

# The AJE Summit 2020 Report: The Past, Present and Future of Japanese Language Education in Europe

Takuya Kojima

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia; Nagasaki University, Japan

Marcella Mariotti

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

**Abstract** Associations of teachers of Japanese play an indispensable role in assisting not only teachers but also learners and impacting society by offering resources and opportunities for the growth of in-service teachers and pre-service teachers such as postgraduate students. Enhancing the quality of the resources and opportunities is expected to become effective when they know each other, learn from each other and work together. For this purpose, the Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe hosted a summit where the representatives of 22 European countries gathered to discuss the current and the future of Japanese language education in Europe. The aim of the current report is to present general but up-to-date information about the teachers, learners, institutions, associations, and features and challenges of each country. Furthermore, this report will illustrate the key discussions of the summit on the challenges and the possible actions for the viable future of Japanese language education in Europe. The Authors hope to contribute to creating the reference points for larger future studies on such associations while reflecting on the impact the summit possibly had.

**Keywords** Japanese Language Education. Associations of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe (AJE). Advocacy by Teachers' Associations. Teacher's Cooperation among and beyond Europe. No-Level Brick Language Education (NoLBrick).

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Summary of Information Shared by Each Country. – 3 Summary of Discussions. – 4 Concluding Remarks.



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari

Submitted  
Published

2021-04-19  
2021-06-30

#### Open access

© 2021 | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License



**Citation** Kojima, T.; Mariotti, M. (2021). "The AJE Summit 2020 Report: The Past, Present and Future of Japanese Language Education in Europe". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 57, 687-710.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2021/01/025

687

## 1 Introduction

This report will summarise data and discussions shared during the 2020 Summit of the Japanese Language Teacher Associations in Europe (hereafter, the Summit). The Summit was held on 15 February 2020 in Venice, Italy. The Summit is the first since 1990. That is, the associations have had no opportunity to come together for over 20 years. The official information of the Summit can be viewed on this website of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (<https://www.unive.it/data/agenda/4/37793>). Funding from the Japan Foundation, the Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe (hereafter, AJE), and Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Supporting Principal Investigators fund for *NoLBrick - No Level-Brick Language Learning: Transformative Language Education*) have supported the Summit. The committee members of AJE, as well as one assistant, administered the Summit. Several student assistants have supported the Summit on-site. We Authors, as two of the organising members, would like to show our gratitude to the funding institutions and the assistants who made this event come true.

The purpose of the Summit was to facilitate the mutual understanding of the current state of Japanese language education (hereafter, JLE) in Europe and to enter into the discussions to consider the future vision of JLE in Europe. Representatives from the 22 countries listed below, took part in the Summit to achieve the aim together. Guests from three countries and two observers from the Japan Foundation also attended and observed the Summit. Twenty-two representatives have authorised us to share the data presented on the day of the Summit. The data provided in February 2020 were drawn on to compose this report. Then, some follow-up adjustment of the details has been made by April 2021. At the Summit, representatives also engaged with networking, which was certainly encouraged through attending the Summit (see Fujimitsu, Shinozaki 2020). The Summit was successful and offered multiple insights that could better be shared with a wider range of stakeholders. The Summit has become an annual event. In 2021, it is scheduled for April.

This report primarily aims to offer reference points for future larger-scale surveys and more academic investigations, using the information mentioned by the representatives of each country. It does not provide all detailed information as it is accessible via resources shared online publicly on the website of AJE (2020, <https://www.eaje.org/ja/symposium/64>). Still, some resources are restricted to private access. Thus, this report has its value in sharing such information. All critical comments on each association were raised by the representatives. They represent the enthusiasm of each association to move forward. This report also presents major discussions during the Summit. The discussions, generated on the basis of shared

information, suggest several issues that JLE in Europe may need to concern for its viable future. Associations of teachers can or should play one of the central roles in enhancing and promoting JLE in Europe. Therefore, this report has been written with the hope of contributing to adding diverse perspectives to each association for it to engage in fruitful dialogue both within and beyond each association. Furthermore, comprehensive reports in English on the associations of Japanese language teachers in Europe are limited. By providing the information below in English, this current report may contribute to beginning a conversation with the members of associations of other foreign languages. Then, such conversation might result in our joint endeavour towards multilingual and socially just Europe. This report is part of a research fellowship under *NoLBRick Project: Investigating Japanese Language Education in Europe in Relation to the Adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference* (supervised by Mariotti).

## 2 Summary of Information Shared by Each Country

### 2.1 Austria

The association of Japanese Language Teachers in Austria was established in 2001, while its origin dates back to the late eighties when several teachers came together to have a study group irregularly at first and then twice a year at some point. The association does not have a general meeting, articles of incorporation, or a budget. As long as the members pay an annual membership fee, they can be part of the association while they can leave any time without penalty. The number of its members ranges from twenty to twenty-five, which includes the teachers at universities, university language centres, private language schools, adult (life-long) educational institutions and private lessons. The current activities include a study group meeting twice a year and issuing a newsletter twice a year—these are expected to continue.

As one of the examples among the institutions above, at the University of Vienna, two full-time teachers and three part-time lecturers, natives of Japan, teach practical Japanese while a non-native teacher of Japanese teaches the theory (i.e. grammar) of the Japanese language. The purpose of language education is, in general, for students to acquire Japanese skills necessary for research in the field of Japanese Studies. There are about 180 students in the first year, 100 students in the second year and 50 students in the third year. There are about 10 to 20 students in the Master programme.

One of the issues is the high dropout rate of the students who are only interested in learning the language, i.e. little interested in en-

gaging with Japanese Studies. The association seeks a way to facilitate optimal learning opportunities for those students. Now, universities are seemingly the only places where the students interested in language learning can move up to an advanced level of Japanese courses.

## 2.2 Belgium

The Belgian Association of Japanese Language Teachers v.z.w/a.s.b.l. (BNK) was founded in 1997. It started with about 20 members and now has about 50 members. The association holds workshops five to six times a year to support teachers, including seminars with invited lecturers two to three times a year. In addition, to support learners of Japanese, the association has held monthly *Let's Talk Japanese* meetings since 1997. BNK also cooperates in speech contests and has a booth at language festivals every year.

At BNK, teachers from various backgrounds collaborate with each other. For example, there are native and non-native Japanese speakers, university lecturers, adult-school teachers, teachers working in private tutoring, and teachers working not only in Belgium, but also in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Finland.

BNK is concerned with the precarious employment of teachers and the lack of the presence of supporting institutions, such as the Japan Foundation. In order to develop JLE in Belgium further, BNK would like to cooperate with Japanese language teacher associations in other European countries.

## 2.3 Croatia

The Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Croatia was established in 2008. The number of members was nineteen at the time of the Summit. The association includes teachers at language school, non-profit organization and secondary school teachers from various cities as well as higher education institutions. The purpose of the Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Croatia is, generally speaking, set to exchange information regarding JLE. The association organises seminars, for instance, by inviting speakers from neighbouring countries. The association welcomes participation in the seminars through an online platform. The resources that belong to the association are shared with teachers at language schools. It also supports researcher and teacher participation in the Japan Foundation seminars in Budapest, Hungary. Moreover, the association cohosts the annual Japanese Speech Contest with the Japanese embassy in Croatia and the University of Zagreb. In Croatia, three higher edu-

cational institutions are offering Japanese Studies and Japanese language programmes. Among them, the University of Zagreb and Pula prepare a Master of Arts (hereafter, MA) course (February 2020) due to the reason described below.

One of the primary concerns regarding JLE in Croatia is the shortage of Japanese language teachers. Some universities run their programmes relying on students from universities in Japan taking part in a teaching position as part of their work experience programme. Therefore, the University of Zagreb, for instance, has set up a plan to focus on Japanese language teacher education in the near future. However, providing professional training opportunities and facilitating programmes to grant MA or Doctor of Philosophy (hereafter, PhD) degree courses specialised in Japanese Studies may not help prospective teachers secure stable employment. As a result, graduates are still reluctant to pursue their career path as Japanese language teachers due to the poor economic and social status of such teachers. In the current circumstances, it is likely to be the case that some teachers will choose to leave Croatia to seek better employment opportunities elsewhere.

## 2.4 The Czech Republic

The association of the Czech Republic originally started as a study group in 2001 and then officially set up its status as an association in 2006. It aimed at surveying who teaches and how they teach in the Czech Republic and identify their needs if there were any. It also started to host a mock examination of Japanese language proficiency test (hereafter, JLPT; the official worldwide Japanese language proficiency test held twice a year). Now, it is recognised by the Czech government and therefore receives several benefits with regard to the association administration, e.g. taxation. While maintaining weekly study group meetings over a year, the activities of the association have expanded to creating teaching resources and materials shared among the members, administrating a speech contest and JLPT, sharing presentations by its members who attend external seminars, symposiums and conferences, and organising workshops and seminars by guest speakers coming to the Czech Republic.

In the Czech Republic, there are approximately 3000 Japanese learners according to the number of test-takers of JLPT. Three higher education institutions have a Japanese language department. Every year, about 40 students graduate. There are about ten institutions where Japanese is taught. Now, an increasing number of learners take up the learning opportunities of Japanese as the Japanese language is closely linked with their occupation in the IT industry. There are also pensioners studying Japanese across the country. These are

all related to the improvement of the economy. More and more people are able to travel to Japan, which also prompts them to study Japanese in some way. As the economy improves in the Czech Republic, in turn, fewer students are needing financial assistance to study in Japan. The association is now concerned that there will be a risk of losing resources and opportunities, i.e. scholarship, for Japanese language teachers and learners due to this situation.

## 2.5 Denmark

There is no Japanese language teacher association in Denmark. Therefore, the absence of teacher networks is found concerning. Two higher education institutions are offering Japanese language courses. The purpose of JLE at one of the universities is not only to improve the capability to communicate in Japanese but also to develop the skills to translate Japanese, read academic writings and exchange opinions on the writings. The Common European Framework of Reference (hereafter, CEFR; Council of Europe 2001) generally guides JLE in Denmark. JLPT is also one of the main interests of learners, and therefore institutions allocate a certain amount of time to prepare for the test. Whereas the higher education institutions have an MA course for the students majoring in Japanese Studies, the drop-out rate is high (twenty to forty per cent). Students graduating from the Japanese Studies programme often take up jobs that are not relevant to Japanese or using Japanese.

It might not be adequate or necessary to establish an association for teachers of Japanese at this stage, yet they are eager to learn how to establish one for future needs. Moreover, teachers in Denmark are seeking an alliance with the teachers in north European countries.

## 2.6 United Kingdom

The British Association for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language was established in 1998. It was emphasised that the association is not for teachers but is rather for research-oriented academics. The association publishes its journal annually and hold an annual conference. It actively organises workshops and seminars for teachers. Publishing a newsletter twice a year is also one of the primary activities for the association. It also offers opportunities like a speech contest for the learners of Japanese at higher educational institutions. The number of members is about 140.

The objectives that the association aims to achieve now is to enhance the networks among the teachers at universities and, more importantly involving the teachers at secondary and primary schools.

It also aims to enhance the status of Japanese language teachers in the UK. The association has now expanded its networks outside the UK using ICT tools in order to invigorate JLE in Europe.

At eight universities, MA and PhD courses are offered for students majoring in Japanese Studies. Bachelor of Arts (hereafter, BA) courses are offered at eleven universities. Additionally, ten universities offer Japanese as one of the majors or minors for joint degree programmes. Japanese subjects are offered at 42 universities, given that optional subjects are concerned. It is also popular that the language centres of universities make Japanese courses available. While the number of students at universities is increasing, the number of students at secondary and primary schools is decreasing. The number of teachers is on a downward trend. Besides, there is an increasing number of part-time teachers. It seems that the socio-economic status of teachers is becoming low.

When specialising in Japanese Studies, studying abroad for a year or half a year is compulsory at universities in the UK. BA graduates either choose to progress to an MA, or to work in the UK or in Japan. Recently, it has been noticeable that the organisers of job fairs actively invite students studying Japanese.

While the association actively utilises teleconferencing software and other ICT tools to broaden its network across Europe and beyond, it is worrisome that insufficient legal knowledge, e.g. privacy, has been provided. They are seeking support with regard to such legal information.

## 2.7 Finland

The Finnish Teachers' Association of Japanese Language and Culture was established in 1993. The number of members is fifty. Members range from teachers at universities, secondary, primary and language schools. In addition to scholars of Japanese Studies, teachers of Japanese flower arrangement, tea ceremony and material arts are also part of the association. The purpose of the association is to protect the rights of Japanese language teachers in Finland. To do so, it has provided opportunities for the members to share information and network with each other. It also contributes to a speech contest, helps JLPT and presents some resources and schools at Japan-related events. There are at least two seminars hosted by the association in a year.

In Finland, the Japanese language will become one of the official subjects at upper secondary schools. Yet it will not happen soon among lower secondary or primary schools. Two universities are offering Japanese language courses. Other universities only offer Japanese as an optional subject, which adds up to 8 universities. At the

University of Helsinki, a Japanese language teacher education programme is offered.

CEFR has been used to guide the teaching and the design of the programmes of Japanese language. Occasionally, the resources for JLPT are used to teach Japanese. For the future, the JLE in Finland, in general, needs to consider how to balance between educating the future teachers of Japanese and educating the practitioners using Japanese for their careers.

The association now questions its own value for members. The active members are limited to only around ten among fifty. This appears to suggest that the events that satisfy the needs of most members may not be organised on a regular basis. Besides, many members are not able to be actively involved in the activities due to their status as part-time teachers.

## 2.8 France

The association in France was established in 1997. It involves about 160 members, of which fifteen committee members administer the activities of the association. Seventy-nine are from higher education institutions, eleven are from secondary schools, and thirty are from institutions such as language schools and Saturday Schools often called *Doyōkō* or *Hoshūkō* in Japanese. The rest of the members are those who do not reside in France. The activities include organising a symposium or workshop, four seminars as well as issuing two newsletters a year. They concern that the number of teachers from secondary schools as well as French teachers of Japanese is small.

Eleven universities are offering Japanese programmes for BA, MA and PhD students in France. The Japanese programmes are usually guided by CEFR at their fundamental levels. Especially at secondary schools, CEFR is influential. While some courses are focusing on JLPT, the attention to JLPT is not necessarily given to a significant extent.

One of the primary concerns of the association is its visibility in France. The low degree of visibility might reflect the low significance of the association and thus JLE in the country. The association hopes to strengthen the ties among teachers at universities, secondary schools and primary schools to face the challenge more effectively. To attract the attention of teachers at secondary and primary schools, the association will explore the potential of the different types of activities that meet the needs of a more diverse population like the ones mentioned. The association has already started events addressing secondary school students and thus secondary school teachers, such as Japan Bowl. Additionally, the association participated in the conference of Japanese Studies of France to expand its



networks with other academic specialisations in Japanese Studies. This may fill the existing gap between JLE and Japanese Studies in the country. Then, it might lead to higher visibility of the association and JLE in the future.

## 2.9 Germany

There are three types of Japanese language teacher associations in Germany. One is for the teachers at universities in German-speaking countries. The second is for the teachers at a life-long education institution. The last is for the teachers at secondary schools. Some teachers belong to two or more types of institutions and, therefore, to two or all three associations. Taking the association for the teachers at universities as an example, the association organises an annual symposium, workshops, and research presentation seminars over a year. The association publishes its journal twice a year.

In Germany, the number of students at secondary schools is less than the number of students at universities as well as the life-long education institutions. Yet the universities offering Japanese courses both for the students majoring and not specialising in Japanese Studies offer courses up to PhD. Japanese courses are the most popular courses at many universities. Once Japanese courses open, they are quickly filled by students. Although most universities have their own course structure and the teachers can design their curriculums flexibly, some universities follow the UNiCert, an international system of certification and accreditation for languages, which language level scale is based on CEFR.

## 2.10 Hungary

The association of Japanese language teachers in Hungary was established in 2001. The number of members is 50, comprising 30 Hungarian and 20 Japanese. Members range from students, private teachers, teachers at language schools and teachers at primary, secondary and higher education institutions. The main activities include creating materials, organising symposiums and seminars, contributing to a speech contest, publishing a newsletter and maintaining the homepage of the association.

One university offers BA and MA courses in Hungary. Another university offers BA, MA and PhD courses. As optional subjects, 11 universities have Japanese language courses. Graduates studying Japanese have started finding jobs at Japan-related companies. A recent trend is that students often go to Japan using a holiday work visa. They often spend a year in Japan while working.

Now, the association problematises that the resources and materials that they created have become old. Besides, perhaps for that reason, they are not actively used. There is a need to update such resources and materials in order for them to meet the educational demands in the 21st century. Another need is to promote Japanese language learning at a secondary level. The value of Japanese learning is not well recognised at the educational level, and therefore the number of learners is decreasing. Now, it is becoming difficult to organise competitions like speech contests due to the decreased number of learners. The association has been aware that it may need to work towards these concerns. Yet the association has not found an effective way to contribute to such areas of concerns. More crucially, the association may not show its value in the JLE community in Hungary and thus might not be appealing to the teachers in Hungary.

### 2.11 Ireland

The association of Japanese language teachers in Ireland was established in 2000. Currently, 28 members are part of the association. Of these 28 members, 6 are Irish. Some members do not teach yet have an interest in JLE. The association hosts a speech contest, introducing teachers to potential learners and learners to potential teachers. The concern of the association is the low number of members. Furthermore, the level of interest is diverse among the members. Thus, the same members perform the committee roles for a lengthy period of time. As a result, the activities are not enriched. The number of members would not increase in such a circumstance. To address these problems, the association plans to seek connections with the associations of other European countries and learn how the associations with a relatively smaller number of members remain active and offer their values.

In Ireland, more learners study Japanese at secondary schools than at any other educational levels. Seventy per cent of learners are at secondary schools. This may be prompted due to its educational system where the first-year high school students take up subjects, e.g. Japanese, that are not relevant to their examination required at the time of their graduation. Also, it is important to note that Japanese is one of the subjects used for the graduate certificate examination for high school students.

Two universities are offering a Japanese BA course in Ireland, yet this is a joint degree with another major. One of the issues identified at the time of the Summit is the students of Japanese not continuing to advanced levels. This is perhaps relevant to the lack of adequate resources for those learners needing facilitation from learning resources suited for advanced learners. The bright side is that the grad-

uates can find a job at Japan-related companies where they continue to perform their duties using Japanese.

## 2.12 Italy

The association of Japanese language teacher in Italy was established in 1988. Approximately 100 members are registered, yet activities appear to be inactive. The association hosts only one workshop a year. There is an increasing need for more workshops. This has not been actualised until today.

Eighty per cent of the members belong to universities. One of the most remarkable moves of JLE in Italy in recent years is the introduction of Japanese as one of the official subjects at secondary schools. However, students often enter universities with little previous Japanese study experience. Thus, they spend most of their time learning Japanese language. There are increasing concerns among teachers about the students who possess only Japanese language skills at the time of their graduation. In addition, it is notable that the number of JLPT takers is more than that of the UK. This may suggest the strong test-taking mentality of learners in Italy.

## 2.13 Latvia

In Latvia, there is no association of Japanese language teachers, although it once existed (in 2003). Even though the establishment of the official teacher association was occasionally suggested, such suggestions did not prompt any concrete actions, yet teachers of Japanese are involved in administrating a speech contest together.

Currently, there is one university and one secondary school offering a Japanese language course in Latvia. There is one language school offering Japanese courses. At the university, an MA course is also offered. Yet the students often continue onto the MA course as they simply want to graduate at MA. They may not be interested in doing research. Eighty per cent of graduates find jobs not directly related to Japanese. CEFR is not concerned by teachers and students of Japanese. To take JLPT, students have to travel to either Finland or Poland, and therefore, it is not common to take one or have it in their mind while studying Japanese. Yet, BA graduates are said to achieve the N3 level of JLPT, which is said to be equivalent to the point between A2 and B1 of CEFR when graduating. They may achieve the N2 level given that they study in Japan.

The primary concern for the JLE in Latvia relates to how to educate Latvian teachers of Japanese. To promote JLE and activate the association's activities, the growth of Latvian teacher numbers

appears indispensable. When it comes to a more education-related concern, it is the high dropout rate of the students who do not study abroad. Thus, a more viable approach to those students remaining in Latvia needs to be considered.

#### 2.14 Lithuania

The association of Japanese language teachers does not exist in Lithuania. It has always been so even in the past. Japanese language courses are offered at three universities. In the past, secondary schools facilitated Japanese courses, but they are no longer available. Four private language schools have Japanese courses. Also, private language lessons of Japanese are conducted. An MA degree is required for non-native speakers of Japanese to teach at universities. A BA degree is sufficient for native speakers of Japanese to do so. One concern is that teachers may not have any teaching experiences or training when they start teaching. There is one lecturer at a university specialising in Japanese language teacher education in Lithuania.

In recent years, more students can study in Japan as the universities have more destinations for their exchange programmes. This means that students with lower academic achievement can also study abroad. In Lithuania, JLPT is not a primary concern.

In Lithuania, communications between teachers are limited to the ones inside each institution. Even though three universities offer Japanese courses, their inter-institutional interactions seldom occur. These teachers are certainly interested in attending seminars, yet not in organising them. The relative lack of enthusiasm in Japanese language teaching among in-service teachers may derive from the assumption that teaching Japanese is an entry job to teach content courses related to Japanese Studies in the future.

As Lithuania alone may not address the current situation, the teachers of Japanese may need to seek support from neighbouring countries, as they have said.

#### 2.15 The Netherlands

The association of Japanese language teachers in the Netherlands was established in 2016. The number of members is thirty-five. Its activities include organising lectures, workshop and seminars, and administrating JLPT.

In the Netherlands, only one university offers a Japanese programme for BA, MA and PhD degrees. Some universities are offering Japanese courses in relation to a business degree, a translation and interpretation degree and an international relations degree. There

is no JLE at secondary schools. Yet community colleges, international schools, and private language schools offer opportunities for learning Japanese. Across the types of institutions, CEFR is actively used to describe the levels of the courses.

The association problematises that the professional development opportunities for the teachers of Japanese are scarce. Besides, the current workshop for teachers may not satisfy the needs of many teachers. Therefore, there is a need for developing a more suitable workshop for the members. At the same time, the increase of the non-native members should be sought.

## 2.16 Portugal

The association of Japanese language teachers in Portugal was established in 2019. Currently, 23 members are part of the association. The purpose of the association is to contribute to JLE in Portugal. Although there has been an informal group of Japanese language teachers in Portugal, it has become necessary to establish an official one due to expense management requirements for public events, such as a speech contest.

Four universities offer Japanese language courses. The vision for Japanese teaching varies, yet often focuses not only on language and communication skills but also translation skills, cultural awareness, and business communication. Teachers and learners in Portugal apparently pay attention to JLPT. Yet JLPT is not directly relevant to their educational activities.

One of the current concerns of the association is the evaluation criteria for the speech contest. The association seeks information-sharing with the Japanese language teachers in different countries in Europe regarding concrete actions toward the issues identified during the discussions at the Summit.

## 2.17 Romania

The association of Japanese language teachers in Romania was established in 2007. Twenty-five members consist of ninety per cent of Romanian and ten per cent of Japanese. However, the active members are about four to five. The association organises seminars, symposiums and supports JLPT.

Six universities offer Japanese language courses in Romania. At 4 universities, the courses can be compulsory or optional. One concern about students is their high dropout rate, partly due to the demanding study workload at universities. Students can enrol on MA courses, yet they are overarching a few areas. There is a small number of PhD students specialising in JLE or Japanese Studies.

In the future, more varieties of resources and materials will be needed, especially for young learners of Japanese. Increasing demand for more learning resources also applies to examinations such as JLPT. Thus, more attention will need to be given to such materials and examinations in Romania.

## 2.18 Serbia

In Serbia, there is no association of Japanese language teachers. Yet there is a Japanese Studies Association of Serbia established in 2013 for those who graduated from the University of Belgrade with their study focus on Japanese Studies. The association appears to constitute the large body of the population involved in JLE in the country.

At a higher education level, only the University of Belgrade provides a JLE programme, in which students can graduate to BA, MA or PhD. The association organises conferences and develops cooperation with the government and corporates for a project such as JLE at primary and secondary schools.

The future direction in Serbia will be the institutionalization of the association to involve more members with the established procedures.

## 2.19 Slovenia

The association of Japanese language teachers in Slovenia was founded in 2016. It consists of ten members. Eight are Slovenian, and two are Japanese. Activities range from supporting JLPT, hosting a seminar, and maintaining its webpage.

In Slovenia, one primary school, one secondary school and one university offer Japanese a language course. In addition, two adult education institutions and four language schools are offering Japanese courses. The university offers both BA and MA courses. The MA course deals with JLE together with pragmatics and translation.

In relation to JLE, the university offers two courses. One is teaching practice, and another is Slovenia short-term workshop.

Teacher training is limited in the country. It is not easy to organise such a training opportunity for the association as the number of members is small. Thus, the association seeks network development with the associations in other European countries. Furthermore, the association plans to develop the curriculum for lower-secondary education. Thus, the information in the countries with such curriculum is sought.

## 2.20 Spain

The association of Japanese language teachers in Spain was established in 2010. When it was established, the number of members was 40. Now, 150 members are registered. Activities include a general meeting, workshops, symposium, Japanese language contest, on-line study group, and networking with teachers in Central and South America. One of the features of the association is to provide financial support for those travelling a long distance to attend the events of the association.

The association identifies its vision. It is described as facilitating opportunities for the members to keep learning and growing. In so doing, the members seek more practical resources and techniques than concepts and theories.

One of the issues that they face is the unwillingness of members to become committee members. Besides, the number of non-native speakers is still limited to 30 out of 150. To make the association more sustainable and enriched, addressing these two areas are thought of as indispensable.

## 2.21 Sweden

There is no association of Japanese language teachers in Sweden. Yet, teachers of Japanese in Sweden are part of a mailing list shared also with teachers in the neighbouring countries such as Norway and Finland. The mailing list was started in 2008. Members share information regarding the workshop and events relevant to the members. Now members consider whether it is necessary to establish Japanese language teacher education-related events.

Five universities are providing Japanese language courses in Sweden. They are geographically close to each other, located in the South of Sweden. Among them, a BA degree with a major in Japanese can be obtained at only one university. The purpose of JLE is often placed on developing intercultural communication.

## 2.22 Switzerland

The association of Japanese language teachers in Switzerland began in 1993. There are 101 members. Most of them engage with Japanese teaching at private language institutions and private lessons. It is also worth mentioning that 22% of the members are involved in teaching heritage language learners of Japanese. The association organises two seminars a year, and occasional bottom-up workshops, applying for obtaining teaching resources from the Japan Founda-

tion, managing more than a thousand resources that members can borrow, and publishing a report and a newsletter. It has the role of a contact point for the Japanese as a heritage language education.

In Switzerland, two universities offer Japanese language courses. At five universities, their language centres provide Japanese language courses.

The association is exploring what kind of workshops is more meaningful for the members. It also questions the strong focus on Japanese education at higher education institutions as the main concern of the association is rather on JLE for learners at language schools and heritage language education institutions.

### **3 Summary of Discussions**

#### **3.1 Concerns About Students**

The increasing number of dropouts is one of the primary concerns for learners in many countries. Concerning this trend, university teachers are likely to pass students rather than fail them. There can be a governmental regulation that funding is not provided to students who exceed the expected duration of their study. This further pushes teachers to allow more students who might miss the standard set for the particular course or programme to keep progressing in their studies. Yet, it was argued that this kind of strategy, which is rather passive for teachers, may not help students who can keep up with the study pace but hinders their motivation. In their study paths, some students strategically change the language of their major from Japanese to European languages, seemingly easier for native speakers of European languages, to keep their major within the study of a language or languages. That is, they stop studying Japanese. One of the representatives stated that leaving the study path that they once started in midway is not problematic as studying Japanese is not the only choice for them. Some others yet argued that the students spend a significant amount of time and often money for their university study and therefore, admitting their leave without encouraging their critical reflection on their choice may not be an ideal approach for JLE whole. This series of discussions illustrates the difficulty in having a consensus to approach the similar condition in each country or perhaps in each institution.

The status of students studying abroad was problematised. Often, they are not allowed to take up courses other than Japanese language courses at universities in Japan. Then, it becomes difficult for them to transfer the credit to their home universities especially if they are MA students. As a result, those who study abroad while being on an MA course often cannot graduate within two years, a common dura-



tion of MA programmes across Europe. Therefore, students in France are encouraged to study abroad in their first MA year, for instance. However, this means that the students are not able to undertake the courses for thesis writing. This might result in the lack of academic writing skills necessary for MA thesis writing. Unless more contents courses and academic skill courses are open to international students, studying abroad may become harder and harder especially for MA students who have less time compared to students taking other types of degrees.

### 3.2 Japanese Language Education at All Levels

Interest in the curriculum for secondary education was noticeable. In all countries, JLE is recognised as an academic discipline. Yet, the Japanese may not be seen as one of the official subjects at secondary schools. In the worst case, no Japanese courses, at least officially, may be offered at secondary schools. In Ireland, Germany, Italy, and France, JLE has already started officially. Teachers who see the need to begin Japanese teaching at secondary school have sought more information about the situation in the countries where such education has already begun.

Similarly, interest in heritage language education in Switzerland was unmissable. Japanese language supplementary schools or Saturday Schools in Switzerland are officially recognised by the government. Study at schools is considered in their academic record in an official manner at their home schools like their sports club activities. Becoming familiar with such institutions, that might have not been well known in more than some countries, may have been one of the most significant outcomes during the Summit.

### 3.3 The Role of Associations

One of the discussions evolved around the contribution of Japanese language teacher associations to their countries. The meaning of the contribution was eventually understood as the visibility of the association in the country and the power to raise voices in political contexts. In the case of France, the association was not selected or was even eliminated from the list of organizations and institutions that decide the national curriculum for foreign language education at secondary schools. This suggests that the role of the association was not known and not valued. Therefore they, not only the association in France, increasingly feel the need to make their contribution to society visible, when there are any. Such an action is likely to result in more funding opportunities and bigger-scale activities to promote

JLE and support teachers and learners in each country. There are several suggestions to increase the visibility of the associations e.g. more advertising, active participation in Japan-related or language- and culture-related events and contacting Senators of the Japanese government. Equally importantly, the associations were suggested to produce more and more tangible contributions to their immediate communities and beyond. Yet, they concluded that what just one association can do might not be many.

In relation to the concern mentioned above, more actively communicating with the Japanese government by uniting countries in Europe was discussed. However, what needs to be communicated remained vague. One suggestion regarded CEFR. CEFR is one of the primary reference points when the Japanese government discusses its framework for JLE in Japan. Therefore, there might be the possibility that the teachers in Europe can more proactively report the understanding and the use of CEFR in Europe for universities and secondary educations. Such reports may need to be in English so that the message can reach not only Japan but also the US, and other countries. The teachers in Europe may be able to learn from the members of The Society for Teaching Japanese as Foreign Language (Nihongo Kyōiku Gakkai) in Japan as they already engage with the communication with the government at the round table regarding JLE in Japan.

### 3.4 Concerns About Members in the Associations

Gradually, participants started to share that the active members among the registered members of each association are quite limited. Only a few, such as Switzerland, have more active members than inactive members. The association in Switzerland sees the annual fee as registration fee for events. Therefore, many are willing to participate yet it is also important to note that the events of the association in Switzerland are closely relevant to the members' shared interest. It was suggested that having more inactive members is not rare as the associations reflect how society works. That is, assuming that all or the majority of members in one group remain active is too idealistic. After all, all have different interests, which results in different degree of involvement and contribution. Perhaps, the number of registered members may have limited significance for the associations. Looking at the number of active members among registered members may lead to more fruitful discussions to decide the future direction of the associations.

Many associations are concerned about the absence of the next generation. Not many are willing to become committee members. Those in their twenties and thirties have their own network. Thus, they do not even become members of any associations. The reason

for this circumstance remained unclear. Then, it was concluded that, after all, whether one joins an association depends on whether it appears worthwhile or not from the viewpoint of the next generations. This again suggests carefully considering the value that each association can offer to the members of the current and the future.

Furthermore, the lesser degree of involvement of non-native speakers of Japanese was concerned for most of the associations. With regard to this concern, using the local language more was suggested. At least, advertisement in two languages, as the association in the UK also does, may create a more inclusive atmosphere for the non-native teachers of Japanese. They also suggested involving non-native teachers of Japanese in the organising process of events and seminars. Spain did show some improvement by employing such strategies.

Discussions about the annual fee of each association opened up. It was first argued whether a certain amount of fee is expensive or not. Yet, it was suggested that whether it is expensive or not is based on a subjective judgement of each individual. If the activities, resources and information that the members can access and receive benefit from are worthwhile for the fee, they would not think that the fee is expensive. It appeared important that the association disclose the information regarding its budgeting to gain the understanding of the members about the membership fee. Furthermore, scrutinising whether the activity is needed ought to be carefully considered to ensure the appropriate uses of the budget. Besides, the economic circumstances that are distinctive in each country require attention. For example, AJE sets its annual fee at €40. The teachers in Lithuania, for instance, may not be able to afford it, as mentioned during the Summit. This may call for further consideration of the annual fee settings by investigating the activities that might not be necessary or can switch to online. (The practice of Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée (AILA) or International Association of Applied Linguistics can be of some help to consider an alternative approach. AILA offers a reduced registration rate for the members of regional applied linguistics associations when it holds a triannual conference. In this way, interested scholars benefit from the international association while avoiding paying a membership fee for both regional and international associations. The international association does not have to change its annual fee settings while opening its door for a wider population).

### 3.5 Others

Speech contests attracted attention. It was clear that almost all countries hold a speech contest. However, the targets and methods seemed to be different from one country to another. In the UK, there

are speech contests for university students, secondary school students and business Japanese, for instance. In eastern Europe, a few countries hold a speech contest together. It is simply because sufficient participants may not gather when one country holds it. However, from the authors' point of views, communicating and connecting with learners in different countries because they learn Japanese appear positive. A few countries that just started their speech contest asked questions around evaluation criteria. Overall, these suggest the importance of a speech contest for JLE in Europe yet also its room for further improvement.

Referring to the information and the resources shared outside Europe to enhance JLE in Europe was suggested. One of the examples raised was the abundant resources for secondary school Japanese education in Australia. It is well known that Australia has strengths in the area as more than ninety per cent of learners study Japanese at either primary or secondary level while it holds the fourth- to the fifth-largest number of learners in the world (The Japan Foundation 2018). This suggests that limiting the view only within the ones in Europe may overlook some useful information outside Europe.

#### **4 Concluding Remarks**

The Summit highlighted two key areas that need further discussions to pursue the viable future of JLE in Europe. This report concludes by considering the two areas and suggesting a possible action for the future.

Firstly, developing programmes and resources for young learners will be more indispensable in Europe. In general, the younger learners study Japanese, perhaps at primary and secondary schools, the more adult learners are likely to study Japanese at higher levels of education such as universities. Then, actualising such a circumstance might contribute to opening up more career opportunities for university graduates with a Japanese Studies degree. They may enter career paths not only in JLE increasingly available at primary and secondary schools but also in media and merchandise industries dealing with Japan-related products for young generations interested in Japan. For this future, having a curriculum for primary and secondary schools appears inevitable if there is none yet, like Slovenia. European countries can certainly cooperate with each other in this respect. Additionally, heritage learners, often young learners of Japanese, can be simultaneously considered in curriculum development. Switzerland may take the initiative to explore how JLE for heritage learners inform curriculum development for primary and secondary school students.

Second, increasing the visibility of the associations of Japanese language teachers in each country will be a must-do for the next dec-

ades. Tohsaku (2014), based in the US, emphasises the importance of advocacy by teachers for JLE. Teachers can advocate JLE by making it more visible through 6Cs-communication, culture, connections, collaboration, credibility and communities. These 6Cs are what teachers utilise or engage with for all stakeholders such as learners, parents of children, those in business, and policymakers. Events such as Japanese speech contexts and Japan Bowl may play an important role in the advocacy. They often provide opportunities for close communication between teachers, learners, governmental institutions. Recently, Japanese industries seem to be paying increasing attention to university graduates specialising in Japanese Studies or speaking Japanese, according to the situation in the UK. Considering this, involving those at corporates may not be challenging even if it has yet been attempted. Associations of Japanese language teachers can lead such communication among stakeholders as it has already been done in some European countries. This asks the associations to look at not only the inside but also the outside of themselves. Furthermore, educating and placing those specialising in researching language policy in the associations or at least AJE may be valuable.

A shared vision of JLE for the associations in Europe may be needed to increase the visibility altogether, although not all do not have to agree with it fully. Tohsaku (2014) states that having a vision can add more values to JLE. In turn, “education without vision is powerless. Likewise, advocacy without vision is powerless” (5). In Europe, a shared vision is likely to shape what the curriculum for primary and secondary schools as well as the act of advocacy look like. Most importantly, it gives consistency to the curriculum and the act. CEFR can be considered one of the influential sources of such a vision in Europe. Yet, the understanding of and the engagement with CEFR are still varied, and thus it hardly provides a shared vision anytime soon (Okumura, Sakurai, Suzuki 2016). Suzuki, Sakurai, Takahashi (2018) and Suzuki et al. (2020) discuss what the Japanese language teacher associations can do by surveying three countries (2018) and four countries (2020). These reports are valuable in clarifying one of the indispensable roles of the associations in Europe as providing professional training and networking opportunities for teachers and suggesting offering more and more cross-nation-boundaries opportunities. These are and will be of critical importance in enhancing the quality of JLE in Europe. Yet, they do not mention where such opportunities and enhancement take teachers and learners. Their attention to advocacy is limited. Starting discussions on a shared vision and advocacy of JLE in Europe will be fruitful for all stakeholders.

How to identify the vision that drives the actions of the associations will be a remaining question to increase the visibility of JLE in Europe. For instance, it needs to be noted that representatives of 22 countries attended the Summit. There are even more countries with

teachers of Japanese in Europe. Deciding on a vision may be feasible with fewer challenges if one country, like the US, is involved in the decision-making process. It is expected that the process will be complex and exhausting in Europe. The AJE, which considers the larger picture, can be in the position to propose a viable approach to the discussion and the decision-making process. However, we can see nothing but hope. The Summit marked the very first step towards tackling the challenge altogether. The Summit, although the name might be different, will continue to facilitate a meaningful discussion among the associations of Japanese language teachers in Europe because it has now become an annual event. The format will become better each time according to needs and purposes.

## Acknowledgments

We should like to thank the Japan Foundation, Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe, and Ca' Foscari University of Venice for supporting the Summit. We also acknowledge the support from committee members of AJE who organised the Summit as well as the representatives who shared the valuable information for us and the student assistants.

## Bibliography

- Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe (2020). *Yōroppa Nihongo Kyōshikai Samitto [Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe Summit]-AJE Summit 2020*. <https://www.eaje.org/ja/symposium/64>.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fujimitsu Y. 藤光由子; Shinozaki S. 篠崎撰子 (2020). *Yōroppa Nihongo Kyōshikai Summit -AJE Summit 2020 Kaisai Hōkaku – Yōroppa no Nihongo Kyōiku no Kongo ni mukete ヨーロッパ日本語教師会サミット—AJE Summit 2020開催報告—ヨーロッパの日本語教育の今後に向けて—* (Association of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe Summit – AJE Summit Report – The Future of the Japanese Language Education in Europe). <https://www.jpfg.go.jp/j/project/japanese/teach/tsushin/report/202006.html>.
- Okumura M. 奥村三菜子; Sakurai N. 櫻井直子; Suzuki Y. 鈴木裕子 (2016). *Nihongo Kyōshi no Tame no Sefāru 日本語教師のためのCEFR* (CEFR for Japanese Language Teachers). Tokyo: Kuroshio Publication.
- Suzuki, Y. 鈴木裕子; Sakurai, N. 櫻井直子; Takahashi, N. 高橋希実 (2018). “Yōroppa ni okeru Nihongo Kyōshikai ga mezasu mono wa nanika - Supein·Fransu·Berugi no Kyōshikai Kaiin eno Chōsa o tōshite mieru koto” ヨーロッパにおける日本語教師会が目指すものは何か?—スペイン・フランス・ベルギーの教師会会員への調査を通して見えること— (What Do the Associations of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe Aim to Achieve -

- Things Seen through Surveying the Members of Associations of Teachers in Spain, France and Belgium). The Editorial Committee of the Proceedings of 21st Symposium in Lisbon ヨーロッパ日本語教師会リスボン報告・発表論文集編集委員会 (ed.), *Yōroppa Nihongo Kyōiku* (22) ヨーロッパ日本語教育(22) (Japanese Language Education in Europe [22]). The Association of Japanese Teachers in Europe e.V. ヨーロッパ日本語教師会, 123-38.
- Suzuki Y. 鈴木裕子; Sakurai N. 櫻井直子; Takahashi N. 高橋希実; Kondo Y. 近藤裕美子; Miwa S. 三輪聖 (2020). “Kuni o koeta Yōroppa ni okeru Nihongo Kyōshikai no Katsudō no Kanōsei” 国を超えたヨーロッパにおける日本語教師会の活動の可能性 (Potentials of Cross-National Boundaries Actions of the Associations of Japanese Language Teachers in Europe). *Yōroppa Nihongo Kyōiku* (24) ヨーロッパ日本語教育 (24) (Japanese Language Education in Europe [24]), 88-120.
- The Japan Foundation (2018). *Survey Report on Japanese Language Education Abroad 2018*. The Japan Foundation.
- Tohsaku, Y.-H. (2014). “Japanese Language Education in the Global Age: New Perspectives and Advocacy”. Kinoshita Thomson, C. (ed.), *National Symposium on Japanese Language Education Proceedings 2012: Creating the Future*. Sydney: The Japan Foundation, 3-13.

