Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The foreign language education in India today comprises many languages. Though there have been changes in the trends, at present, the most popular choice in India seems to be German and French, followed by Spanish, Japanese and Chinese. The era of Indo-Russian friendship also saw a significant rise in Russian language learners in India. However, it had a downfall after the USSR fell apart. Today, many schools in India offer French as a language option right from eighth or ninth standard, followed by German. Other languages, including Japanese, are learnt as an optional either at the collegiate level or later, out of personal interest and professional needs. Historically, Indo-Japan relations have been very unique. Buddhism travelled to Japan via China and Korea. Along with the religion, many cultural aspects were passed on to and reflected in Japanese culture and society. From a linguistic perspective, Indian Buddhist monk Bodhisena, is known for founding Kegon Buddhism in Japan as well as teaching Sanskrit. Sanskrit is said to have influenced the 47 characters in the Japanese script and also the arrangement of the Japanese syllabary.

1.2 Japanese language education in India

The first Japanese language course in India was established in 1954 by the Ministry of Defence through their affiliated language school. Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan) was the first university to begin a Japanese department in 1954. Japan-India Cooperation Association in Mumbai started a Japanese class in 1958. Whereas in 1971, Indo Japanese Association

Despite the above facts, the language did not catch much attention until the late 1990s. The rise in interest in the Japanese language happened over a relatively shorter period. The Japan Foundation, an organization funded by the government of Japan for promoting Japanese language and culture, opened an office in New Delhi in 1993. The milestones in the history of Japanese language education in India are compiled in a chronological table in Annexure.

1.2.1 An upsurge in Japanese language education

Compared to the earlier time, the Japanese language education in India saw an upsurge in the decade of the 1990s.

1.2.2 The economic causes

The upsurge in the Japanese language education in 1990’s was driven by the economy. After the economic reforms, companies from Japan started entering India and exploring it as a market as well as a manufacturing center. As per the latest data¹ published by the Embassy of Japan, the total number of Japanese companies registered in India, as of October 2017, was 1,369(5% YoY growth). The total number of Japanese business establishments in India, as of October 2017, was 4,838(6% YoY growth). They are expected to grow in multiples thereby opening new career avenues to bilingual youth in India. As a result, there was a sudden growth

in the number of learners learning Japanese language and Japanese language education began to catch up with other foreign languages which are traditionally more popular in India. According to a Japan Foundation survey conducted in 2006 stated that 369 teachers (teaching in registered organisations only) taught 11,011 learners at 106 different institutions which had almost doubled compared to the previous year. Today, after a decade, the number of learners is more than double, being above 24,000 (Detailed reference given in Table 1.1).

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT)\(^2\), the standardized testing by The Japan Foundation, is offered in six Indian cities as of 2018; Delhi, Pune, Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkata, and Chennai. The most basic level of this examination, the N5 level (classified as Level 4 till 2010) is for beginners (having less than 150 hours of classroom instruction). It is the most widely attempted level. The numbers decrease at higher levels; least number of examinees for N1 being the topmost and the toughest. The number of examinees has always been rising since 1990s. Chennai has shown the fastest growth rate concerning the number of examinees during this decade. The increasing number of examinees of JLPT can be seen in the data available on The Japan Foundation website\(^3\). The remarkable growth in recent five years (after 2012) can be seen in the graph given further.

\(^2\) JLPT is a multiple choice test with three papers namely, 1. Kanji script and vocabulary, 2. Reading comprehension and grammar 3. Listening and listening with reading

\(^3\) Data retrieved on 5-Oct-18 from URL: https://www.jlpt.jp/e/statistics/archive.html
Fig. 1.1 Number of JLPT applicants and examinees from 2012–17

The latest information on the number of institutions, teachers, and learners as of 2016\(^4\) as per the survey conducted by The Japan Foundation is as follows.

Table 1.1 Number of Japanese Learners at school level as of 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Institutions</th>
<th>No. of Teachers</th>
<th>Number of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>1,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\) Data retrieved on 8.5.2017 on http://www.jpf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/area/country/2016/india.html
Fig. 1.2  Level wise distribution of the number of learners in India as of 2016

Here, it should be noted that the data shows nearly 45% of learners studying in the category ‘Others’ as they consist of unregistered private coaching classes and company trainings which cater to small groups of learners and prepare them for JLPT.

As companies in India target business with Japan, they started increasing their recruitment of bilingual professionals (here, Japanese-English speaking/translating Indians) from technical as well as non-technical backgrounds. This resulted into the rise in numbers of the Japanese language learners over the years planning a career with the language.

1.2.3 Socio-political causes

In recent years, there is a further rise in the number of Japanese language learners due to a social problem in Japan. Japan is in dire need of human resources due to an ageing society. The “working-age population” in Japan dipped below 80 million in October 2013 for the first time in 32 years, and the projections indicate that it will fall below 60 million by 2040. At present, a quarter of Japan's 127-million population is aged 65 or over.
Another crucial reason contributing to the rise in Indo-Japanese collaborations is the renewed Indo-Japan friendship after the Indian elections in 2014. Many bilateral treaties and projects have been signed and are underway as an effect of improved bilateral relations. There is a boost to Japanese investment in India and Indian companies catering to the Japanese market.

Implications:

- Talent shortages in a global perspective
- Faster growth in developing countries

Fig. 1.3 Population growth in Japan compared to other countries

Fig. 1.4 Japanese companies in India

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5 (Source: Survey of Embassy of Japan, New Delhi conducted in October 2017)
All the above mentioned reasons have resulted into the growth of the Japanese language learners in India. Though the Japanese government is working with organizations in India to address the workforce shortfall in Japan and aims to increase the number of Indian learners learning Japanese, the pace is slow. As the latest move in this direction, both the governments have decided to establish Japanese language certificate courses at 100 higher educational institutions in India as well as training 1000 Japanese language teachers over the next five years. In July 2018, the first such school has started in Jawaharlal Nehru University.

1.2.4 The private sector in Japanese language education

Though there is a growing number of JFL learners in response to the increasing demand, as a result of less action taken by universities in last few decades, the private sector had to take the initiative in Japanese language education. It cannot be denied that private institutions conduct most of the Japanese language teaching in India, in the form of company training programmes or private coaching classes for the above mentioned JLPT. In spite of these efforts, due to the absence of a mechanism and consolidated effort to provide for skilled human resources, there remains a significant shortfall relative to the growing industry needs.

In response to this situation, business process outsourcing and information technology companies took the lead and are responsible for the rise in Japanese language learners in Pune. They initiated internal training courses in the language and started offering appropriate avenues to their employees.

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A good example would be Tata Consultancy Services, which had a press release in September 2015 announcing inauguration\(^7\) of Japan-centric Delivery Center (JDC) in Pune. The new center is said to be augmenting delivery capabilities of TCS’ 2,400 strong Japan-based workforce, established in July 2014 in a joint venture with Mitsubishi Corporation as part of the strategic expansion in the Japan market. It is said to “cater to specific business needs of Japanese corporations in alignment with their unique expectations, enabled by way of localization of global business practices and enhanced language support.” It further says, “In order to ensure the perfect cultural and lingual fit, an Academy has been established as an integral part of the JDC, featuring dedicated faculty who will provide extensive language training and cultural seminars for staff at multiple levels. A customized curriculum is also being developed in collaboration with universities from the surrounding Pune area which boasts the largest student population for Japanese-language studies in India.”

1.2.5 Pune’s take on Japanese language education

With the background of various transitions occurring on the national level, Pune can be seen as an emerging hub of Japanese language education. The first Japanese language teachers came to the city of Pune in the 1970s, and the Savitribai Phule Pune University (then, University of Pune) established a Japanese language course in 1977 and later developed it to a section in 1978. Initially, the learners gathered for pursuing their interest in Japanese language and culture. Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth in Pune made an entry in Japanese language education in 2004 with a 1- year certificate course and soon developed a department

by 2013, and began offering regular BA and MA degree courses. It became the first and is till
date the only university in West India to offer graduate and postgraduate degree courses
specialising in Japanese.

Pune city being an educational hub in India had an advantage as a Japanese language
education center, and it began capturing Japanese business when India's information
technology boom began. As early as 2004, software exports to Japan made up 12% of Pune's
then-US$1 billion software industry\(^8\). The similarity between Japanese grammar and that
of Marathi is mentioned as a factor by many in easing their study of the language. Another
fact contributing to the increasing number is the rise in Japanese companies particularly in
Maharashtra. As per the official report of the Embassy of Japan in India, Maharashtra has the
highest number of Japanese companies and establishments (survey conducted in 2017\(^9\)).

1.3 Background of the present study

With the above contributing factors, the demand for bilingual Indian professionals has reached
an all-time high. It is evident that the Indian Japanese language education has to produce larger
quantity and better quality of Japanese knowing graduates. However, the present scenario
poses many challenges. The present study focuses on the quality aspect of Japanese language
education. The Indian learners of the Japanese language and the education system as a whole
have been blamed for being ‘examination-oriented’ and not focused on the ‘language
performance’. Such an ‘examination-oriented’ approach has been more prevalent in recent

\(^8\) Thakur, Gaurav (2004-02-18), "Sayonara USA, Hello Japan", The Times of India.

years when JLPT certificates became the criteria for considering a candidate for employment, appraisal and even scholarship programmes. The importance attached to JLPT can be attributed to the fact that it is the only standardized testing available worldwide. Though the importance of standardised testing cannot be denied, the nature of examination makes it necessary to consider the training and measurement of other two vitally important language skills, i.e. speaking skills (used in conversation, speech, presentation) and writing skills (emails, business communication, academic writing and so on) which form the core of real-life communication.

A representative example of this concern can be a statement by a representative from the industry. “Most of the Indian/ Japanese companies initially resorted to JLPT scores for hiring new talent as there is no other standardized evaluation system known worldwide to measure Japanese language proficiency. However, after the industry gained some insight in business with the Japanese side, they have recognised the importance of proficiency in speaking and writing communication which is necessary for working with the Japanese counterpart. The number of candidates with such proficiency is very less.”

said Mr. Sudhanva Adhyapak, Asst. Vice President, Fidel Softech Pvt. Ltd., in an International Seminar in December 2016. Although the industry seems to have realised and incorporated some change in the screening process of candidates, the education system in many language schools still focusses on the JLPT examination. The ‘Functional and Market-oriented approach to Japanese language education’ is also mentioned by Bedekar (2016). Learners by and large are unaware and not

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10 First International seminar on “Understanding Japanese business culture- Harmonizing the corporate and academic perspectives-” organized by TMV, Pune and Japan Foundation New Delhi on 10th December 2016.
given control of “What to study”. They study the pre-decided and fixed content, which may not necessarily consider the needs of the learners.

1.3.1 Need of the Study

The researcher being a Japanese language teacher in practice, finds it necessary to address the problem of learners not meeting the quality expectations. For addressing the problem, there is a need to make some substantial quality improvement in Japanese language education. Apart from the vital factors such as curricular aspects, teachers’ training, implementation of better processes, relevant organizational rules and regulations, the goal of “quality education” will be realised only when we nurture ‘motivated and self-directed learners’.

Though ‘cultivating motivated and self-directed learners’ can be seen as one of the objectives of quality education, it certainly can be seen as a parallel process and also as the main driving force for the betterment of education. We, as teachers should aim at nurturing self-directed and self-initiating learners who learn to be inter-dependent, work in a team and become independent with the progressing level. This path will train the learners for the self-reliant professional life in the future. We need to do away with the system that creates learners who are dependent on teachers for solving problems, and try to find motivation in external sources, and who turn to others for their goals and aspirations. In short, we should aim at developing ‘Autonomous Learners’. This study is dedicated to these very ideals.

When we think of the term ‘Autonomy’, it is a quintessential element of higher education. It can be interpreted in various ways; in terms of Self Governance in institutional operations, decision making, in self-directed learning in an educational institution, and as a goal of education as a whole. The present study focusses on Autonomous Learning interpreted as Self
Governance of learners. An autonomous learner is the one who has developed the capacity to take at least some control over the learning, and is responsible for one’s learning. It is today’s need to develop such a capacity which requires a set of personal qualities and also involves a set of skills. As explained in the earlier section, due to the exam-oriented nature of Japanese language studies in India, one of the goals of autonomy, i.e. to control and bear the responsibility of the decision over “what to study” still remains a distant goal. However, it is possible to initiate autonomy at the level of skills and strategies and help learners to get independent.

1.3.2 Research Problem

In India, particularly in Pune, with an isolated environment concerning opportunities for Japanese language usage, learners and teachers need to concentrate on and maximize efforts during the classroom time. Most of the language schools conduct part-time courses where the syllabus needs to be completed in a short span of time.

Apart from the JLPT preparation, the Japanese language classes are varied in the objectives and content. As against the language classrooms in many countries, an Indian JFL classroom is large numbered. Moreover, in line with the worldwide trend of ‘diversity in Foreign Language learners’, Japanese language learners in India also have various goals such as: pursuing a hobby, getting a job in a Japanese company, pursuing a career in the language such as translation and interpretation.

In such a scenario, the teacher is unable to guide each learner as per his/her needs individually. With a focus on completing the set portion with a specific number of vocabulary, grammar patterns, perhaps the learners are not given a chance or trained to explore own ways of
learning if met with challenges regarding oral communication or comprehension of unseen texts. In such a case, we can say that the objective of foreign language teaching should not be merely to introduce them to a foreign language but to enable them to perform well when they graduate from a course and the teachers are no longer beside them to support.

The private classes and some of the open courses at the universities are usually grammar and kanji-vocabulary oriented classes. Eventually, the learners tend to concentrate more on knowing “about the language”. For example, it can be observed that the learners read and comprehend unknown texts one by one and in a unit of single words and sentences and try to solve the questions given after that. By and large, the learners and teachers seem to be more occupied with “What to read” and “What to answer” than “How to read” or generally speaking, “How to learn”. For the variety of goals and texts likely to be faced in future, the learners need to be equipped with various strategies and trained to apply appropriate range strategies from a considerable repertoire. Similarly, learners tend to have weaker oral/written communication skills and almost lack of global strategies. Because of large numbered classes and limited hours, and due to the lack of awareness on teachers’ side, there is hardly any opportunity for the learners to look objectively at their learning process. With the above deliberation on the topic, the research title was decided as the following.

Exploring the Possibility of Autonomous Learning in Japanese Language Education

-With Specific Reference to Strategy Training-

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11 “Bottom Up” process of reading is found common in Indian classrooms
Whereas, the problem statement for the study was decided as further.

To develop and examine the effectiveness of a strategy training programme for initiating Autonomous Learning in JFL learners.

1.4 Objectives

In order to meet the requirement specified in the problem statement above, the following objectives were set for the present study.

1. To investigate the JFL learners’ beliefs about and readiness for autonomous learning

2. To develop a programme for training in ‘Japanese conversation and learning strategies’

3. To test the effectiveness of the programme in ‘Japanese conversation and learning strategies’

4. To develop a programme for training in ‘Japanese reading and learning strategies’

5. To test the effectiveness of the programme in ‘Japanese reading and learning strategies’

The present study can be seen as the first step towards the long-term objective; i.e., to establish that Learning Strategies may motivate learners to handle tasks interdependently and independently instead of relying heavily on teachers.

1.5 Assumptions of the study

1. There is a similarity in syntax of Japanese language and Indian languages. Therefore, it is easier for Indian JFL learners to learn Japanese to a certain extent.

2. In India, there are less opportunities for Japanese Language Usage outside the classroom.
3. The Indian JFL classrooms have been Language Knowledge (kanji, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension) oriented in most of the cases.

4. Principle of Conscious Approach: Conscious learning plays an important role in language acquisition, enlarges intellectual capacities of learners, and helps to understand new concepts and express new ideas in the target language.

5. Principle of differentiated teaching: Teachers should differentiate between teaching speaking and writing; teaching listening comprehension and speaking.

1.6 Conceptual definitions

The terms have more than one conceptual definitions because, the field of this study is not very old and is still in the stage of theory building. There are various interpretation of the terms such as ‘Autonomous Learning’ or ‘Learning Strategies’. The conceptual definitions referred in the present study are given below.

1. Learner autonomy: According to Holec (1980:4), the full-fledged autonomous learner can make decisions with regard to five domains: learning goals, learning content and progression (the syllabus), learning methods and techniques, monitoring of learning progress, evaluation of learning achievement. The attainment of autonomy in each of these five domains would empower the learner to tailor learning to his or her own needs. When learning decisions are made, exclusively by the learner in all five areas, the learning is entirely self-directed and the learner completely autonomous.

2. Learning strategy: As stated by Oxford (1990: 17), there is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are; how many strategies exist; how they should be defined, demarcated, and categorized; and whether it is – or ever will be – possible to create a real,
scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies”. However the present study finds the
definition given by Rebecca L. Oxford as it sufficiently shows the complexity of the term
Learning Strategy for language learning: “Learning strategies are specific actions taken by
the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective,
and more transferable to new situations” (1990:8). This definition stresses that learning
strategies can be helpful and supportive to the learner but also require self-direction and
learner autonomy.

3. Direct and indirect strategies: Learning strategies that are directly related to the learning of a
language are called Direct strategies—for example, memory techniques to remember
vocabulary. Indirect learning strategies are the strategies that are not directly related to a
specific part of learning, but to the overall learning process—for example, affective strategies
like techniques to reduce anxiety, social strategies such as looking for opportunities to learn
with peers or seniors, and meta-cognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring and
evaluating one’s own learning.

4. Cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies: Cognitive strategies are basically to know how to
reach a goal, such as how to read or remember a particular Kanji character (a study method).
Metacognitive strategies are to make sure that the goal was reached successfully, such as
double checking the correct answer (like a confidence builder), monitoring your learning and
evaluating yourself.

5. Reading strategies: Reading strategies can be defined as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to
control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct
6. Co-operative language learning: Cooperative language learning is based on the idea that second language learning can be best done in heterogeneous groups when all learners work collaboratively and cooperatively for one common goal. It replaces the idea that learners have to work competitively against one another. On the contrary, it instead supports the idea Vygotsky claimed in his Sociocultural (S-C) Theory, which states that “Interaction not only facilitates language learning but is a causative force in acquisition.” (Saville-Troike 2006: 111).

1.7 Operational definitions

Based on the above conceptual definitions, the selected research method and the available sample size, the following operational definitions were used.

1. Learner Autonomy or Autonomous Learning is interpreted as ‘making a well informed decision regarding learning methods and techniques to perform the language tasks, monitoring of learning progress, and evaluation of learning achievement’. The learners being still untrained for taking the control and being autonomous in other areas like syllabus, teaching content and goals, only the decision-making related to language tasks, monitoring and objective evaluation of own learning is considered to be the goal, and the first stage of autonomy. It is a means to empower the learner to tailor learning to his or her own needs.

2. Learning strategy: Keeping the classification by Oxford (1990) as the main reference point; the relevant Direct and Indirect strategies were selected for each of the 2 training programmes. Direct learning strategies in the training mean the skill specific cognitive strategies and compensation strategies, whereas Indirect learning strategies were mainly
dealing with, social strategies such as peer learning and meta-cognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating one’s own learning.

3. Reading strategies: Reading strategies were interpreted as techniques to deal with unseen text and make sense out of it. They were not divided explicitly into local and global strategies, but were seen as ways to decode text, understand words, sentences, interrelation between sentences and paragraphs, and construct meanings of the whole text with the help of linguistic clues.

4. Co-operative language learning: Cooperative language learning was incorporated within the regular class activities in the form of peer feedback and discussions, when all learners needed to work collaboratively and cooperatively for one common goal. It also comes in the realm of ‘social strategy’ in the Oxford classification of Learning Strategies.

1.8 Scope, limitation and delimitation

1.8.1 The scope of the present study

The scope of the present study was determined as given further. The range of Learning Strategies is extensive, from mnemonics to affective and metacognitive strategies. Autonomous Learning and Learning Strategies can be applied to all four language skills and all levels of learning. Therefore, the present study is narrowed down on the survey of the current status of usage and training of selected Strategies.

Secondly, the selected target group was the intermediate level of JFL learners because they were expected to know the basics of Japanese language (said to be covered in approximately 300 clock hours) using which they could apply the newly learnt strategies.
Thirdly, the present study involved experimentation in 2 main parts of the study namely; 1. Training in Japanese conversation (direct and indirect strategies) and 2. Training in Japanese reading (direct and indirect strategies). The study handles strategies specific to the above two representative skills. Conversation skill involves performance in the language in the form of interaction and reading involves comprehension using the language knowledge. The skill specific strategies are meant to assist learners in successful oral communication, comprehension of texts and achieving the related linguistic goals respectively.

1.8.2 The limitation of the study
The limitation of the study was the timing of the training programmes. It had to be decided as per the availability of the participants. In case of the long-term conversation training, the timing was in the evening after working hours. This entailed the factors which were beyond the control of the teacher such as fatigue, inconsistency in attendance of some participants. As a result, although the number of participants in the conversation strategy training was 30 initially, only the participants that attended all sessions could be treated as a sample; i.e. as less as 13.

Similarly, in case of the training in reading, the intensive training was conducted for 10 hours over a weekend. Approximately 7 participants missed some part of training, and therefore are not counted as the sample of the study.

1.8.3 The delimitation of the study
A delimitation is that of sample size and method. Though sample taken for the questionnaire surveys was randomly selected from various cities and was larger in size, the sample for experimentation was purposive because, due to the nature and fixed period of both the
trainings, the participants were not available from all parts of the country. Therefore, a small group design was selected. Subsequently, experiments in both these parts were conducted on Pune and Mumbai learners because the learners needed to consistently attend training over a certain period so that the change (growth/ no growth) could be measured. Hence, the conclusions of the study may not be generalized for all the JFL learners in India. However, the study should be treated as an exploratory study and should be further applied and measured for larger groups.

1.9 Summary

The first chapter introduced the present study with the background of Japanese language education in India, and its challenges. It also explained the nature of the present study as an exploratory study, which experiments to equip learners with strategies for the areas where they find themselves to be weak. It tries to develop and provide a framework for Strategy Training in a Japanese language classroom. It is also an attempt to train JFL learners in looking at their learning objectively and is dedicated to the ideal of developing students who “learn to learn”.

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