

Assessment of Japanese Language Education in the International Baccalaureate Program at International Schools in Japan

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The number of International Baccalaureate (IB) students seeking admission into Okayama University is gradually increasing. Presently, there are 20 IB students enrolled in the undergraduate program. With the exception of English oriented courses, at most Japanese Universities, the language of instruction is Japanese and all undergraduate students are required to take classes, write reports and make presentations in Japanese. Therefore, it is important to explore the different levels of Japanese offered within the IB curriculum, in order to understand the Japanese language proficiency of IB students entering the Japanese Higher Education System. Presently, the IB curriculum offers Japanese language as A (native level), B (communication level) and AB Initio (Introductory level). A survey was carried out by Okayama University in 10 International Schools (IS) in Japan, using a questionnaire with 6 closed ended, multiple choice questions. Results showed that, at IS, students came from various backgrounds including Japanese natives, returnees, mixed race and foreign nationals. Almost 88% of IS offered both Japanese A and B and 12% offered only Japanese A. About 87.5% of students taking Japanese A had Japanese parents, compared to 50% mixed race students and 37.5% Japanese returnee students. Foreign students did not take Japanese A. Inversely, there were no Japanese students taking Japanese B, but 88% foreign students, 63% mixed race students and 37.5% returnee students took Japanese B. Regarding choice of Japanese A or Japanese B, in 50% students, it was parent recommended, in 37% placement was made following a language assessment test and in 13%, it was the students choice. Almost 50% IS thought that the IB Japanese language proficiency was insufficient to study at Japanese Universities and only 13% felt the Japanese level was sufficient. Regarding IB students taking Japanese A with the aim of studying at Japanese Universities, most IS replied that “sometimes” it was the case but not always. Results of this survey reveal a certain trend towards students from Japanese backgrounds choosing Japanese A and aiming to study at Japanese Universities, while Japanese B is chosen by students of various backgrounds including foreign students, whose main aim is to learn the language and not always with the intention to enter Japanese Universities.

Japanese Language in the IB Diploma Program

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is a non-profit organization established in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968, which introduced an internationally recognized pre-college curriculum to reform education and nurture global citizens with leadership skills (1-2). In 1979, MEXT officially recognized the IB diploma (IBDP) equivalent to Japanese high school graduation (3-4). The IBDP curriculum is based on 6 subject groups surrounding 3 core requirements. All courses are studied for 2 years and students must choose 1 subject from the first 5 groups (Language & Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals & Societies, Experimental Sciences and Mathematics), in addition to a 6.th subject, which may be an arts subject chosen from Group 6, or another subject from groups 1-4. At least, 3 out of 6 subjects are studied at “higher level” (HL) with 240 teaching hours. The remaining 3 subjects are studied at “standard level” (SL) with 150 teaching hours. The Japanese Language A (Jap. A), is from Group 1, or the Language and Literature group and can be studied in HL or SL. Japanese Language B (Jap. B), and Japanese ab initio are group 2 or the Language Acquisition group subjects. Jap. A and Jap.B can be taken in HL or SL but ab initio is only offered in SL. Students can obtain a bilingual diploma by taking 2 languages from Group 1. Jap. A prepares the IB student for native level Japanese, whereas Jap. B is intended for students who have had some previous experience of learning Japanese and ab initio courses are for beginners or students who have little or no exposure to the Japanese language (5).

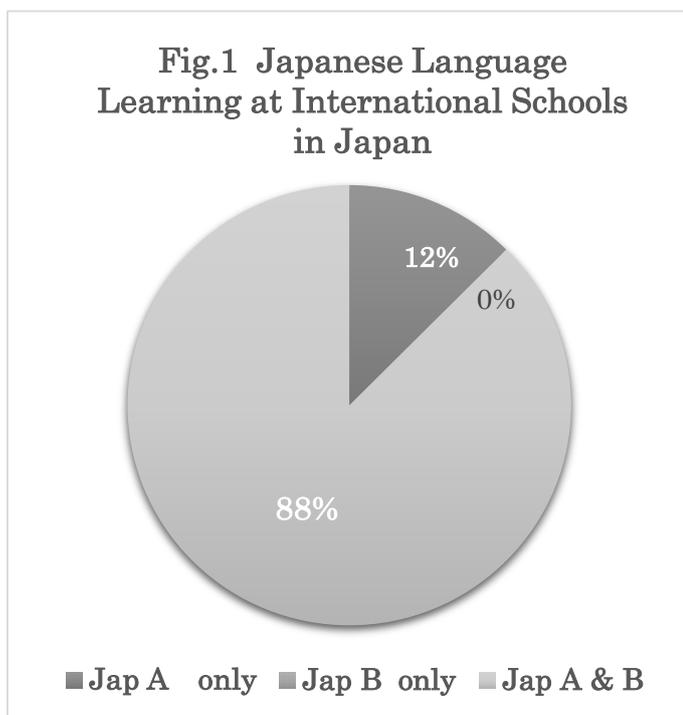
IB Diploma students at Okayama University

With the ongoing globalization of Japan, there has been a rapid growth in the internationalization of Japanese universities, since higher education plays a very important role in the process of globalization (6). The number of IB students seeking admission into Japanese Universities is increasing gradually. Okayama University was the first national university in Japan to accept IBDP students as high school graduates in 4 faculties and 1 special course in 2012, and in all 11 faculties and the special course from 2015 (7), without having to take the examinations by the National Center for University Entrance Examination (NCUE) or any other entrance exams at Okayama University. Presently, at Okayama University, there are 20 IB Diploma students from IB schools in Japan and abroad, enrolled in 11 different faculties and 1 special course. Besides the special program which will introduce an all-English curriculum from October 2017, the medium of instruction in all 11 faculties at Okayama University, is Japanese. At the undergraduate level, along with other Japanese high school graduates, IB students are also expected to take lessons, write reports and make presentations in Japanese. Following discussions with Okayama University IB student academic advisors and receiving inquiries from students, teachers and parents from IB schools, regarding the level of Japanese required at Japanese Universities, a survey was carried out to explore the different levels of Japanese being studied by IB students at International Schools in Japan.

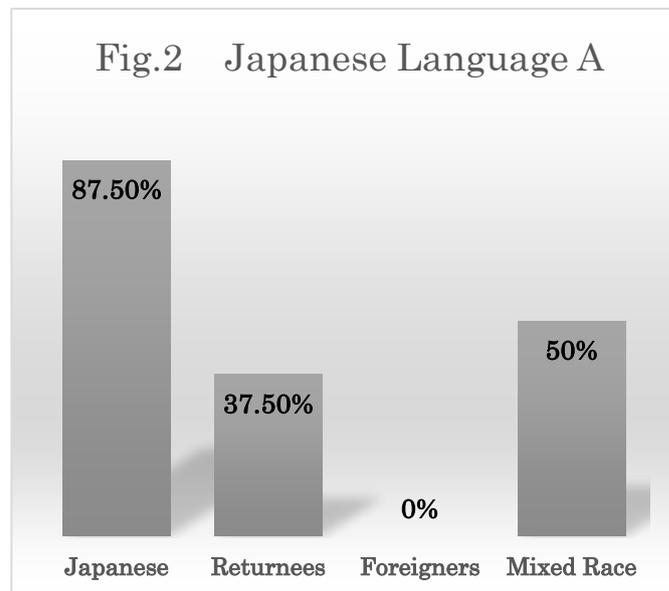
Method: A questionnaire with 6 closed ended, multiple choice questions was constructed and approved by Okayama University Admission Center Members. This survey was carried out during visits by Admission Center

members, to various International Schools (IS) in Japan. This report contains survey data answered by academic advisors of 10 international schools in Japan, between September 2016 and February 2017.

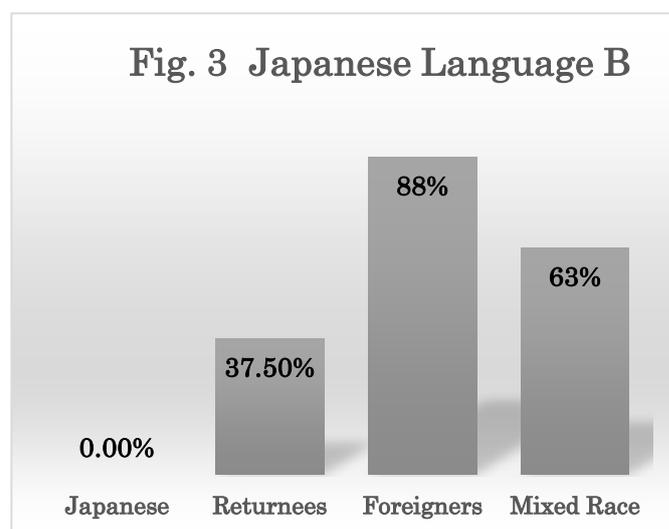
Results: Analysis of data obtained from 8 IS revealed that, in IS, students came from various backgrounds (Japanese, returnees, mixed race or half with one parent Japanese and foreign nationals). Almost 88% of IS offer both Japanese A and Japanese B courses and only 12% IS offer only Japanese A. There was no IS included in the survey that offered only Japanese B (Fig. 1).



Regarding the type of students who take Japanese A, in 87.5% of IS, Japanese students of Japanese parents living in Japan took Japanese A. In 50% IS, mixed race students (half) and in 37.5% IS, returnee Japanese students, took Japanese A. There were no foreign students among the 10 IS, who took Japanese A (Fig. 2).

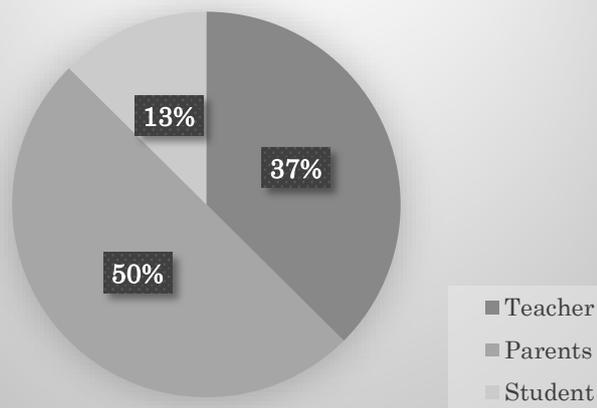


With reference to students taking Japanese B, there were no Japanese students in any IS taking Japanese B. In 88% IS, Japanese B was chosen by foreign students and in 63%, by mixed race students and in 37.5%, by returnee students (Fig. 3).



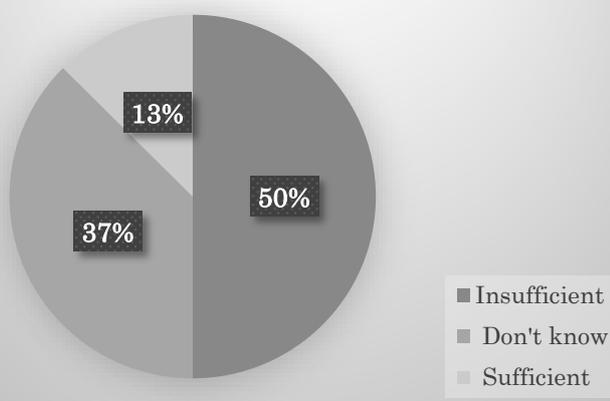
When asked about how IS students choose Japanese A or Japanese B, 50% IS replied that, it was recommended by their parents, while 37% IS schools placed students in different levels following language assessment placement tests and 13% schools let the students choose (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 How Japanese Language is chosen



When asked whether the level of Japanese A, was sufficient to study at Japanese Universities, 50% IS replied it was not, while 37% felt it was difficult to say and only 13% felt the level was sufficient (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 Is Japanese Language A sufficient for Japanese Universities?



In answer to whether students who took Japanese A, were aiming to study at Japanese universities, almost all IS answered “sometimes”.

Conclusion:

There is a growing concern about how much Japanese proficiency is required to study at the different faculties of Japanese Universities, where the language of instruction remains Japanese in almost all subjects, with the exception of International

Courses. Results of this survey reveal a certain trend towards students from a Japanese background choosing Japanese A and aiming to study at Japanese Universities. However, Japanese B is chosen by students of various backgrounds including foreign students. Further survey is necessary to understand and get a clearer picture of actual facts.

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