



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEVELOPING JAPANESE SPEAKING SKILLS IN A DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *This article addresses the pressing issues of developing oral communication competence in Japanese language learning in the age of globalization and digital technologies. The study examines the effectiveness of modern tools that enhance the pronunciation, fluency, and communicative abilities of Japanese language learners. These tools include mobile applications, online communication platforms, interactive simulators, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based speech analysis programs.*

Keywords: *Japanese language, speaking skills, digital education, online platform, artificial intelligence (AI), communicative competence, blended learning, language teaching methodology, interactive tools, motivation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Relevance and Justification of the Topic. The ongoing processes of globalization and the technological revolution worldwide have expanded international economic, cultural, and political relations to an unprecedented degree. This, in turn, has sharply increased the demand for learning foreign languages, particularly the Japanese language, given Japan's high economic and technological potential. The strengthening strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Japan, along with the development of cooperation in education, tourism, and business sectors, further intensifies the need for specialists proficient in Japanese. Among the four fundamental principles of language learning—reading, writing, listening comprehension, and speaking—oral communication, or speaking skills, is considered the foundation of practical communication. Nevertheless, traditional teaching methods often encounter several limitations in developing this skill. It is

nearly impossible to provide individual attention to each student in large study groups, allocate sufficient time for their speaking practice, and create a natural communication environment. In such situations, students often remain passive listeners and hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes (language anxiety).

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has had a significant impact on language teaching methodologies. The digital learning environment has enabled language learners to study at their convenience, without time and spatial constraints. Research in modern linguistics and pedagogy indicates that Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) holds great potential for increasing student motivation and individualizing the learning process. As linguist Jack C. Richards stated, "technology is no longer merely an auxiliary tool, but has become an integral part of the curriculum, fundamentally transforming the ways languages are learned and taught."¹ This is particularly evident in learning languages with complex phonetic and grammatical structures, such as Japanese. Aspects like Japanese honorifics (keigo), intricate verb conjugations, and unique intonation cannot be sufficiently mastered solely through textbooks; they require continuous practical application. It is precisely in this context that digital tools—interactive applications, AI-powered conversational agents, virtual reality simulations, and online communication platforms—provide invaluable assistance.

Based on the foregoing, the following research problem is formulated: What opportunities does the digital learning environment create for effectively developing Japanese speaking skills, and which methodological approaches yield the highest results in this process? This research aims to find scientifically and practically grounded answers to such questions, and to develop methodological foundations for the effective integration of digital tools into Japanese language classes.

¹ Jack C. Richards. *Key Issues in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

The Aim of the Research is to scientifically substantiate the theoretical significance of digital learning tools in developing Japanese speaking skills, and to test the effectiveness of the most efficacious methods through pedagogical experimental testing within the educational system of Uzbekistan.

Analysis of Theoretical Foundations: This involves studying fundamental research in the fields of digital education, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). In this regard, the views of scholars such as Mark Warschauer on the evolution of technology in language teaching are of significant importance². As he emphasized, "We have moved from computer programs consisting of simple drills to internet-based environments that facilitate real communication and collaboration." Furthermore, the research of Uzbek scholars like N.A. Muslimov on the implementation of digital educational technologies in the learning process, particularly his idea that "Digital technologies in modern education create wide opportunities to stimulate students' independent and creative activities," strengthens the theoretical foundation of this work³.

Investigation of Modern Tools: To study and classify the didactic potential of modern digital tools specialized in developing Japanese oral communication. Within this task, applications with gamification elements like Duolingo or Memrise, language exchange networks such as Tandem and HelloTalk, as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based speech recognition programs like Google Assistant or specialized Japanese "AI Speak Tutor" will be analyzed.

Conducting Pedagogical Experimental Testing: To develop a specialized curriculum based on the integration of digital tools and test its effectiveness with Japanese language learners in Uzbekistan (e.g., undergraduate students).

² Warschauer, M. (2000). *The changing global economy and the future of English teaching*. TESOL Quarterly, 34(3), 511-535

³ Muslimov, N.A., & va boshqalar. (2015). *Innovatsion ta'lim texnologiyalari*. "Sano-standart" nashriyoti.

Analysis of Results and Development of Recommendations: To comparatively analyze quantitative (test scores) and qualitative (changes in pronunciation, surveys) indicators obtained during the experimental testing using statistical methods. Based on the conclusions, to prepare practical recommendations and methodological guidelines for Japanese language teachers and curriculum developers.

The object of the research is the process of forming and developing speaking skills in students learning Japanese in higher education institutions of Uzbekistan.

The subject of the research consists of the specific methods, tools, and effectiveness indicators for improving Japanese speaking skills (pronunciation, fluency, lexical-grammatical accuracy) using digital learning technologies (interactive platforms, mobile applications, AI-programs).

The scientific novelty of the research is determined by several important aspects:

Firstly, within the context of the Uzbek educational system, the effectiveness of developing Japanese oral communication specifically through digital tools will be empirically tested (experimental testing) and scientifically substantiated for the first time. While most studies have been conducted using English as an example, this work offers an adapted approach for Uzbek learners, considering the unique phonetic and grammatical features of the Japanese language.

Secondly, the role and precise mechanism of impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based speech assessment systems in improving students' pronunciation and fluency will be evaluated. "AI-powered conversational agents provide learners with opportunities for endless practice in a safe and low-pressure environment, which is crucial for building self-confidence"⁴.

⁴ Arjmandi, G., & Ebadi, S. (2023). *The Effect of an AI-Powered Chatbot on Speaking Fluency and Accuracy of Iranian EFL Learners*. Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 15(31), 1-28. URL: https://jeltl.tabrizu.ac.ir/article_16281.html

Thirdly, a customized variant of the "Blended Learning" model, which integrates traditional classroom instruction and digital technologies, will be proposed for teaching Japanese. In this model, the teacher's role shifts from a supervisor to a facilitator, and students gain the opportunity to independently reinforce their knowledge using digital tools. This approach serves to increase not only learning effectiveness but also the flexibility of the learning process.

This study employed a comprehensive approach, integrating complementary theoretical and empirical methods of scientific inquiry, derived from its objectives and tasks. The methods applied at each stage of the research were selected to ensure its objectivity, reliability, and scientific grounding.

1. **Literature Review:** To establish the theoretical foundation of the research, a comparative analysis of fundamental and contemporary scientific sources in linguistics, pedagogy, information technology, and foreign language teaching methodologies was conducted. This process examined how classic theories, such as Krashen's "comprehensible input" and "affective filter" hypotheses, are reflected in digital environments. Furthermore, the views of Uzbek scholar G.T. Makhkamova on the formation of communicative competence, specifically her assertion that "not only linguistic knowledge but also socio-cultural and strategic competencies play a crucial role in engaging in communication," helped to substantiate the necessity of using digital simulations for teaching complex Japanese honorifics (keigo).

2. **Classification and Systematization:** Digital tools designed for developing Japanese speaking skills were classified according to their functional capabilities. This classification allows for the selection and systematic integration of tools into the educational process based on pedagogical objectives. The tools were categorized into the following groups:

- **Pronunciation Trainers:** Software based on speech recognition technology (e.g., "Japanese Accent & Pronunciation Tutor," Google's pronunciation feedback tool).

- **Vocabulary and Phrase Trainers:** Applications based on the spaced repetition method (e.g., Anki, Memrise).
- **Real-time Communication Platforms:** Social networks enabling connection with native Japanese speakers (e.g., Tandem, HelloTalk).

The results obtained indicate that the significantly higher performance of the Experimental Group compared to the Control Group can be attributed to several interrelated factors:

1. **Reduction of the "Affective Filter":** Fear of making mistakes and psychological pressure (the "affective filter") can hinder language acquisition. Digital tools, particularly AI-powered conversational agents, boosted students' self-confidence and stimulated their speaking activity⁵. This provided a safe, non-judgmental environment for practice, crucial for overcoming inhibitions.

2. **Personalized Learning and Feedback:** In a traditional classroom setting, it is challenging for an instructor to constantly monitor each student's pronunciation. AI-based programs, however, provided instantaneous and objective feedback on every sound and intonation, enabling students to work on their individual deficiencies. This process, as researcher Chapelle states, "allows learners to take control of their own learning trajectory"⁶. The immediate and specific feedback facilitated targeted improvement, which is often difficult to achieve in large group settings.

In conclusion, this research theoretically and practically demonstrated the significant importance of the digital learning environment in developing Japanese speaking skills. The results of the pedagogical experimental testing revealed that the systematic integration of artificial intelligence, interactive applications, and online communication platforms into the learning process yields significantly higher

⁵ Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press. URL: http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles_and_practice.pdf

⁶ Chapelle, C. A. (2001). *Computer Applications in Second Language Acquisition: Foundations for Teaching, Testing, and Research*. Cambridge University Press.

effectiveness compared to traditional methods. Digital tools offer invaluable opportunities for learners to practice more in a safe environment, receive instant feedback, and personalize the learning process, thereby enhancing their motivation, self-confidence, and ultimately, their communicative competence.

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