



An Analysis of the *University Japanese* Second Classroom

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Abstract

In recent years, the promotion of minor language education in secondary schools has led to a steady increase in the number of students taking Japanese in China's college entrance examinations. Consequently, universities have introduced public Japanese courses, such as *University Japanese*, specifically tailored for these students. However, traditional, single-mode, in-person classrooms face significant challenges in meeting the needs of students with prior Japanese knowledge due to limited class hours, varied proficiency levels, and weak practical application skills. Thus, it is essential to establish a second classroom for Japanese learning. This study is based on survey data collected from students enrolled in *University Japanese* in 2021 and 2022 at a certain university. By comparing the data of these two cohorts, this research analyzes students' attitudes, needs, and directions in learning Japanese. It also explores the role of pedagogical innovations in enhancing students' interest and effectiveness in learning Japanese. Considering the importance and current development of the second classroom, the study investigates methods to improve students' practical Japanese skills and stimulate their enthusiasm for learning. The findings aim to facilitate the development of public Japanese teaching within the context of new liberal arts education.

Keywords: Public Japanese teaching, pedagogical innovation, second classroom

1. Introduction

With the advancement of globalization and the deepening of higher education reform in China, foreign language education plays a vital role in cultivating talents with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills. As a significant minor language discipline, Japanese has gained increasing prominence in Chinese universities. In recent years, the promotion of minor language education in secondary schools has led to a significant rise in the number of students taking Japanese in college entrance examinations. This trend presents both opportunities and challenges for foreign language education in higher education institutions. To meet these students' learning needs during their university studies, many universities have introduced *University Japanese* as an elective course available to all students. However, due to challenges such as the wide variance in students' Japanese proficiency, limited teaching resources, and tight class schedules, these courses struggle to fully address students' individualized learning needs. Therefore, developing innovative teaching methods, particularly through the implementation of a second classroom, has become an urgent issue in achieving better educational outcomes.

As an extension and complement to the primary classroom, the second classroom holds an irreplaceable position in the modern higher education system. It not only compensates for the shortcomings of regular classroom teaching but also provides students with more targeted and practical learning opportunities through a variety of extracurricular activities. At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of second classroom development and its critical role in fostering student growth. In *University Japanese* instruction, the second classroom can stimulate students' interest in language learning and subtly cultivate their practical skills and innovative thinking. However, the second classroom for *University Japanese* in most universities is still in the exploratory phase, lacking systematic planning and effective guidance. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a well-structured and scientifically planned second classroom system that aligns with the characteristics of *University Japanese* courses and students' actual needs.

Under the new liberal arts educational framework, the goals of *University Japanese* have long surpassed simple language instruction, aiming instead to enhance students' overall

foreign language competencies and cross-cultural communication abilities. This study focuses on the prominent issues in current *University Japanese* teaching practices, utilizing survey data collected from students enrolled in the course to analyze their attitudes, needs, and objectives in learning Japanese. Furthermore, it explores how the establishment of a second classroom can improve teaching outcomes. The research also seeks to identify pathways for integrating the first and second classrooms, providing solutions to current challenges in public Japanese courses. The ultimate aim is to promote the comprehensive development of university-level Japanese education and support students in becoming well-rounded talents with international competitiveness.

2. The importance and current research status of the second classroom

The primary mission of higher education is to cultivate well-rounded talents with comprehensive skills and competencies. However, classroom teaching often fails to fully address students' individual growth needs. Therefore, the integration of the first classroom and the second classroom has become an essential approach to bridge this gap. In the field of Japanese language education, the second classroom not only extends the depth and breadth of language instruction but also serves as a necessary complement to traditional teaching methods, enhancing students' cross-cultural communication skills. This perspective provides a theoretical foundation for the current research.

2.1 The importance of the second classroom

At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of strengthening the second classroom and its role in practice-based education. The second classroom refers to organized and purposeful educational activities conducted outside of formal teaching plans and syllabi during students' free time. According to Peng (2011) [8], the first classroom and second classroom together form an organic whole in higher education. The second classroom serves as an extension and supplement to the first, playing an irreplaceable role in student development. Fundamentally, this innovative educational model complements the first classroom, jointly contributing to the educational functions of universities, and constitutes a vital component of higher education.

Chinese universities have actively implemented the second classroom transcript system. Wei (2018) [9] views the second classroom transcript evaluation system as a transformation and innovation in evaluating students' comprehensive qualities. This system adopts a forward-looking perspective to help students enhance self-awareness, emphasizing the establishment of feedback and consultation mechanisms. Through interaction, it provides students with timely guidance, supervision, and encouragement, helping them better understand themselves and actively engage in personal growth and development.

However, some researchers point out that despite the growing recognition of the importance of the second classroom, most universities still lack a complete system for it. National-level directives and guidelines for developing second classroom educational programs in universities are absent. As a result, a disconnection exists between professional teaching in the first classroom and quality-oriented education in the second classroom. The specific construction and implementation of the second classroom require universities to explore and design based on their unique circumstances.

2.2 Current research status of the University Japanese second classroom

Existing domestic research on the second classroom largely focuses on ideological and political education or quality development systems. In the field of foreign language education, attention has mainly been directed toward English-related courses or Japanese major-specific instruction, with limited studies on the practical application of the second classroom in elective courses for non-foreign-language majors. Zhao (2017) [10] observed that the development of second classrooms in foreign language education often prioritizes English, leading to instability and imbalances in the construction of second classrooms for Japanese.

In previous studies, university English courses typically have well-established training objectives and assessment systems, often utilizing standardized tests such as CET-4 and CET-6. In contrast, *University Japanese* lacks a unified and fixed assessment standard. Therefore, *University Japanese* cannot simply replicate the models used for university English courses; instead, it must explore development paths tailored to its unique disciplinary characteristics.

This study focuses on students enrolled in *University Japanese* at Zhaoqing University, aiming to investigate the impact and significance of the second classroom on public Japanese courses. By engaging students in various activities, the research seeks to better stimulate their interest, enhance their enthusiasm for learning, and ultimately improve their Japanese proficiency. Additionally, it aims to cultivate students' comprehensive foreign language competencies and enhance their core competitiveness. Developing and promoting the second classroom for *University Japanese* not only helps improve the foreign language skills of non-foreign-language majors but also supports the university's comprehensive evaluation of students. Furthermore, it activates students' intrinsic motivation and facilitates their holistic development.

3. The current status of *University Japanese* and the necessity of the second classroom

Although *University Japanese* courses have made some progress in exploring teaching content and formats, their limitations remain apparent. Issues such as inflexible course design and a lack of student interest and motivation hinder improvements in overall teaching effectiveness. In this

context, the second classroom, as an innovative educational practice, provides diverse solutions for teaching *University Japanese*. Through scientific planning of the second classroom, student needs can be better addressed, fostering innovation and optimization of teaching models.

3.1 Survey Methods and data analysis

The learning condition survey for *University Japanese* covered students from the 2021 and 2022 cohorts, yielding a total of 937 responses. This data provides valuable insights into students' learning motivations, goals, and challenges, offering innovative directions for Japanese language teaching.

From the perspective of academic distribution, the respondents came from 18 different faculties, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of Japanese learning. Significant variation was observed in the total time students had spent learning Japanese before entering university, indicating diverse foundational levels. This highlights the necessity for personalized teaching methods to address varying proficiency levels, affirming the importance of differentiated instruction. Additionally, students across the two cohorts cited diverse reasons for selecting Japanese, including an interest in Japanese culture, professional requirements, and personal development. This necessitates incorporating diverse content in teaching to meet students' varied needs. Students' learning objectives also differed; some aimed for basic communication skills, while others sought higher proficiency levels. Thus, setting flexible learning goals and assessment systems is essential.

Students demonstrated clear objectives for taking *University Japanese*, expressing expectations to achieve a certain level of proficiency and apply their Japanese skills in professional fields or future employment. Survey data revealed that 79% of students chose Japanese for higher foreign language scores in college entrance exams, 51% selected it to avoid English, and 65% aimed to pass final exams. Meanwhile, 72% showed the most interest in Japanese culture, including literature, films, and translation. These findings indicate that most students had initially studied Japanese in preparation for college entrance exams and had relatively basic goals for undergraduate-level learning. Their primary interests, however, lie in cultural knowledge beyond textbooks.

Due to the surge in students taking Japanese for college entrance exams, *University Japanese* courses are often delivered in merged classes, lacking suitable textbooks and facing challenges related to uneven proficiency levels. A small group of students, who had studied Japanese for over three years, had passed the N1 or N2 certification exams. However, the majority had studied Japanese for only 0.5 to 3 years, exhibiting weaker and more varied proficiency levels. Furthermore, since *University Japanese* classes do not follow traditional administrative class structures, they are often scheduled during evenings or weekends, which may contribute to students' psychological fatigue and reduced engagement. Consequently, the effectiveness of merged-class teaching is generally poor.

For students who had studied Japanese with the goal of excelling in college entrance exams, the lack of exam pressure after entering university significantly diminishes their motivation to learn. Motivation is a critical factor influencing Japanese learners' success (Zhang, 2021) ^[11].

Designing targeted practical activities can effectively sustain or enhance students' motivation. To encourage active foreign language learning, it is essential to foster interest in both content and learning methods. Thus, incorporating diverse cultural elements, such as Japanese culture, into teaching through innovative approaches is key. Regarding teaching materials, students expressed a strong desire for more up-to-date and practical resources. This indicates that current textbooks may not fully meet students' needs, necessitating updates or the introduction of new resources. Additionally, students' interests in Japanese learning varied, ranging from linguistic knowledge to cultural customs. These findings suggest that cultivating students' interests should be a priority in teaching to enhance learning outcomes.

3.2. The necessity and key research areas of the *University Japanese* second classroom

Given the current challenges in *University Japanese* courses, including short learning cycles, complex student backgrounds, limited teaching resources, and suboptimal teaching models, the second classroom serves as an essential extension and complement to the first classroom, offering irreplaceable value. Developing and effectively implementing the *University Japanese* second classroom is both necessary and meaningful. Through second classroom activities, students' interest in Japanese learning can be stimulated, their personal character cultivated in subtle ways, and their practical and creative abilities enhanced. Moreover, interactive activities provide students with timely guidance, supervision, and motivation, helping them gain a deeper understanding of Japanese as a discipline, better understand themselves, and actively engage in their learning and growth.

While the role and necessity of the *University Japanese* second classroom are clear, its current status in universities is not promising. Many institutions have not integrated the Japanese second classroom into their teaching systems or developed clear plans for its implementation. The second classroom's status is often low, with insufficient attention from educators. Some teachers fail to recognize its importance or participate in or guide students' second classroom Japanese activities.

This study aims to address these gaps by leveraging the "Internet+" context to develop both online and offline activities, exploring ways to build a *University Japanese* second classroom teaching system. The research focuses on integrating the first and second classrooms and creating a unified teaching model.

Key research questions include how to design and implement diverse Japanese second classroom activities and how to guide students to participate reasonably and effectively. To improve academic skills, activities could include practical Japanese instruction, preparatory courses for Japanese proficiency tests, and special projects like Japanese cultural knowledge competitions, translation contests, and fun Japanese trivia quizzes. These initiatives aim to strengthen students' foundational knowledge of Japanese, develop their understanding of translation principles and methods, and improve their practical language application skills.

Additionally, strategies must be developed to fully engage

students in second classroom activities and motivate their active participation. This includes exploring the integration of *University Japanese* first and second classrooms to maximize the second classroom's value and impact. Ensuring broad participation in second classroom activities, such as Japanese academic competitions, is also crucial. Competitions should not only focus on students with strong Japanese foundations who are likely to win awards but also aim for universal coverage and inclusivity, ensuring that the majority of students can actively participate.

Finally, building a robust management system for the *University Japanese* second classroom is a critical area for further exploration. This involves creating structures that support widespread participation, maintaining quality, and systematically integrating second classroom outcomes into the overall teaching framework. These efforts are essential for fully realizing the potential of the second classroom in *University Japanese* education.

4. Conclusion

In recent years, the steady increase in the number of students taking Japanese in the college entrance examination and the widespread adoption of public Japanese courses in universities have presented both challenges and opportunities for *University Japanese* education. Traditional classroom teaching models struggle to meet students' diverse learning needs and fail to fully realize the role of Japanese courses in enhancing students' foreign language competencies and cross-cultural communication skills. This study, based on a survey of students enrolled in *University Japanese* at a certain university, analyzed their learning motivations, goals, and needs, further validating the necessity of establishing a second classroom. As an extension of the first classroom, the second classroom not only compensates for the shortcomings of traditional teaching but also stimulates students' interest and enhances their motivation through diverse activities. Thus, scientifically planning and systematically constructing the second classroom is a critical task in reforming *University Japanese* education.

Analysis of the survey data reveals that students with varying Japanese proficiency and learning goals face key challenges, including low interest in learning, limited learning resources, and monotonous classroom content. The second classroom addresses these issues by offering diversified learning paths. For example, activities such as cultural lectures, Japanese film appreciation, and translation practice not only broaden students' horizons but also enable them to apply Japanese knowledge in real-world scenarios, thereby improving their language proficiency. Additionally, Japanese competitions and academic activities provide platforms for students to showcase their talents and develop their skills, fostering greater motivation and engagement. Therefore, future teaching designs should encourage universities to strengthen their support for the Japanese second classroom, enriching students' learning experiences and improving teaching outcomes.

The integration of the first and second classrooms is particularly important in the practical implementation of the second classroom. The first classroom provides foundational language knowledge and skills, while the second classroom deepens students' understanding and application of the

language through practice-based activities. A flexible teaching model can be achieved by combining online and offline approaches, leveraging modern multimedia technology. For instance, online platforms can host Japanese knowledge competitions or virtual language exchange activities, overcoming temporal and spatial constraints and increasing student participation. Additionally, developing a robust evaluation mechanism that incorporates second classroom activities into students' overall assessments can incentivize active engagement and facilitate the organic linkage between the first and second classrooms.

In conclusion, the construction of the *University Japanese* second classroom is not only a valuable supplement to existing teaching models but also a crucial exploration aligned with the reforms in foreign language education in the new era. By establishing a scientifically sound second classroom system, students' language application skills can be enhanced, and their interest and potential can be stimulated, laying a solid foundation for their future academic pursuits or career development. Moreover, this effort significantly contributes to optimizing and advancing public Japanese teaching systems in universities. Looking ahead, universities should further diversify and standardize second classroom activities, focus on resource integration, and invest in professional development for teaching staff to maximize the second classroom's educational potential in *University Japanese* teaching.

5. Funding Project

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