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## Learning Needs to Improve Japanese Language Proficiency for International Students Aspiring to Attend Graduate School: Case Studies of Japanese Language School Students

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## Abstract

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## Keywords

International students aspiring to go to graduate school, improvement in Japanese language skills, learning needs, Japanese language schools

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# Learning Needs to Improve Japanese Language Proficiency for International Students Aspiring to Attend Graduate School: Case Studies of Japanese Language School Students<sup>1</sup>

Altan Bulag<sup>※</sup>

## Abstract

The number of international graduate students in Japan has been increasing. However, some international students do not acquire the requisite Japanese language skills for studying because of their short stay in Japan before moving to graduate school. In many cases, students face difficulties and have research and language needs. In this study, we clarified the difficulties that students face and the need to improve their Japanese language ability to attend graduate school. We gained an understanding of the current learning situation of students in Japanese-language schools who aspire to graduate school. Additionally, we discuss the support that can contribute to the improvement of international students' Japanese language skills.

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## Introduction

Japan launched the “300,000 Foreign Students Plan” in 2008 as part of its global strategy, aiming to

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accept 300,000 foreign students by 2020. According to data from the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), which releases statistics for up to May 1 of the previous year every March, Japan was able to achieve that goal 11 years later, in 2019, with the number of international students enrolled in Japanese educational institutions reaching 312,214. Although the number of international students in Japan has since declined because of the unprecedented Corona disaster that swept the world, the number of international students in Japan as of May 1, 2021, was 242,444. This increase in the number of foreign students in Japan is largely attributable to the implementation of the “300,000 Foreign Students Plan,” in which the Japanese government has facilitated foreign students’ study in Japan by improving entrance examinations, admissions, and entry points and by creating a safe environment for students to concentrate on their studies at each educational institution. Consequently, in addition to the conventional number of students from Kanji-speaking countries and regions, the number of students from non-Kanji-speaking countries has rapidly increased. In this context, many foreign students from Kanji-speaking countries and regions have entered Japanese universities directly from their home countries, and some foreign students who graduated from universities in their home countries now aim to enter Japanese graduate schools directly.

Previous studies, however, have revealed that international students at Japanese universities, especially graduate schools, now have a wide range of academic needs because of these changes and relaxations. Mukai (2019) analyzed the situation of international graduate students enrolled in special courses offered by the Japanese Language Program of the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology and the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo and found that most international students have specific needs in academic Japanese language proficiency, and the degree of need varies from person to person, requiring various types of support. Takanashi et al. (2017) analyzed errors in the drafts of master’s theses by international graduate students who had progressed to writing master’s theses and found that “advanced learners of Japanese have various grammatical problems at the production level, such as writing,” and that most of these errors involved elementary-level grammar items. She pointed out that most of these errors occur in elementary-level grammar items and can be attributed to a lack of sufficient instruction in the process from elementary to advanced levels.

Furthermore, Altanbulag (2021) analyzed how first-year graduate students misused Japanese texts after studying Japanese at a Japanese language school and passing the graduate school examination. He suggested that the academic needs of graduate students can be divided into learning needs and research needs. He also points out that learning needs for improving Japanese language proficiency may have a great deal to do with their situation prior to entering graduate school. In addition, Hirao (1999) suggests that international graduate students do not fully grasp academic terms in their field of specialization before entering graduate school, which makes it difficult for them to understand lectures. Similarly, Sanehira (2017) suggests that some international graduate students cannot fully engage in research activities because of insufficient Japanese language learning, as described above, which raises concerns even for their academic advisors. Furthermore, Asai (2018) asked students who entered graduate school from a Japanese language education program to reflect on their studies and preparation during their time in a Japanese language program. She analyzed the contents of their reflections, clarified the difficulties faced by students of Japanese language programs preparing to enter graduate school and how they overcame them, and discussed future issues in Japanese language education in Japanese language programs at universities.

To summarize the results of the previous studies mentioned above, most were conducted on international students currently enrolled in graduate school and were characterized by identifying the learning needs of international graduate school students and taking measures or supporting measures. However, as introduced by Asai (2018), “the preparatory educational institutions where students wish to enter graduate school are university faculties, university-affiliated special courses, Japanese language schools, professional training colleges, etc.” The Japanese language education provided by these institutions, or the characteristics of the international students receiving such Japanese language education, may affect the learning needs of international students who wish to enter graduate school. The study needs of international students who wish to enter graduate schools are diverse, and the academic needs of international graduate students, which have been discussed in many previous studies, are also diverse. Therefore, in this study, we first identify the current level of Japanese language proficiency and the preparation required to enter graduate school among those enrolled in Japanese language schools, one of the major preparatory educational institutions for graduate school applicants. We then identify their learning needs in terms of improving their Japanese language proficiency. Next, we will clarify their learning needs in terms of improving their Japanese-language skills.

#### 1. Actual status of students enrolled in Japanese language schools and graduate schools

Using data published by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), Table 1 presents the changes in the total number of foreign students in Japan, the number of foreign students enrolled in Japanese language institutions, and the number of foreign students enrolled in graduate schools over the last three years.

As is well known, the overall number of international students in Japan has declined since the end of 2019 due to the Corona disaster, from a peak of 312,214 in 2019 to 242,444 as of May 1, 2021. Of these, the decline in the number of foreign students enrolled in Japanese language institutions was the most significant, with the number of students in 2021 being less than half of that in 2019, a decline of 51.6%. By contrast, although the total number of international students enrolled in Japanese graduate schools has decreased slightly, the percentage of all international students has increased annually from 17% in 2019 to 21.8% in 2021. This means that one out of every five international students is a graduate student. However, it should be noted that many international students who came to Japan at their peak in 2019 entered graduate school in 2020 and 2021, which may have increased the ratio of graduate students to all international students. Therefore, the future trends in this field should be considered.

Table 1: Number of foreign students in the last three years

Year	Total number of foreign students	Number of students enrolled in Japanese language institutions	%	Number of students enrolled in graduate schools	%
2019	312,214	83,811	26.8%	53,089	17%
2020	279,597	60,814	21.8%	53,056	19%
2021	242,444	40,567	16.7%	52,759	21.8%

Prepared by the author based on data from the Japan Student Services Organization

However, the most reliable data currently available are those listed above, and the “number of students enrolled in Japanese language education institutions” refers to the number of foreign students

enrolled only in Japanese language schools (data on foreign students in Japanese language education programs at universities are included in the calculation of the parent universities), while the “number of students enrolled in graduate schools” includes those enrolled in master’s and doctoral programs. Furthermore, according to the author’s inquiries with relevant institutions, there are no statistics on the pre-master status of all graduate school students in Japan. Therefore, the table does not show a statistical relationship between Japanese language school graduates and graduate school students. However, according to the author’s own experience at a graduate school and the survey conducted in this study, a certain number of foreign students wish to enter graduate schools from Japanese language schools, and this number is increasing.

## 2. Actual Conditions of Japanese-Language Study among Applicants to Graduate Schools of Japanese-Language Institutions

### 2.1 Basic situation of the survey subjects and the survey process

To understand the actual learning situation of international students studying at Japanese language schools to become graduate students in Japan and their preparation status for entering graduate school, 14 international students enrolled in two Japanese language schools were surveyed in July 2022. In July 2022, a semi-structured group interview survey was conducted with 14 international students enrolled in two Japanese language schools. The survey subjects were ten international students known to the author and four classmates introduced to the author by these students, for a total of 14 people. The common attributes of the survey subjects were that they were all Chinese nationals, had graduated from universities in their home countries, and wanted to enter graduate school in Japan by April 2023, if possible, or join a Japanese graduate school as research students. We asked them to introduce foreign students from other countries or regions, but could not find anyone, leaving us with 14 survey targets. The details of the survey targets are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Basic Situation of Survey Subjects

Number	Student	Time of arrival in Japan	Period in Japan	JLPT	School
1	A	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	S school
2	B	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	S school
3	C	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	S school
4	D	2022.3	4 months	N2	S school
5	E	2022.3	4 months	No score	S school
6	F	2022.3	4 months	No score	S school
7	G	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	W school
8	H	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	W school
9	I	2020.12	1 year and 7 months	N2	W school
10	J	2022.3	4 months	N2	W school
11	K	2022.3	4 months	N2	W school
12	L	2022.3	4 months	N2	W school
13	M	2022.3	4 months	No score	W school
14	N	2022.3	4 months	No score	W school

As few international students were able to come to Japan in 2021 because of the Corona disaster, the survey subjects were international students who came to Japan in 2020 (hereinafter referred to as second-year students) and 2022 (hereinafter referred to as first-year students). The reason for selecting students who entered the two schools at two different times was to enable comparisons to be made. As the purpose of the survey was to understand the current status of Japanese language learning among the international students and their learning needs, the following “Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level” (hereinafter referred to as “Self-evaluation/Checklist”) was prepared in advance, which the students were instructed to answer.

Table 3: Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level

Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level (Please put a circle on the number that applies, a higher number means a higher level.)						
Category		Evaluation/Check Contents		level		
Japanese language skills	Basics of Japanese	usage of case particles in general		1	2	3 4 5
		usage of composite case markers		1	2	3 4 5
		use of particles related to intransitive/transitive verbs		1	2	3 4 5
		rules of conjunction between parts of speech		1	2	3 4 5
		distinction and usage of ‘ga’ and ‘wa’		1	2	3 4 5
		appropriate selection and use of vocabulary		1	2	3 4 5
		verb tense expressions		1	2	3 4 5
		understanding, acquisition, and use of KO-OU expressions in sentences		1	2	3 4 5
		use of conjunctions		1	2	3 4 5
		use of demonstrative		1	2	3 4 5
		use of notation and symbols		1	2	3 4 5
		understanding the relationship between subject and predicate in sentences		1	2	3 4 5
	Written Language	Understanding and using ‘da’ and ‘dearu’		1	2	3 4 5
		Mastery of written language(Use of written language)		1	2	3 4 5
	Academic Writing	understanding and deciding the titles		1	2	3 4 5
		logicality of the sentence		1	2	3 4 5
		organization of the paper and sections		1	2	3 4 5
		How to cite		1	2	3 4 5
		References and how they are presented		1	2	3 4 5

The Self-evaluation checklist was based on a study by Altanbulag (2021). This table is based on the results of tabulating and analyzing the errors in Japanese sentences by first-year students who have completed Japanese language school and entered graduate school and summarizes the abilities required for entering graduate school. Considering that all surveyed students were university graduates, the evaluation level was set at 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. This is because we believe that the errors that appear in the Japanese sentences of new graduate school students can be considered a universal problem shared by students who have recently entered graduate school from a Japanese language school and future students as well. This is also a learning need among these students who wish to improve their Japanese language skills.

A survey was conducted to understand international students' needs to improve their Japanese language skills. In conducting the survey, the author introduced the structure and contents of the Self-evaluation/checklist to the international students, explained the items (Self-evaluation/checklist contents), which are relatively abstract expressions, using the Japanese language and knowledge of the Japanese language that the students have, and asked them to carefully evaluate and check each item individually. This was to ensure the students could evaluate themselves as objectively as possible when asked about the relationship between the self-evaluation/checklist items and the graduate school classes. Simultaneously, we also checked the attributes of the international students and other items in Table 2.

## 2.2 Actual Conditions of Japanese Language Learning of Surveyed Students

Despite the limited sample size, the results displayed no clear differences in Japanese language proficiency between foreign students from the two schools who visited Japan simultaneously. However, some clear differences existed in the Japanese language proficiency of the international students who came to Japan simultaneously, although similar ratings were found. The following sections introduce the three categories on the self-evaluation checklist: "Basics of Japanese", "Written Language" and "Academic Writing" as well as the numerical order of the content of each evaluation and checklist.

### (1) About basic Japanese

Many students, both second-year and first-year students, gave similar ratings for Basic Japanese, with ratings of "4", "3", "3" and "3" for the four items of "verb tense expressions" (tense), "use of particles related to intransitive/transitive verbs", "rules of conjunction between parts of speech" and "use of demonstrative" respectively. Most international students seem to be relatively confident in the above Japanese grammar contents and expressions related to verbs.

In other items, most second-year students gave a self-evaluation of "4" for "usage of case particles in general", "distinction and usage of 'ga' and 'wa'", "use of conjunctions", "use of notation and symbols". In addition, the self-evaluation for "usage of composite case markers", "appropriate selection and use of vocabulary", "understanding, acquisition, and use of KO-OU expressions in sentences" and "understanding the relationship between subject and predicate in sentences" is rated as "3". When students move beyond simple grammatical content to writing sentences and texts, their self-evaluations tend to decline slightly, even among second-year students.

Most first-year students gave a self-evaluation of "3" to "use of case particles in general" and "use of conjunctions" and a self-evaluation of "usage of composite case markers", "distinction and use of 'ga' and 'wa'", "appropriate selection and use of vocabulary", "understanding, acquisition, and use of KO-OU expressions in sentences", "use of notation and symbols" and "understanding of the relationship between subjects and predicates in sentences" was "2". Compared to second-year students, first-year students are aware that they have not yet mastered many items in Japanese, indicating that they have many learning needs.

### (2) About Written language

In understanding and mastering written language, understanding and mastering sentence-final expressions and mastering written expressions are considered the main areas. Most second-year students gave a self-rating of "3" on this item, while many first-year students gave a rating of "2" or



lower. This is also the case for the period during which the foreign students studied Japanese. This is also directly related to the length of time they have studied Japanese, but second-year students' self-evaluations are not as high, indicating that they feel they have learning needs in written language.

### (3) About Academic Writing

Regarding academic writing, the logicity of sentences, citation of previous research, and presentation of references, which were observed in the foreign students' writing, were combined with the two items of "understanding and deciding the titles" and "organization of the paper and sections," which are the minimum skills required of graduate students, to make a total of five items.

Most of the second-year students gave a self-evaluation of "3" to "organization of the paper and sections" and all the other four items were rated "2". In addition, most first-year students gave a self-evaluation of "2" to "understanding and deciding the titles" and all self-evaluations for the other four items were "2" or lower. Thus, although there were some differences between the self-evaluations of second-year and first-year students, most international students rated their own Japanese language ability in academic writing as low.

The table below presents the average scores for all students as a whole and for first-year and second-year students.

Table 4: Group Comparison of Level Scores

Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level					
Category		Evaluation/Check Contents	Overall average (14)	1st year average (8)	2nd year average (6)
Japanese language skills	Basics of Japanese	usage of case particles in general	3.3	2.6	4.2
		usage of composite case markers	2.6	2.1	3.2
		use of particles related to intransitive/transitive verbs	3.1	3.1	3
		rules of conjunction between parts of speech	2.9	2.9	3
		distinction and usage of 'ga' and 'wa'	3.1	2.5	3.8
		appropriate selection and use of vocabulary	2.8	2.5	3.2
		verb tense expressions	4	4	4
		understanding, acquisition, and use of KO-OU expressions in sentences	2.3	1.9	2.8
		use of conjunctions	2.9	2.8	3.2
		use of demonstrative	3.4	3.1	3.7
		use of notation and symbols	3.1	2.5	4
		understanding the relationship between subject and predicate in sentences	2.4	1.9	3
	Written Language	Understanding and using 'da' and 'dearu'	2.4	1.8	3.3
		Mastery of written language (Use of written language)	2.1	1.6	2.8
	Academic Writing	understanding and deciding the titles	1.9	1.8	2.2
		logicity of the sentence	1.5	1.3	1.8
		organization of the paper and sections	2.1	1.5	2.8
		How to cite	1.6	1	2.3
		References and how they are presented	1.5	1	2.2

The categories in the above checklist are “Basics of Japanese”, “Written Language” and “Academic Writing” in that order from the top, and the self-evaluations of all survey targets were in the same order, with the highest self-evaluation for “Basics of Japanese” followed by “Written Language” and the lowest for “Academic Writing”. In other words, both second-year students and first-year students have a fair amount of knowledge in “Basics of Japanese” and they seem to have a slight command of “Written Language” but still find it difficult to write “Academic Writing”. Therefore, it can be said that foreign students’ learning needs increased from the top to the bottom of the scale.

The average scores of the second-year students are higher than those of the first-year students in all other evaluation and checklist items, except for the average score of the “use of particles related to intransitive/transitive verbs” indicating that the average scores of the second-year students are higher than those of the first-year students. One reason for the higher mean scores of first-year students could be that they overestimated their self-evaluations during the evaluation process.

Furthermore, a comparison of the above self-evaluation/checklist results with those of the study by Altanbulag (2021), on which this self-evaluation/checklist was based, requires a mention here. In the study by Altanbulag (2021), misuse of “general usage of case particles” and “appropriate selection and use of vocabulary” were found in the sentences of all seven graduate students who were surveyed, but in this survey, many students at Japanese language schools gave relatively high self-evaluations for the above two items. Although different survey methods may yield different results, the above “differences” and comparisons indicate a difference between actual ability and self-evaluation of that ability. In other words, there is a possibility that international students are overestimating their actual abilities in their self-evaluations. Therefore, it may be necessary to teach foreign students how to recognize such differences and their causes.

### 3. Learning Needs to Improve Japanese Language Proficiency for International Students Aspiring to Attend Graduate School

Through self-evaluations, checking the Japanese language level of international students, and other items, we can summarize the learning needs of Japanese language school students who wish to enter graduate school by improving their Japanese language skills as follows.

**First, we believe that there are learning needs at the cognitive level, that is, to know what level of Japanese language is necessary for graduate school study and academic Japanese language acquisition.** As the author has experienced, international students at Japanese language schools who have not yet entered graduate school have never imagined what graduate school in Japan is like, how classes are conducted, how presentations are made, etc., and are completely unaware of what specific Japanese language knowledge is required. What they do know are two conditions: they need a vague, high level of Japanese language proficiency, and they need to have an N2 or higher (some graduate schools require N1) on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Of the two conditions that we know of, the requirement of N2 or higher on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test is concrete and worth the effort; therefore, we should make an effort to obtain it before entering graduate school. On the other hand, the other is vague, high-level Japanese, and as there is no way to know how high and difficult it is, it will remain vague until they enter graduate school. Another problem is that they do not know where they stand in terms of the content and structure of the Japanese language and the knowledge, they have acquired in Japanese language school if they were to sum and divide it up again for graduate school

study. Therefore, Japanese language school students who wish to enter graduate school need to be aware of what level of Japanese language content is required for graduate school and at what level they are currently at.

Here, we would like to mention one more detail: the qualification of N2 or higher on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). Currently, most graduate schools in Japan require international students who wish to enter graduate school (limited to those who wish to obtain a degree in Japanese) to score N2 or higher in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). The JLPT consists of three sections: “Language Knowledge”, “Reading” and “Listening”. This literally means that only the ability to read and listen in Japanese can be verified for international students. Graduate school studies require both these abilities, as well as a high level of writing ability in written Japanese and a higher level of speaking and communication ability, which is the ability to present and discuss in Japanese. Simply put, it is difficult for international students to enter graduate school to prove that they have a certain level of Japanese language proficiency necessary for their studies if their Japanese language proficiency is above N2 in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Therefore, in addition to the above two recognitions, international students should also have the correct recognition for the “JLPT-N2 or above” qualification. As reflected in Table 2, there is no clear correlation between the self-evaluation of international students and their N2 certification, suggesting that N2 certification and the actual level of Japanese are two different things.

**Next, based on the recognition of the required Japanese language content and its level, we believe that there are specific practical-level needs in the process of acquiring such knowledge.** The learning needs of international graduate school students and their process of acquiring academic Japanese can be classified into three major categories: strengthening basic Japanese, learning written Japanese, and writing academic texts. The relationship between these three learning needs is that “strengthening basic Japanese” is a prerequisite for “mastering written language” and these two together are a prerequisite for being able to “produce academic writing”. In other words, to produce academic writing, one must strengthen basic Japanese and master written Japanese skills. Only when these three learning needs are met can international students be considered to have improved their Japanese language skills and safely move on to the next stage of their academic studies and research activities.

The survey results revealed that both second-year and first-year students have a certain level of basic Japanese language skills, but these skills are far from being strengthened. In particular, most first-year students have various learning needs in all categories that require immediate attention and support. In addition, both second-year and first-year students have only acquired a beginner’s level of knowledge and skills in “mastering written language” and “academic writing” which are the most important skills for graduate students who will be writing advanced academic texts for their master’s theses in graduate school. To master these skills and be ready to take graduate school examinations, they need to make considerable efforts. In fact, it is impossible to solve this challenge through individual effort alone.

It is possible for first-year students to study Japanese for another year at a Japanese language school. However, it is doubtful that this would solve the problem, as the current second-year students also have many learning needs in the areas of “mastering written language” and “producing academic writing”. It should be noted that the current curriculum of Japanese language schools is not designed for students who wish to enter graduate schools, nor is it necessary to do so, but some foreign students accepted by schools aim to enter graduate schools. Therefore, it can be assumed that the current curriculum,

Japanese language teaching methods, and how they are implemented in Japanese language schools are unable to meet the learning needs of some international students who wish to enter graduate schools, depending on the goals and policies of Japanese language education. This is supported by the recent proliferation of preparatory schools for Chinese students, which have become very popular in recent years. Students from affluent families attend Japanese-language schools and preparatory schools, where they receive thorough instruction in the preparation for graduate school. In this case, if students do not have the financial means to attend preparatory school, they may not be able to enroll in these schools, and the opportunities for some international students to make choices may be narrowed. It is hoped that Japanese language schools will devise ways to meet the diverse learning needs of international students and simultaneously provide public assistance and support that will broaden their career paths.

#### 4. Support for improving the Japanese language proficiency of international students who wish to enter graduate schools in Japan

It is no exaggeration to say that the routes to graduate school in Japan today are diverse and range from overseas to undergraduate courses and special courses at Japanese universities, Japanese language education courses, Japanese language schools, and professional training colleges. Compared to the Japanese universities and graduate schools that the author attended more than a decade ago, many universities and graduate schools today offer relatively more extensive support and assistance to international students, and there are a wide variety of fields and areas of study, even if limited to extracurricular Japanese language classes. In a study by Mukai (2019) and others, many graduate schools reported that they provide instruction in the Japanese language and basic courses in their majors in response to the demands and learning needs of international graduate students. In addition, a study by Morita et al. (2020) has indicated that some universities provide detailed test preparation and guidance for undergraduate students who wish to enter graduate school. Furthermore, Asai et al. (2018) examined how universities that offer separate courses in Japanese establish classes and courses exclusively for students who wish to enter graduate school and how they provide guidance and help prepare for examinations there.

However, few studies have examined the actual conditions and issues of support and Japanese language education for the learning needs of graduate school applicants in Japanese language schools. Based on the results of this study, we propose support measures for Japanese language students who wish to enter graduate school.

First, as discussed above, Japanese language schools should constantly work to inform international students about the specific level of Japanese language knowledge required in graduate school. The roles of metacognition in foreign language learning and second language acquisition have long been discussed. If international students are made aware of the kinds of classes that graduate schools offer and the level of Japanese language knowledge required for these classes, and if they are made aware of the level of Japanese language knowledge that they currently possess, they will be able to decide what they will study and how they will study it. To consider this kind of activity as a form of support for international students, the “Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level” used in this report was useful. By having international students self-evaluate and, at the same time, read the content of the evaluation, they can check the Japanese they have acquired and the Japanese they need to acquire. By answering self-evaluation and checklist questions, we hope that international students can set more specific goals and study plans.

Next, the students should summarize the accumulated Japanese language knowledge they have studied and acquired up to this point and train themselves to prepare for graduate school classes by mobilizing all their knowledge. Japanese language schools could implement the following steps to ensure effective measures to help the students: they could take cues from university programs and Japanese language education programs, set up classes for students aiming to enter graduate school, train them in academic writing, organize activities to exchange opinions with their seniors, and observe graduate school classes. Guidance and correction of research proposal writing provided by Japanese language schools, as mentioned by the students in this survey, could be considered part of assistance and support, but this alone would not lead to a fundamental solution to the problems and issues.

## Conclusion

When one hears that the minimum requirements for international students to enter graduate schools are basic Japanese, mastery of basic written language, and Japanese language proficiency to write academic texts to some extent, one would think that this is a given. However, this may not be the case in the current situation. Various causes and matters may be related to this, and it is also true that some international students aiming to enter postgraduate studies are most affected as a result.

This study focuses on those who wish to enter Japanese graduate schools, which may be one of the reasons for the diversification of the academic needs of international graduate students, and clarifies the issues they face in entering graduate schools and their learning needs. The study also suggests that international students who enter graduate schools after studying at Japanese language schools may have the greatest number of learning needs in terms of Japanese language study and the improvement of Japanese language skills.

However, it cannot be denied that there is a certain bias in the results and conclusions of the study, as only 14 students from two Japanese language schools were surveyed. To make the survey results, analysis, and conclusions more objective, it is necessary to secure a large number of diverse survey participants and further compare and analyze their learning needs. In addition, we believe that there is room for further in-depth study and improvement of the structure of the “Self-evaluation/Checklist of Japanese Language Level”. For example, the self-evaluation/checklist does not include advanced speaking and communication skills to present and discuss in Japanese, which is a sought-after skill for graduate students. More consideration needs to be given on how to incorporate such items and how to survey them in the future. We would like to address this issue in our future studies.

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