

Japanese Language Education in Sri Lanka: A critical analysis of the past, present and future

Udara I. de Silva¹

After completing more than fifty years of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Japan, Japan plays a crucial role in Sri Lankan economy, culture and education. Economic and cultural relations including trade and tourism have increased the interest among Sri Lankans in Japan, its people and its language. With the so called “Japanese Boom” taking the Asian sub-continent with a storm, Japanese studies is a field which boasts of many academics and researchers. In respect of Sri Lanka, Japanese is the language with the highest demand in the field of foreign language education with the highest number of students offering it for their secondary and higher education.

The Japanese language education boom which started in the 80’s, has now achieved its pinnacle where it has been included in the secondary and tertiary level education. Traditional book-based, teacher centred teaching methods have been replaced with more modernised methods of teaching. Multi -media teaching aids, computer assisted teaching and web-based learning have been introduced in order to enhance the quality of teaching enabling students to engage in their studies more effectively with enthusiasm.

Even though the interest in Japanese Language Education in Sri Lanka has grown rapidly since its introduction to Sri Lanka decades ago, no considerable research that probes into its development has been carried out. Hence, this paper places its importance on the history, the present and the future perspectives of Japanese Language Education in Sri Lanka with an analysis of data collected from the secondary schools and at tertiary level including universities, language schools, and technical colleges. The role played by the Japanese Government through various institutions and organizations such as the Japan Foundation and the Japanese Language Education Association is also considered. Consequently, it will bring forth an understanding of the number of students and schools which offer Japanese as a foreign language, qualifications of the teachers and the facilities available. In summary, this paper probes into the history of Japanese language education, its progress, analyse the quality of teaching and learning and the benefits that have been imparted. Moreover, it will throw light on the standards achieved, the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching methodology, the facilities available and on the future perspectives in Japanese language education in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: foreign language education, Japanese language, teaching methodology, Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language

¹ Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka