



Asia Education Foundation

Attachment 3: Factors related to student continuation and discontinuation of Japanese in senior secondary school

**Report for the Senior Secondary Languages Education
Research Project**

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Objectives

The objective of this research¹ is to provide insights into reasons why students of Japanese in high school elect to discontinue their studies before Year 11, or continue into senior secondary school. The study is national in scope, encompassing both Government and non-Government schools, enabling comparisons across jurisdictions and sectors that may reveal incentives and disincentives that operate in particular states or territories. It is hoped that a better understanding of the reasons for student choices, and the impacts of particular institutional and policy settings, will inform the development of policy measures at government, jurisdiction and school levels as well as pedagogic approaches to support increased continuation.

Methodology

The main vehicle for ascertaining factors in student choice is an online survey, completed anonymously by Year 11 students in schools that offer Japanese. There are two versions of the survey: one for those studying Japanese in Year 11 (Continuers) and the other for students who studied Japanese earlier in their high school career but discontinued before Year 11 (Discontinuers). Year 11 students were selected as it is the first year of senior school (Year 11 and 12) and students were considered mature enough to decide whether or not to participate in the survey, and to provide thoughtful answers, while still being close enough to decisions made in previous years to remember accurately. In Year 11, language study is generally elective, with the exception of the small number of students studying IB courses, where some language study is compulsory. In addition, published figures for study in Year 11 and 12, available on curriculum authority websites, indicate that the vast majority of students who complete Year 11 units also complete Year 12 units. The largest number of students who are going to discontinue do so at the end of compulsory language study (at the end of Year 7, 8, 9, 10 depending on the jurisdiction and the school) with smaller numbers discontinuing in each subsequent year.

Data on study choices by Year 12 students of Japanese, in comparison to the general Year 12 population, was also obtained from curriculum and assessment authorities in a number of states. This data was analysed to throw light on the impact of the number of Year 12 subjects studied at Year 12 (which varies across states) on the rate of language continuation.

Focus

This study is primarily interested in factors that are associated with students continuing or not continuing to study Japanese into senior school, and particularly, factors that are subject to manipulation, and that therefore might be targeted by authorities wishing to increase the number of students studying a language.

Previous studies focusing on language learning 'motivation' have often looked at attitudes to language and language study and to the people who speak the language (associated with integrative orientations). However, while it has been found that positive attitudes are strongly correlated with continuation,

¹ This report has been compiled expressly for the purpose of informing the work of the Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project. It is a preliminary report on an on-going project which is not totally complete, and which will later be written up for publication in other forms. For this reason, the focus is on data and results, and background material, such as academic references, have been kept to a minimum.

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direction of causality is debatable, and attitudes are not a factor easily susceptible to change. Extrinsic factors, such as perceptions of usefulness and social influences, have also been considered, but many studies have focused on factors shaping individual attitudes and preferences regarding language study in isolation, and have failed to adequately consider institutional and structural factors, which can be influential in shaping subject choice.

In particular, inadequate attention has been given to the particular factors that influence subject choice in high stakes environments such as Year 12 in Australia. Subject choices do not only reflect personal interests and perceptions of usefulness of the individual subject, but choices in one area affect possibilities in another, and choices are constrained in various ways, including the number of subjects that can be chosen, and perceptions of relative difficulty/return for effort. Subject choice literature shows a nexus of four broad factors: Individual interests and aptitudes, local circumstances (school community), system-level factors, and instrumental reasons. Drawing on this framework, a review of previous studies of language study motivation and continuation, and discussions with teachers and students, this study focuses on the following groups of factors:

- **student interests and aptitudes**
- **student assessment of usefulness for practical purposes/relevance** to future career and private interests (travel, leisure, social relationships)
- **student perceptions of difficulty/time required/ability to achieve good results** (relative to other subjects)
- **student assessment of and attitudes towards the teaching context:** teacher skills, suitability of teaching content and approach
- **influence of past history/experiences**, especially travel to Japan
- **social influences:** parental/sibling advice, teacher advice, peer subject choices
- **structural factors – school level:** timetable, offering as combined 11/12 or separate classes, IB requirements, limited number of offerings
- **structural factors – system level:** School certificate requirements, ATAR calculation rules, perceptions of scaling University entry bonus points and prerequisites etc.

The study aims not just to elucidate reasons for subject selection, but to provide information about which aspects are most amenable to change. For this reason, the survey seeks to establish, for those who did choose to continue, what factors, or combinations of factors were important. Where these are amenable to change, they provide a target for policy to address.

For those students who have not continued, the study seeks to first establish whether students have made a positive and definite choice not to take Japanese, or whether they are 'waverers' (Lo Bianco, & Aliani, 2013), or even committed students who have been thwarted by external factors and who might have chosen Japanese if circumstances had been different. Knowing the relative proportions of these groups will give insights into whether efforts should be directed to addressing fundamental issues of perceived interest and usefulness on the students' part, or whether there are external factors that could be addressed in ways that would free or encourage greater numbers of students who are already positively disposed to the subject.

Survey on continuation

Requests for participation were sent to all schools teaching Japanese for which details could be obtained in the following jurisdictions and sectors:

- Government schools: All states/territories except, Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and SA from which permission was not received in time to for this report
- Independent schools: All states/territories except NT
- Catholic schools: Vic. It was decided not to pursue applications in other states due to the time consuming nature of submitting applications for approval, which in major jurisdictions have to be submitted separately to each Diocese.

Survey responses were received from 163 Continuers (62.5 per cent female) and 74 students who have not continued with Japanese (31 per cent female). Responses were received from the four largest states, NSW, WA, Qld and Vic (see Figure 1 below), with about 64.6 per cent being from Government schools, 29.1 per cent from Independent schools and 6.3 per cent from Catholic schools in the Continuers survey, and a higher proportion from Independent schools (52.7 per cent) in the Discontinuers survey. It is not possible to accurately report the number of schools represented in each survey, as some schools who agreed to distribute questionnaires may not have resulted in any participants, and many schools seem to have only distributed surveys to Continuers, finding it more difficult to identify and access Discontinuers. In the Continuers survey, 71.5 per cent were in schools in Australian capital cities, 26 per cent in other large cities and the remainder in rural areas. On the basis of Year 12 figures, I estimate the total population for Year 11 Japanese to be in the order of 5,000–6,000 nationally, so the sample of Continuers is approximately 4 per cent, although not distributed evenly nationally. However, it is reasonable to expect that schools who have agreed to participate in the survey are more supportive of or interested in Japanese/language teaching than the norm. Students, too, as they have self-selected to fill in the survey, may not be fully representative of the ‘average’ student.

From this perspective issues in discontinuation relating to dysfunctional or very unsupportive schools are likely to be under-represented, and the degree of student interest/engagement reflected may be higher than the norm. However, this means that where problems and issues are revealed, they are likely to be issues across a broader spectrum of schools as well, and there is no reason to believe that the general trends revealed are not representative of the broader student population.

Table 1: State of respondents

State	Continuers	Response (per cent)	Discontinuers	Response (per cent)	Total
ACT	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
NSW	62	38.5	23	31.1	85
NT	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Qld	17	10.6	8	10.8	25
SA	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Tas	1	0.6	1	1.4	2
Vic	56	34.8	16	21.6	72
WA	25	15.5	26	35.1	51
Total	161	100	74	100	235
Skipped	2				2

Background and characteristics

Language spoken at home

The majority of respondents to the Continuers survey (72 per cent) come from homes where English is spoken, but many respondents indicated that they spoke multiple languages at home, among those 34 per cent who speak Chinese, and a further 24 per cent another Asian language while 16.5 per cent speak a European or other language. However, only 5 per cent speak Japanese at home, confirming that the profile of Japanese learners, even at senior secondary school, is predominantly true second learners, rather than heritage or background speakers.

School background

The majority of Continuers did not study Japanese at primary school (70.6 per cent). The number is even higher for Discontinuers, indicating that K-12 study is relatively rare, even though Japanese is the most widely taught language in Australia, at both primary and secondary levels (de Kretser, & Spence-Brown 2010).

Table 2: Years of study at primary school, by state: Continuers

	No, didn't study Japanese at primary school	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	Total
Q1: NSW	95.16% 59	1.61% 1	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62
Q1: Qld	47.06% 8	0.00% 0	23.53% 4	17.65% 3	11.76% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	17
Q1: Vic	55.56% 30	9.26% 5	5.56% 3	5.56% 3	7.41% 4	3.70% 2	7.41% 4	3.70% 2	1.85% 1	54
Q1: WA	60.00% 15	16.00% 4	4.00% 1	0.00% 0	4.00% 1	4.00% 1	8.00% 2	4.00% 1	0.00% 0	25
Total respondents	112	10	9	6	8	3	6	3	1	158

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Table 3: Years of study at primary school by state (Discontinuers)

	No, I didn't study Japanese at primary school	1 year or less	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	Total
Q1: ACT	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0
Q1: NSW	95.65% 22	4.35% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	23
Q1: NT	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0
Q1: Qld	12.50% 1	12.50% 1	37.50% 3	37.50% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	8
Q1: Tas	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0
Q1: Vic	66.67% 10	0.00% 0	13.33% 2	13.33% 2	6.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	15
Q1: WA	53.85% 14	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	11.54% 3	15.38% 4	0.00% 0	15.38% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26
Total respondents	47	2	6	8	5	0	4	0	0	72

However, the numbers of students who have studied at primary school differed markedly across jurisdictions, reflecting the very different situations in terms of the prevalence and nature of languages provision. Only three out of 62 Continuers from NSW had studied in primary school (i.e. less than 5 per cent), reflecting low levels of primary language provision in general, whereas in Qld, over half the students had at least two years of primary school Japanese study. In Qld, Japanese programmes comprise a very high proportion of language teaching at both primary and secondary level, which has the effect of making it more likely that those students studying Japanese in Qld will study the language at both levels. In Vic, approximately 45 per cent had studied at primary school, but a greater proportion of Victorian students had studied for more than four years in primary school than in Qld, reflecting the greater number of programmes with K-6 provision in Vic. In WA, 60 per cent of students had no primary school background in the language.

The figures for Discontinuers were similar for NSW, but interestingly, for Qld there was an even smaller proportion who had not studied at primary school (only one student out of eight). However, in Vic, the proportion of Discontinuers who had not studied at primary school was higher. The numbers for each state are small in this survey, however, and it is possible that the effect of groups from particular schools is distorting the sample, so it would be unwise to draw any general conclusions.

The figures for years of study at secondary school prior to Year 11 also revealed considerable variation across jurisdictions. In Vic and WA, 100 per cent of respondents were in a Continuing course, with 85 per cent of students in Vic having studied for four years prior to Year 11, while in WA the median years of prior study was six (62.5 per cent). In NSW, of the 36 students in the Continuing course, only five had studied for

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four years prior to Year 11, perhaps reflecting the fact that study often commences in Year 8, rather than Year 7 in that state (a situation which is the target of a recent proposed policy change at state level).

The high numbers in NSW who had studied for less than two years are due to the fact that 42 per cent of respondents were enrolled in the Beginners course, which is designed as a two-year programme, commencing in Year 11. Unfortunately, the option of indicating that they had not studied previous to the current year was not included in the response choices, so some of the students who indicated that they had studied for one year may have included the current year, and 22 students skipped this question, perhaps because an appropriate choice was not provided. Some students, though, may have studied for a year or two in earlier year levels, discontinued the language and picked it up again as a 'Beginner' in Year 12.

Table 4: Course studied in Year 11 (Continuers)

	Continuers/ Japanese as a second language year 11 units	Continuers/ Japanese as a second language Year 12 units – for students who accelerated	Beginners course Year 11 units (not available in all states)	Beginners course Year 12 units (not available in all states)	Heritage/ first language/ advanced course Year 11 units	Heritage/ first language/ advanced course Year 12 units	VET units in Japanese	IB units in Japanese
Q1: NSW	95.65% 22	4.35% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q1: Qld	12.50% 1	12.50% 1	37.50% 3	37.50% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q1: Vic	66.67% 10	0.00% 0	13.33% 2	13.33% 2	6.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q1: WA	53.85% 14	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	11.54% 3	15.38% 4	0.00% 0	15.38% 4	0.00% 0
Total respondents	47	2	6	8	5	0	4	0

Table 5: Prior years of study at secondary school (Continuers)

	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	Total
Q1: NSW	24.44% 11	6.67% 3	57.78% 26	11.11% 5	45
Q1: Qld	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	47.06% 8	29.41% 5	17
Q1: Vic	0.00% 0	7.41% 4	7.41% 4	85.19% 46	54
Q1: WA	8.33% 2	4.17% 1	62.50% 15	25.00% 6	24
Total respondents	15	10	53	62	140

For 52 per cent of students in the Continuers survey, Year 8 was the last year language was compulsory, with 18 per cent nominating Year 9 as the last compulsory year. Again, there is considerable cross-

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jurisdiction variation, with 76 per cent of NSW students indicating the language was compulsory only to Year 7 or 8 (consistent with that state's policy of 100 hours of compulsory language study). In Vic, a variety of years of compulsory study was evident, with 35.2 per cent indicating that it was compulsory to Year 10 (a proportion which should increase due to incoming policy changes).

This is a factor that may be relevant to encouraging continuity into senior secondary school, because students only make a decision at Year 10 whereas in states where students have to decide to continue or discontinue after only one year of study in Year 7 or 8, the factors influencing that decision are very different. However, there is no clear data on the impact of years of study on continuation at senior secondary level and this is an area where more study would be helpful.

Table 6: Year to which study is compulsory (Continuers)

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Not compulsory at any year	Total
Q1: NSW	4.84% 3	70.97% 44	0.00% 0	1.61% 1	8.06% 5	14.52% 9	62
Q1: Qld	0.00% 0	88.24% 15	0.00% 0	5.88% 1	0.00% 0	5.88% 1	17
Q1: Vic	7.41% 4	38.89% 21	18.52% 10	35.19% 19	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	54
Q1: WA	12.50% 3	0.00% 0	62.50% 15	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 4	24
Total respondents	10	80	25	23	5	14	157

Travel to Japan

Approximately 40 per cent of the Continuers have been to Japan (some multiple times) and a further 22 per cent have plans to travel there within the next two years. The rates for Discontinuers are much lower, particularly in relation to school trips (5.6 per cent) and exchange (2.8 per cent), with 68 per cent indicating they have never visited, and only 9.7 per cent intending to do so soon. This indicates the strong relationship between travel, or prospective travel, to Japan and continuation of studies. Prospective travel and past travel are both significant motivations for continuation of study (see below) but the direction of the relationship may not be entirely one way – it may well be that study of the language itself motivates students to travel. There were also some interesting differences across jurisdictions. Notably, none of the Qld Continuers had travelled to Japan either on a school trip or on exchange, although some had travelled outside of school or were planning to travel in future.

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Table 7: Travel to Japan (Continuers) (multiple responses possible)

Answer choices	Percentage	Number
Yes, on a school trip	13.38%	21
Yes, on an exchange programme	14.65%	23
Yes, outside of school	23.57%	37
No, but plan to go this year or next year	22.29%	35
No	38.22%	60

Total respondents: 157

Students' other subjects

Contrary to the stereotype of Languages being favoured by students in the humanities, 47 per cent of Continuers were studying a mainly science/mathematics course (70 per cent in WA), while only 10 per cent were studying mainly humanities. The remaining students were in mixed courses (38 per cent) or other areas. It is encouraging to see that students with a range of disciplinary backgrounds undertake language study, especially as anecdotally, Science-focused students in some states find it difficult to fit a language into their course.

This finding is important for schools to take into account when scheduling languages, and has implications for how language is taught and marketed to students. When rating factors in their choice to continue with Japanese, over 50 per cent of students indicated that the fact that language study was 'different' from their other studies was a moderate or major influence. The place of language in a well-balanced course seems to be a factor that appeals to students and could be leveraged in encouraging more participation. The experience at tertiary level has been that in situations where course design was changed to enable or encourage students to take units outside of their major field of study (for example, the 'Melbourne model'), languages experienced considerable growth in enrolments.

Table 8: Students' other subjects (Continuers)

	Mainly science/ maths subjects	Mainly humanities/ social science/arts subjects	Mainly economics/ business subjects	Mainly technical/ applied science subjects	Other/ mixed – can't classify	Total
Q1: NSW	38.71% 24	11.29% 7	4.84% 3	4.84% 3	40.32% 25	62
Q1: Qld	35.29% 6	17.65% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	47.06% 8	17
Q1: Vic	50.00% 27	9.26% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	47.74% 22	54
Q1: WA	70.83% 17	4.17% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25.00% 6	24
Total respondents	74	16	3	3	61	157

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Use of Japanese outside of class

Although the surveyed students were overwhelmingly additional language learners (i.e. not heritage/background learners), more than half of Continuers used Japanese at least once in the last month for purposes other than schoolwork. The highest category of use was listening and viewing Japanese content, with 54 per cent doing this at last three to four times a month or more.

This suggests the importance of engagement of students with Japanese popular culture, and other forms of interaction with and through Japanese (e.g. Facebook contact with Japanese friends). On this measure, as on travel, Qld students had much lower rates on all categories of use than the other states represented. Due to the relatively small number of participants, this may reflect backgrounds and environments specific to the particular schools which participated, and is not necessarily representative of the entire state, although the participants were mainly from metropolitan areas and were from a mix of Government and Independent schools.

Table 9: Use of Japanese outside of class (Continuers)

	Not at all	Once or twice	3–4 times	More than 4 times	Total	Average rating
Speaking (in person, by phone, via Skype etc.)	47.13% 74	24.20% 38	12.10% 19	16.56% 26	157	0.98
Listening/watching (e.g. music, TV, movies etc.)	24.52% 38	21.29% 33	13.55% 21	40.65% 63	155	1.70
Reading (e.g. websites, emails, manga etc.)	40.00% 62	30.97% 48	8.39% 13	20.65% 32	155	1.10
Writing (e.g. text messages, email, blogs etc.)	49.03% 76	24.52% 38	12.90% 20	13.55% 21	155	0.91

Commitment to Japanese

Sixty four per cent of Continuers were so strongly committed to studying Japanese that not continuing in Year 11 and 12 was not an option they considered. Twenty nine per cent indicated that it had been a difficult choice to continue, despite wanting to study the language, while only 7 per cent had not had a strong commitment to studying Japanese. For the respondents to this survey, Japanese, it seems, is not taken as a default or infill subject, and although this may over-represent the situation more broadly, due to the self-selective nature of the sample, this accords with anecdotal evidence from teachers.

For the Discontinuers, 43 per cent did not seriously consider continuing with the language, but 43 per cent had considered continuing, and 14 per cent (ten students) had wanted to continue but were not able to do so. For the ten students who were not able to continue, the most common factor given as influencing their decision to quit was that they could not fit it into their course (six cited this as a major influence, and one as a minor influence). Responses to an open-ended question on factors that might have changed their minds indicated that not being able to fit Japanese in was related to either timetabling issues or the number of units they could take. The only other factors which were selected as a major factor for more than one student were feeling disadvantaged relative to other students (three students) or having decided to study another language instead (two students).

Eighty five per cent of Continuers intend to continue in Year 12 with a further 11 per cent undecided and 4 per cent not intending to continue. For those contemplating discontinuing, the main reason is lack of room

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in course (19 per cent), other subjects being more useful or lack of enjoyment (15 per cent each), followed by 11 per cent who think other subjects will give a better ATAR. Thirty four per cent of respondents listed 'other' reasons. Twenty nine per cent intend to continue their studies at University, but the majority (56.6 per cent) are undecided about post school options.

Of the Discontinuers, when asked if they might study Japanese again in future, 25.4 per cent responded 'yes', while 41.8 per cent responded 'maybe'. This represents an important pool of students who can be captured by later opportunities to study at tertiary level, and there is strong evidence that where tertiary institutions make it easy or attractive for students to take a language, many are happy to do so.

Respondents gave a range of suggestions for encouraging more students to continue, which included many suggestions for more opportunities to use the language, more contact with the culture, more interesting or fun activities and more information about the usefulness of Japanese. Understandably, most suggestions related to ways of improving the programme at school level or information to students, rather than larger policy initiatives.

Reasons for continuation

As illustrated by Table , students indicated that multiple considerations were important in their choice to continue. No one factor can be singled out as being decisive on its own – it is likely that a constellation of factors converge to determine decisions.

When ranked in terms of the number of respondents who nominated the factor as a 'major influence', the top three reasons for deciding to continue with Japanese were the following:

- I enjoyed learning Japanese.
- I wanted to travel to Japan in future.
- I was interested in Japan and Japanese culture in general.

All were ranked as a 'major influence' by over 50 per cent of students, and as a 'major' or 'moderate influence' by approximately 80–90 per cent of students. This confirms earlier research which found that intrinsic motivations such as enjoyment and interest are of primary importance in the decisions of language students in Australia. The importance of travel as a motive also confirms results of other research and is also an indicator of interest in Japan and Japanese.

The fourth top reason may be surprising: 'learning Japanese is a worthwhile challenge'. This needs to be treated with caution, as it may be that keen, conscientious students were more likely to fill in the survey, and to nominate this reason. However, even if this is the case, it does indicate two things. It confirms the notion that Japanese is challenging, and not an easy subject, even for those who do well. It also confirms that some students are willing to take on challenging subjects, or even motivated by them, particularly if they perceive themselves to be succeeding and able to obtain good marks (c.f. the high proportions nominating getting good marks in the subject, which was ranked at number eight, and 'Japanese was one of my strongest subjects' [number 9]).

The impact of anticipated results on decision to continue was clearly strong, working alongside intrinsic factors. The possibility that bonus marks and scaling might help the ATAR/OP was ranked at number ten, but there was considerable variation across jurisdictions – it was ranked fifth in Qld (40 per cent nominating as a major influence), but only 17th in NSW (24 per cent major influence). This suggests that in jurisdictions where such measures exist, the possibility of bonus marks and scaling may be an important incentive, particularly given the major importance of anticipated results in decisions on discontinuation (see below).

Other factors in the top ten included 'my school offered good teaching in this subject' (ranked fifth), indicating the importance of excellent teaching in promoting continuation, and 'I think everyone should

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study a language' (ranked sixth). This response indicates the educational value placed on language study per se, and was stronger in some states than others.

Instrumental motivations for studying Japanese rank a little lower than intrinsic motivations, but are still regarded as influential, especially helpfulness to future career (moderate or major motivation for 57 per cent of respondents). Usefulness in daily life was also noted as a motivation (moderate or major) by 53 per cent of respondents. While the major trends were consistent nationally, there were interesting jurisdictional differences in the ratings of particular motivations, which possibly reflected the different populations in different states/territories, on aspects such as ethnic background. For example, students in NSW gave usefulness to career and interest in pop culture a higher ranking than did students in other states. However, students in Qld ranked as equal third the reasons 'learning Japanese would help me to understand people from different backgrounds' and 'I didn't want to waste my previous study', both related more to general educational value than to specific occupational usefulness. However, response rates in Qld in particular are too low to draw general conclusions, and should be treated as indicative of a need for further research.

Social influence from parents, friends and teachers was generally ranked lower than other factors, although this seems to refer to overt influence, and may not accurately reflect the pervasive influence of family and teachers on general attitudes that have developed over the respondents' lifetimes.

Table 10: Reasons for continuation, ranked on 'major influence'

Answer options	No influence	Minor influence	Moderate influence	Major influence	N/A	Rating average	Response count
I enjoyed learning Japanese.	3	12	48	90	1	2.47	154
I wanted to travel to Japan in future.	5	22	39	85	5	2.35	156
I was interested in Japan and Japanese culture in general.	4	20	48	82	2	2.35	156
Learning Japanese is a worthwhile challenge.	7	27	59	62	1	2.14	156
My school offered good teaching in this subject.	19	20	49	58	9	2	155
I think everyone should study a language.	30	30	32	56	7	1.77	155
I was interested in Japanese pop culture (manga, anime, J-Pop etc).	28	31	40	55	2	1.79	156
I was getting good marks in Japanese.	15	28	45	55	12	1.98	155
Japanese was one of my strongest subjects.	15	32	41	51	15	1.92	154
Bonus marks and/or positive scaling for Japanese may help my ATAR/ OP (Qld)	28	23	41	51	12	1.8	155
I thought Japanese might be helpful to me in a future career.	19	40	39	50	8	1.81	156
I thought learning Japanese would	17	34	53	49	3	1.88	156

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Answer options	No influence	Minor influence	Moderate influence	Major influence	N/A	Rating average	Response count
develop skills to help understand people from many different backgrounds.							
I've studied Japanese for several years, and I didn't want to waste my previous study.	27	27	33	46	23	1.74	156
Taking Japanese keeps my options open for future study.	15	32	56	45	7	1.89	155
I thought learning Japanese might be useful in my daily life (e.g. communicating with friends, watching movies, researching hobbies and interests on the internet etc.)	24	46	42	41	3	1.65	156
Studying Japanese will look good on my resume.	30	34	44	41	7	1.64	156
Japanese was different from my other subjects and I thought that was good.	24	29	59	38	6	1.74	156
I liked the group of students studying Japanese.	28	41	39	37	10	1.59	155
I had visited Japan, and that made me want to continue with Japanese.	42	11	21	32	49	1.41	155
I had the chance to go on a school trip to Japan in Year 11 or 12.	52	28	12	22	42	1.04	156
My Japanese teacher encouraged me to take Japanese.	42	30	35	22	26	1.29	155
I didn't find Japanese very difficult.	31	44	47	21	12	1.41	155
My school offered a Beginners course that allowed me to pick up Japanese in Year 11.	38	12	16	18	71	1.17	155
I thought Japanese went well with my other subjects.	46	41	24	18	25	1.11	154
My parents encouraged me to take Japanese.	43	34	31	18	30	1.19	156
My friends were taking Japanese.	61	46	17	15	15	0.9	154
I was able to take an extra subject, so managed to fit Japanese in.	68	14	10	10	54	0.63	156
The study experiences of my brother or sister encouraged me to take Japanese.	61	15	16	10	54	0.75	156

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Answer options	No influence	Minor influence	Moderate influence	Major influence	N/A	Rating average	Response count
I have a Japanese family background.	63	5	2	8	78	0.42	156
I needed to fill up my subjects – there were no other subjects that I wanted to, or could study instead.	67	23	7	8	51	0.58	156
Career advisors or other teachers at school encouraged me to take Japanese.	72	21	10	8	45	0.59	156
I needed to study a language for my high school course prerequisites (e.g. required for IB, compulsory at my school).	67	7	7	7	68	0.48	156
I was able to take Japanese through distance education or outside of school, even though it wasn't offered as a regular subject at my school.	52	4	6	5	89	0.46	156
I need to study a language for a university course prerequisite.	75	6	10	4	61	0.4	156

Reasons for discontinuation

As can be seen from Table 11, the two reasons most commonly cited as having a 'major influence' on Discontinuers' choices not to continue with Japanese related to instrumental decisions about the mark the student was likely to obtain relative to marks in competing subject choices. The next two reasons related to room for Japanese within the students' subject choices and decisions having already been made about Year 12 subjects. The next ranked reasons were a group of three reasons relating to perceived difficulty (I found learning Japanese too difficult, the workload was too high and I felt disadvantaged), followed by reasons related to perceived usefulness. If responses are ranked according to 'average weighting' (taking into account not only responses indicating major influence, but also moderate and minor influence), then difficulty, low expectations of achievement and workload are the top three reasons.

Workload is significant not just because students don't like to work hard, but because they perceive time will be taken away from other subjects, lowering their ability to perform well in these subjects as well. Not liking Japanese was ranked as ninth in terms of major influence, and seventh ranked on average rating, somewhat surprising given the perceived high level of difficulty. Concerns with content and delivery were ranked relatively low, and social influences, including discouragement from parents, teachers and siblings were also rated by most students as having 'no influence'.

Clearly, perceived difficulty, in particular difficulty in achieving a good score for a reasonable input of time and energy is a major trigger for discontinuation. It is not clear from this single study whether this focus on relative difficulty is the same for all subject choices of Year 11 students, or whether Japanese is particularly singled out as more difficult than other subjects. However, there is evidence from work on student choices relating to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects that student choices here too are influenced by perceptions that the subjects are 'too hard', and that this is leading to declining enrolments. Commentators have expressed the view that Australian students are increasingly avoiding subjects they perceive as 'difficult'. Interestingly, in interviews conducted for earlier research and in general

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conversations with teachers, students were often quoted as believing that science subjects were easier than language, because in science and mathematics there is a clearly defined knowledge base which students can realistically aim to master, whereas in language the knowledge base is not clearly defined, and the learning task seems open-ended.

Table 11: Reasons for discontinuation, ranked on 'major influence' score

Answer options	No influence	Minor influence	Moderate influence	Major influence	N/A	Rating average	Response count
I didn't think I would get a good enough mark in Japanese.	15	15	12	25	0	1.7	67
I thought other subjects would give me a better ATAR/OP or score to enter university	21	8	10	24	3	1.59	66
I already had enough subjects and couldn't fit Japanese in.	24	2	9	24	8	1.56	67
There was no point continuing to study Japanese because I knew I didn't want to take it in Year 12.	20	10	13	23	1	1.59	67
I found learning Japanese difficult.	11	13	22	21	0	1.79	67
The workload for Japanese was too high.	12	17	20	16	2	1.62	67
I felt disadvantaged compared to some other students taking Japanese (e.g. those who had studied it before, or already knew some Japanese, or related languages).	28	13	9	15	0	1.17	65
I didn't think Japanese would be useful to me in my future career.	24	14	12	14	2	1.25	66
I didn't enjoy learning Japanese.	19	19	15	13	1	1.33	67
I didn't think I would have much chance to use Japanese in future in my daily life (travel, with friends, for interests/hobbies etc.)	26	19	7	13	1	1.11	66
I didn't like the way Japanese was taught.	23	21	12	10	1	1.14	67
I couldn't see the relevance of what we were learning.	29	18	10	10	0	1.01	67
Most people speak English, so I can't see the point in studying Japanese.	42	15	4	6	0	0.61	67
I didn't have much in common with the other students taking Japanese.	45	5	3	6	8	0.49	67
I didn't think I was learning much in Japanese class.	29	19	13	5	0	0.91	66

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Answer options	No influence	Minor influence	Moderate influence	Major influence	N/A	Rating average	Response count
I was not very interested in Japan or Japanese culture.	32	21	8	5	1	0.79	67
There was a timetable clash between Japanese and other subjects I wanted to take.	41	1	4	5	16	0.47	67
I decided to take up (or continue) another language instead.	47	3	2	5	10	0.39	67
My parents discouraged me from continuing with Japanese.	43	5	4	3	12	0.4	67
My friends were not continuing with Japanese so I didn't either.	46	9	2	3	7	0.37	67
My Japanese teacher discouraged me from continuing with Japanese.	47	3	1	3	13	0.26	67
My brother or sister discouraged me from studying Japanese.	50	1	1	3	12	0.22	67
There was too much repetition from earlier years	39	14	8	2	4	0.57	67
I had moved schools, and this disrupted my study of Japanese.	44	0	3	1	19	0.19	67
Japanese is not offered as a Year 11 or Year 12 subject at my school.	42	0	1	1	23	0.11	67
I have a Japanese background and there wasn't a course suitable for my level.	43	1	0	1	22	0.09	67
Year 11 and 12 classes are combined and I didn't want to study in a combined class.	43	0	2	0	22	0.09	67
Other teachers discouraged me from continuing with Japanese.	47	4	0	0	16	0.08	67
I had already taken Year 11 or 12 level units in Japanese in Year 10.	45	0	1	0	21	0.04	67

The influence of Year 12 structures and overall number of subjects taken on continuation of Japanese

Evidence gathered from previous research (de Kretser, & Spence-Brown, 2010) had suggested that in some states the ability to take an 'extra' subject (above the normal load) was important in allowing or encouraging students to fit Japanese in to their senior secondary programme. Conversely, publicly available data from South Australia indicated that structures that reduced the number of subjects taken in Year 12 in recent years corresponded with a dramatic drop in enrolments in Year 12 languages, confirming the important influence of the overall number of subjects taken on language enrolments. Many students are constrained in their subject choices by prerequisites or recommended subjects for entrance into tertiary courses, and a language is in this sense an 'elective' which they can only choose if they have space after selecting other 'core' subjects (such as English, two mathematics units, physics and chemistry for Engineering students).

The rules and conventions for the number of subjects studied at Year 12 are surprisingly varied across Australia. Both the average number of subjects taken at Year 12 level, and the rules which affect the ability to accelerate in languages or other subjects are quite diverse. In fact, even the definition of a Year 12 subject is not consistent, with Tas and ACT effectively only offering one year level of 'continuers' Japanese post Year 10, able to be taken in either Year 11 or 12, albeit under a different senior secondary structure which makes comparisons difficult. It was thought that the ability to take an extra subject might be particularly important in Vic, where the 'normal' load at Year 12 is five subjects (minimum of four), but there are positive incentives for taking a sixth subject, in the form of the award of 10 per cent of the mark in the fifth and sixth subject. In this state, it is common practice to take a Year 12 level subject in Year 11, in order to make up the complement of six subjects without having to undertake a higher than average workload in Year 12. (Non-heritage background students usually take a non-language unit early in order to make way for the language in their Year 12 programme, unless their school has an acceleration programme.)

This factor ('I was able to take an extra subject so managed to fit Japanese in') was included in the survey. While it was not amongst the most highly rated factors, it was shown to be an influence for a significant minority of students. However, the wording meant that it only captured students who perceived that they were taking an 'extra' subject, which was not defined. Surprisingly, this factor was rated lowest in Vic (approximately 5 per cent indicating it was a major or moderate influence), somewhat higher in NSW (approximately 13 per cent) and approximately 20 per cent in Qld and WA. As high numbers of students of Japanese are taking six subjects in Vic, either they do not perceive this as taking an 'extra' subject, or they do not recognise that taking an extra subject was a significant factor in their choice to continue. Qualitative data from interview studies would probably be required to further elucidate this point.

To throw further light on the influence of number of subjects taken, data was obtained from the Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities in Vic, Qld and NSW. As can be seen from the table below, in Qld and Vic, a significantly higher proportion of students of Japanese take six subjects or more than is the case for the general population; in Qld, 79 per cent of students taking Japanese are taking six subjects or more. While the reasons for this correlation are no doubt complex, in that the Japanese group may well be a more academic group than the general population, and taking a language subject may both be a cause of taking more subjects and a result of being free to take, or wanting to take more subjects, the figures do provide evidence that this is a significant factor, and one that Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities need to be aware of when they plan policy in this area. Data

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from NSW were less clear cut than the Victorian and Qld data, with approximately 40 per cent of the general cohort taking six or more subjects, with similar proportions for students of Japanese when viewed in terms of *units*, but less students of Japanese taking more than six subjects when viewed in terms of *subjects*. This reflects the availability in NSW of extension units in Japanese and other subject areas, which may encourage good students to take extra units in a specialised area, rather than broadening their subject choices. It may also be affected by the large cohort taking Japanese as a Beginners course, which anecdotally has some particular features not typical of the general student population, but further analysis is necessary before drawing any conclusions on this point.

Table 912: Number of subjects studied by students of Japanese, compared with general population

No. of subjects studied in Year 12	4	5	6	>6
Qld total student body	12.2%	26.7%	43.4%	5.8%
Qld students taking Japanese	3.3%	18.8%	64.6%	12.6%
Vic total student body	8.5%	42%	40.8%	2.5%
Vic students taking Japanese	1.4%	27.4%	65.3%	5.5%

Conclusion

This report provides information on decisions to continue or discontinue language study, sourced directly from students currently in Year 11, across states and school systems, for the most widely taught language in Australia, Japanese. While some caution in interpretation is required in terms of representativeness, due to the self-selection of both schools and students to participate, the results provide revealing insights into student characteristics and the reasons for their choices to either continue or discontinue the study of Japanese at senior secondary level. Although the importance of individual reasons would no doubt differ for other languages, it is likely that some of the broad trends (such as the importance of intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations relating to marks and difficulty) would be similar for other languages, at least for languages that are not primarily studied by heritage speakers.

It is clear that students are influenced by a range of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as well as structural constraints and affordances, and it is the confluence of these that is likely to influence decisions rather than one or two motivations taken in isolation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results confirm that students are not primarily motivated by instrumental decisions about career value, but are strongly influenced by intrinsic motives such as their interest in and liking for the subject, and desire to travel to Japan (which also reflects interest in the language and people). They also attribute general educational value to the subject, for example, in terms of presenting a worthwhile challenge, providing skills in intercultural understanding.

However, liking is not enough, and it is clear that students who choose to continue studying Japanese generally perceive that they will achieve good results in the subject, either due to their own abilities or to factors such as bonus marks, and that this is an important factor in choice. This is borne out by the results for the Discontinuers, who also often express an interest in Japanese, but for whom the decision to discontinue is strongly influenced by perceptions of difficulty, high workloads, and an inability to do well. For some students this is compounded by a lack of room in their course, or other structural factors such as timetable clashes. Such structural factors are the reasons why students who wish to continue are unable to do so, and must be a target of any efforts to improve participation.

The results of this study suggest that efforts to improve Japanese teaching to make the subject interesting and engaging, and to connect students with opportunities to engage in actual communication or to travel to Japan may well help to influence student choices. In addition, students seem to recognise the broader educational value of language learning, and its role in a balanced study programme and this is an additional factor which may support continuation, when combined with other factors.

Perceptions of usefulness to career and daily life may not be the most decisive component in choice, but a majority of students indicate that these factors have some influence in their decision to continue, so efforts to alert students to the relevance of Japanese to their lives may also bear positive fruit. Notably, this should not be done just in terms of career – relevance to travel and leisure is also of major importance, as has been noted by recent studies in the learning of both Japanese and other languages, including English (Kubota, 2011). Often, students choose to study a language because of interest, but then start to look for ways in which they could use it in a career. Finally, the ability to do well is crucial to student choices, so ensuring that the demands of the subject are not excessive in comparison with other subjects, and that students feel they have a reasonable chance of scoring well if they study hard is also an important factor.

In conclusion, it should be noted that while individual motivations are important, so are the larger structural factors that shape subject choice. Incremental gains can be made in student retention by

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addressing language-specific issues and improving teaching and advocacy. However, the large differences across jurisdictions in terms of participation at senior secondary level indicate that, although they may not be uppermost in students' minds, it may be the case that targeting broader structural factors, often quite removed from language teaching per se, has the most potential for removing barriers and encouraging language study. These include issues such as timetabling and whole-school support for language programmes at the school level. At the jurisdiction level, they may include measures to provide more room in courses for language subjects and incentives for taking on a higher workload, as well as ensuring that students are competing on an 'even playing field' in terms of being able to achieve at a high standard in language subjects.

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