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.03.003>
- Zhang, H., Wu, J., & Zhu, Y. (2020). Why do you choose to teach Chinese as a second language? A study of pre-service CSL teachers' motivations. *System*, 91, Article 102242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102242>
- Zaharuddin, A., & Mustafa, Z. (2024, June 10–11). Where are the Japanese language teachers? An inquiry into the shortage in Malaysia [Paper presentation]. The 4th International Conference on Language, Linguistics and Society (ICLALIS2024), Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.