

The Current Situation and Roles of Japanese Language Instructors at Universities in Korea

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The situation of Japanese language instructors at Korean universities is not well known despite the fact that Korea has the largest number of Japanese language learners in the world. This study particularly focuses on native Japanese instructors involved in Japanese language education in various universities in Korea.

The purposes of this study are to describe the situations and issues of native Japanese instructors and to discuss qualifications and responsibilities they are required to have.

Two major elements of the Korean university education system have a high impact on Japanese language education. The first is the department system, which is called “*hakbche*”. Students choose their majors in their sophomore year. This system may result in declining qualities of major studies and students’ motivation. Another issue is the relative evaluation system. As a result of this system, some students enroll in Japanese classes solely to take difficult classes. Students who are actually eager to take Japanese classes may not succeed in getting into the classes.

This study is based on interview data (telephone and in-person), conducted in

March, 2001. The subjects are 17 Japanese instructors in 13 universities in Korea including junior colleges. The interviews consist of 26 questions, including questions about the instructors' educational background (their major and level of education), their experiences teaching Japanese language and the country of Korea itself, and the qualifications and responsibilities they are required to have for their respective positions.

Our analyses of the data show the following. The subjects' knowledge of and experience in Japanese language education is not high, although all of them hold a master's degree or above. Their universities do not require them to have specialized knowledge in Japanese language education, but rather expect them to be merely a native Japanese speaker whom students can talk to in Japanese. Many of the subjects are not satisfied with their current situations and are concerned about the future. Their positions are unstable because many of them are just instructors (albeit full time) or visiting professors and there is a limit to the number of years in their employment contracts. Unfortunately, the conditions of native Japanese instructors in Korean universities are not encouraging as you see in this study.

Keys to successfully improving Japanese language education in Korean universities are probably insuring that instructors have a clear reason why they want to teach in Korea before they decide to come, finding out specific areas they can contribute to or Japanese language education in their university in Korea, and finally having a good knowledge of Korean language culture.

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