STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS ONLINE JAPANESE LEARNING AT UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

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Abstract

The use of digital technology in education has become more common in Malaysia, allowing universities to incorporate online learning into their courses. This study aimed to identify undergraduate students' attitudes and motivation towards the online learning component of a Japanese language course at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), and to determine the relationship between these two constructs. A total of 110 undergraduate students participated in the study through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an online questionnaire and analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 30.0. The findings showed that students held positive attitudes towards the online Japanese learning (M = 4.13, SD = 0.63) and showed a high level of motivation (M = 4.00, SD = 0.57). Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between attitudes and motivation (r_s = 0.792, p < 0.001). However, the findings also indicated that active participation, concentration and understanding of lesson content were identified as areas requiring further attention. These results highlight the importance of incorporating effective online activities to improve the learning experience, encourage engagement, and support self-directed language learning.

Keyword(s): *attitudes, motivation, online learning, Japanese language*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology in education has been practiced in Malaysia for many years. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013-2025 also outlines the utilisation of ICT to improve the quality of teaching and learning. According to Singh and Thurman (2019), online learning is learning experienced through the internet in either synchronous or asynchronous environments, where students interact with instructors and peers without being constrained by physical location. This approach allows students and teachers to interact, share knowledge, and implement learning activities to take place flexibly, regardless of location and time.

In foreign language education, online learning has become increasingly important, including in Japanese language courses offered to undergraduate students at UMS. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transition from face-to-face classes to fully online teaching and learning. This experience also increased the use of digital technology in language education and

opened opportunities for lecturers to incorporate online activities into face-to-face teaching through blended learning.

Blended learning refers to integration of an online learning environment with traditional face-to-face learning (Hrastinski, 2019). This approach is often supported by learning management systems (LMS) along with various advanced technologies and digital tools that facilitate teaching, interaction, and learning beyond the classroom. It also gives students more flexibility in managing their learning, allowing them to balance their studies with other life commitments. It may also encourage student participation and help maintain their interest and learning motivation.

In Malaysia higher education, including UMS, teaching and learning activities have increasingly incorporated blended learning approaches. The Japanese language course at UMS adopts the Substitution Blended Learning (SBL) framework, in which a designated portion of face-to-face instruction is replaced with structured online learning. Under this arrangement, four out of 14 instructional weeks are conducted online, while the remaining ten weeks are delivered through face-to-face classes.

Attitudes refer to the way an individual thinks, feels, and responds positively or negatively towards something. According to Agheyisi and Fishman (1970), attitudes consist of three main components, namely cognition, evaluation, and behavioural tendency, which collectively shape an individual's predisposition towards a language. Students who have a positive attitude towards online learning of Japanese are more likely to actively participate in the teaching and learning process, online or face-to-face.

According to *Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (2007), motivation is defined as a strong desire or enthusiasm within an individual that drives them to strive for success. Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to motivation as being moved to do something and argue that motivation varies in both quantity and quality. In language learning, motivation plays an important role in helping students maintain an effective learning process in online and face-to-face classes.

Attitudes and motivation play an important role in language learning, particularly in the context of foreign language acquisition. A study by Arciaga and Lucas (2024) among Filipino learners of Japanese during the pandemic highlighted the important roles of attitudes and motivation in online Japanese learning. Their findings indicated that learners held positive attitudes towards learning Japanese and demonstrated strong integrative motivation.

The implementation of blended learning in the Japanese language course at UMS demands students' readiness in terms of their attitudes and motivation towards the online learning component. Although previous studies have reported positive attitudes and high levels of motivation towards online learning, these findings may not fully reflect the experiences of students at UMS due to variations in students' backgrounds, course structures, and online teaching and learning practices across institutions. To date, there is a lack of specific empirical data measuring the level of attitudes and motivation among undergraduate students enrolled in the Japanese language course at UMS. The lack of data poses challenges in planning effective teaching strategies, as lecturers do not have a clear understanding of students' attitudes and motivation towards the online learning components of this course.

A study by Sim et al. (2021) among university students in Malaysia found a moderately high level of acceptance of online learning, which reflects generally positive attitudes towards this learning method. Previous studies have also highlighted the important role of students' attitudes towards online learning in influencing their engagement and motivation (Ferrer et al., 2022). In the context of the Japanese language as a foreign language in Malaysia, existing studies have primarily focused on students' overall attitudes or motivation towards Japanese language learning

(Singh et al., 2021; Hieda & Shabudin, 2014) or examined the relationship between attitudes and motivation within face-to-face learning environments (Nor et al., 2019).

However, the relationship between students' attitudes and motivation towards the online learning components in Japanese language courses remains underexplored empirically. Due to the lack of empirical evidence on this relationship, it is difficult to determine whether fostering positive attitudes towards online learning can also contribute to enhancing students' motivation to learn Japanese.

Therefore, this study aimed to identify the levels of attitudes and motivation among undergraduate students towards the online learning components of the Japanese language course at UMS and to determine the relationship between these constructs. The findings are expected to provide meaningful implications for teaching and learning strategies, improve the overall learning experience, enhance student engagement, and support self-directed learning practices towards achieving more effective learning outcomes.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the level of students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning at UMS.
2. To determine the relationship between students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning at UMS.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research design to examine students' attitudes and motivation towards the online learning component of a blended Japanese language course at UMS. The course was conducted under the SBL framework, in which four out of the 14 instructional weeks were allocated to structured online learning, while the remaining ten weeks were delivered through face-to-face instruction. Although the overall course incorporated both face-to-face and online learning activities, data collection focused on students' experiences with the online learning component.

Research Sample

The respondents comprised undergraduate students enrolled in the Japanese as a foreign language course at the Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (PPIB), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), during Semester 2 of the 2025/2026 academic session. The course was offered in 18 class sections managed by multiple lecturers. To ensure instructional consistency and minimise potential variations in teaching delivery and online learning implementation across different lecturers, a purposive sampling approach was employed. Six existing class sections with a total of 146 actively enrolled students were selected for the study. These sections were selected because they followed the same teaching structure and online learning arrangement. All 146 students who had completed the online component in these selected sections were invited to participate voluntarily. A total of 110 students completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 75.3%. All 110 responses were used in the data analysis.

Research Instrument

For this study, a questionnaire in the form of a Google Form was used. The questionnaire was adapted from the instrument developed by Mahad et al. (2021), with several modifications made to suit the context of the current study. References to Malay language learning in the original questionnaire were changed to Japanese language learning. Some items may appear similar in terms of their focus on attitudes and motivation. However, these two constructs are closely related in language learning. Therefore, following the original instrument, each item was classified according to the construct that it was mainly intended to measure.

The questionnaire was prepared in English to ensure that respondents could understand the questions clearly and provide appropriate responses. It consisted of two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A contained items regarding the respondents' gender and ethnicity. Section B contained 20 items: 10 items measuring students' attitudes and another 10 items measuring their motivation towards online Japanese learning. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The reliability of the adapted questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) to determine the internal consistency of the items. The attitude items recorded $\alpha = 0.90$, while the motivation items recorded $\alpha = 0.84$. Both values exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.70 (George & Mallery, 2003), indicating a good internal consistency for both constructs. These results suggest that the questionnaire items were sufficiently reliable for use in this study.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 30.0. Descriptive statistics are used to summarise the respondents' demographic information. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to determine the levels of students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning. According to Cooksey (2020), descriptive statistics help summarise data and make the findings easier to understand and interpret.

The mean scores are interpreted into three levels: low, moderate, and high. The classification into these levels is determined using the class interval formula, calculated as (maximum score - minimum score) divided by the number of levels (Darusalam & Hussin, 2016). Since this study used a five-point Likert scale, the class interval range is 1.33. The range used to interpret the mean scores is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Interpretation of mean scores used in the study

Mean score range	Level
$3.67 \leq M \leq 5.00$	High
$2.34 \leq M \leq 3.66$	Moderate
$1.00 \leq M \leq 2.33$	Low

To address the second research objective, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between students' attitudes and motivation. This test was chosen because it is suitable for analysing ordinal data, such as responses collected using a Likert scale.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Table 2 provides details of the respondents' gender and ethnicity. A total of 110 students responded to the questionnaire. For gender, the majority were female, with 64 students (58.2%), while 46 students (41.8%) were male. In terms of ethnicity, 84 students (76.4%) were Bumiputera, 16 students (14.5%) were Chinese, 8 students (7.3%) were Malay, and 2 students (1.8%) were Indian. In this study, the Bumiputera category refers to the Sabah's indigenous communities, such as Kadazandusun, Murut, Bajau, and other native groups. Malay respondents were listed separately from the Bumiputera category for the purpose of demographic classification.

Table 2: Students' profile

Demographic	Category	No. of respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	64	58.2
	Male	46	41.8
Ethnicity	Bumiputera	84	76.4
	Chinese	16	14.5
	Malay	8	7.3
	Indian	2	1.8

Students' Attitudes towards Online Japanese Learning

Table 3 shows that students' overall attitudes towards online Japanese learning were at a high level, with a mean score of $M = 4.13$ ($SD = 0.63$). This indicates that most students viewed the online learning component positively. This finding is consistent with the study by Arciaga and Lucas (2024), who found positive attitudes among students learning Japanese online. Although their study involved a fully online learning environment, both studies show that students generally responded positively to the use of online learning in Japanese education.

Table 3: Overall level of students' attitudes towards online Japanese learning

No. of respondents (N)	Mean score (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)	Level
110	4.13	0.63	High

The mean scores and standard deviations for the ten attitude items are shown in Table 4. The results show that nine out of the ten items recorded mean scores at the high level, while

only one item fell within the moderate level. The most appreciated aspect of the online Japanese learning was the lecturer's teaching approach of using technology-assisted teaching aids (Item 1, *M* = 4.51, *SD* = 0.69), along with the strong interest in the online teaching methods employed by the lecturer (Item 2, *M* = 4.26, *SD* = 0.85).

Furthermore, students demonstrated strong commitment and self-directed learning, evidenced by high mean scores in diligently completing assigned exercises (Item 10, *M* = 4.35, SD = 0.66), regularly attending online classes (Item 4, *M* = 4.35, SD = 0.83), and independently searching for additional Japanese study materials online (Item 9, *M* = 4.30, *SD* = 0.72). However, item 4 had a slightly higher standard deviation than item 10, suggesting that students' responses to class attendance varied more.

Moreover, students were able to follow and understand the lesson content (Item 5, *M* = 3.95, *SD* = 0.98) and did not easily become bored during the online classes (Item 8, *M* = 3.95, *SD* = 1.02), while the overall online learning environment (Item 7, *M* = 3.81, *SD* = 0.99) remained consistently positive. They were also prepared and ready to take part in the learning process (Item 3, *M* = 4.21, *SD* = 0.84).

However, the only attitude item to fall within the moderate level was active participation during online learning (Item 6, *M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.98). These findings suggest that active participation may be an area that requires further attention when implementing online learning activities.

Table 4: Students' attitude items towards online Japanese learning

No	Items	Mean score (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)	Level
1	I like the lecturer's teaching approach of using technology-assisted teaching aids	4.51	0.69	High
2	I am interested in the lecturer's online teaching methods	4.26	0.85	High
3	I am always prepared for online Japanese learning	4.21	0.84	High
4	I regularly attend online Japanese classes when they are conducted from time to time	4.35	0.83	High
5	I can easily understand the content of online Japanese classes	3.95	0.98	High
6	I am more active during online Japanese learning	3.58	0.98	Moderate
7	I like the online Japanese learning environment	3.81	0.99	High
8	I do not feel bored with the implementation of online Japanese classes	3.95	1.02	High
9	I like searching for information about the Japanese subject online	4.30	0.72	High
10	I diligently complete all the exercises given by the lecturer during online classes	4.35	0.66	High

Students' Motivation towards Online Japanese Learning

Table 5 shows that students' overall motivation towards online Japanese learning was high, with a mean score of *M* = 4.00 (*SD* = 0.57). These results indicate that students were generally

motivated to take part in online Japanese learning. This finding aligns with the study by Yean et al. (2022), who reported high levels of motivation among Malaysian university students learning Japanese during the period of online instruction implemented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5: Overall level of students' motivation towards online Japanese learning

No. of respondents (N)	Mean score (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)	Level
110	4.00	0.57	High

Based on Table 6, eight out of ten items recorded mean scores at the high level, while two items were at the moderate level. The strongest motivation for the students was intrinsic aspiration and personal achievement, specifically the desire to become proficient in Japanese (Item 6, *M* = 4.75, *SD* = 0.51). This desire was accompanied by enthusiasm to join the online classes (Item 3, *M* = 4.30, *SD* = 0.71), receiving positive encouragement (Item 2, *M* = 4.14, *SD* = 0.88), completing assigned exercise promptly (Item 4, *M* = 4.13, *SD* = 0.75), and enjoying online learning (Item 1, *M* = 4.12, *SD* = 0.91).

Students also demonstrated high resilience when facing limitations. The high mean score (Item 7, *M* = 4.22, *SD* = 0.83) suggests that students perceived themselves as remaining motivated to learn Japanese even when faced with limitations related to learning devices. Students also expressed confidence in their ability to achieve good academic performance even when faced with internet connectivity problems (Item 9, *M* = 3.82, *SD* = 1.02). Although devoting more study time to Japanese compared to other subjects (Item 8, *M* = 3.69, *SD* = 1.06) scored slightly lower among the high level score items, it still shows a high academic commitment.

In contrast, the two items that fell within the moderate level highlighted cognitive challenges associated with online learning. Both these findings show that the focus during the online classes (Item 10, *M* = 3.34, *SD* = 0.94) and comprehension of the lessons delivered (Item 5, M = 3.49, SD = 1.07) were among the challenges the students faced in online Japanese learning.

Although students show a high level of motivation overall, the online learning experience still requires further attention in terms of delivery methods, student concentration, and understanding of lesson content. This finding is consistent with the study by Abd Rahman and Aris (2021), who highlighted issues such as passive participation, lack of focus during classes, and limited interaction in online learning environment.

Table 6: Students' motivation items towards online Japanese learning

No	Item	Mean score (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)	Level
1	I enjoy learning Japanese online	4.12	0.91	High
2	I receive positive encouragement to learn Japanese online	4.14	0.88	High
3	I always feel enthusiastic when the online Japanese classes begin	4.30	0.71	High
4	I promptly complete the exercises given by the lecturer	4.13	0.75	High

No	Item	Mean score (*M*)	Standard deviation (*SD*)	Level
5	I understand the Japanese language better when it is delivered online	3.49	1.07	Moderate
6	I want to become proficient in Japanese	4.75	0.51	High
7	I am motivated to learn Japanese even when I do not have suitable devices	4.22	0.83	High
8	I spend more time learning Japanese compared to other subjects	3.69	1.06	High
9	I am confident that I can achieve excellent marks even when facing internet connectivity problems	3.82	1.02	High
10	I am more focused when learning Japanese online	3.34	0.94	Moderate

Relationship between Students' Attitudes and Motivation towards Online Japanese Learning

Based on Table 7, a Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning. The findings show a positive and significant relationship between the two constructs, with a correlation coefficient of $r_s = 0.792$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that students who have positive attitudes towards the online Japanese learning process also have a higher level of motivation to engage in the learning process. This finding is consistent with Ferrer et al. (2022), who found that students' attitudes towards online learning play an important role in their motivation. Nevertheless, the correlation does not establish a causal relationship between the two constructs.

Table 7: Relationship between students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning

	No. of respondents (N)	Correlation coefficient (r_s)	Significance (p)
Attitudes and Motivation	110	0.792	<0.001

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students enrolled in Japanese language courses at UMS showed positive attitudes and high motivation towards the online Japanese learning and demonstrated a significant positive relationship between students' attitudes and motivation. Students particularly valued technology-assisted teaching aids and were primarily driven by their personal desire to master the language. However, despite these positive attitudes and high motivation, students still find it difficult to stay focused, participate actively, and fully grasp lesson content during the online classes.

Thus, the findings of this study have important implications for the implementation of online Japanese teaching. Lecturers should continue integrating technology-assisted learning materials that are positively accepted by students, while further strengthening elements of

interaction and engagement. Activities such as gamified quizzes, breakout room discussions, videos and polling can be incorporated to complement content delivery and create more interactive learning experience (Salurante et al., 2026). Moreover, clear communication, continuous feedback and varied assessment methods should also be considered for effective online teaching (Sato et al., 2024).

In addition to the role of the lecturers, support from both the institution and students is also highly important in improving the effectiveness of online Japanese learning. At the institutional level, the design and implementation of online teaching should incorporate approaches that foster students' positive attitudes and motivation. Meanwhile, at the individual level, students should develop self-discipline and practice self-directed learning when engaging in online learning. These efforts are important in addressing some of the challenges identified in this study, particularly students' active engagement, concentration, and understanding. With the combined efforts of lecturers, institutions, and students, online Japanese learning can be more effective and meaningful.

Finally, this study has a few limitations, mainly due to its descriptive and correlational design. This means the findings do not provide evidence that online learning improves academic achievement or directly changes students' attitudes and motivation. Instead, this study provides a clear picture of students' attitudes and motivation towards online Japanese learning are, as well as the relationship between the two constructs. In addition, the respondents were drawn from six of the 18 course sections, all taught by the same lecturer, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could expand the scope of this research by examining other factors, such as student engagement, language achievement, learning experiences, and the effectiveness of online teaching strategies across different lecturers.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the preparation and publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Author 1 was responsible for the research design, adaptation of the research instrument, data collection, and preparation of the original manuscript. Author 2 contributed to editing the manuscript and providing critical revisions. Author 3 conducted the data analysis using SPSS, interpreted findings, and contributed to the discussion of the results.

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Ethics Statement

Participation in this study was voluntary, and no student was required to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to completing the questionnaire after they were informed the study's purpose. Responses were collected anonymously through Google Forms, and the lecturer had no access to information linking responses to individual students. All collected data were kept strictly confidential and used solely for the purpose of this study.

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