

Demotivation in Japanese Language Learning: Student Perspectives from an Indonesian University

Anandita Anisa Candra^{*1}, Dedi Suryadi²

Japanese Language Education, Faculty of Language Education, Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta

*Correspondence to anandita.anisa.fpb22@mail.umy.ac.id

Abstract: Demotivation can undermine students' sustained engagement in university-level Japanese language learning. This study examines students' perceptions of demotivating factors, the learning behaviours associated with declining motivation, and their suggestions for instructional support. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, supported by descriptive summaries of closed-ended questionnaire responses. Data were collected through an online questionnaire containing closed-and open-ended questions from 74 Japanese Language Education students at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, across the 2022-2024 entry cohorts. Open-ended responses were grouped into themes, while closed-ended responses were summarised using frequencies and percentages. The findings identified perceived learning difficulties and low self-confidence as internal factors, alongside teaching methods and the learning environments as external factors associated with demotivation. Among respondents, 78,4% reported feeling behind classmates with prior Japanese learning experience, and 58,1% reported low self-confidence. Students also described monotonous instruction, rapid explanations, and limited opportunities for interaction and language practice. Reported behaviours associated with declining motivation included procrastination, incomplete assignments, reduced class attendance, and thoughts of leaving the program. Students called for more varied and interactive activities, clearer explanations delivered at a manageable pace, and a supportive classroom atmosphere. These findings suggest that responses the demotivation should address both perceived learning difficulties and instructional conditions, while recognising that the questionnaire data do not establish causal relationships.

Keywords: Demotivation, Japanese language learning, University Students, learner perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Learning Japanese at university requires sustained engagement with vocabulary, grammar, writing systems, and development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Motivation helps learners maintain the effort needed to meet these demands. Rahman (2021) discusses its role in sustaining learning effort, while Anggraeni et al., (2024) highlight its importance for perseverance and engagement in language learning. However, students' motivation may change as they encounter unfamiliar material, increasing academic demands, and different classroom experiences. Understanding Japanese language learning therefore requires attention to the conditions under which students' willingness to continue learning may decline.

Demotivation refers here to a reduction in learners' motivation associated with particular experiences or conditions. It differs from initially low motivation because it concerns a perceived decline in a previously existing willingness to learn. Gao and Liu (2022) discuss foreign language learning demotivation in relation to both internal and external factors. Internal factors concern learners' perceptions, confidence, and emotional experiences, whereas external factors include instructional practices and the learning environment. These dimensions may overlap difficulty following an explanation, for example, may become relevant to motivation through a learner's growing uncertainty about their own ability. Ushioda's (2025) discussion of teacher engagement with classroom motivation research also draws attention to the relevance of instructional experiences. This perspective encourages an examination of demotivation in relation to both learners' circumstances and the conditions in which learning takes place.

For Indonesian learners, some difficulties in learning Japanese involve differences between the two languages. Kamila and Lestari (2022), for example, examine Indonesian morphological and syntactic interference in learner's production of Japanese passive sentences. Such difficulties require learners to understand unfamiliar linguistic patterns and apply them in practice.

Nevertheless, experiencing difficulty does not necessarily indicate demotivation. The distinction matters because students may find a course demanding while remaining committed to learning. An analysis of demotivation must therefore consider how students interpret these difficulties and whether they associate them with declining confidence, interest, or participation.

Previous studies have examined several aspects of this problem. Yamashita (2020), in a study of Indonesian university students learning Japanese, identified course difficulty, speaking anxiety, devalued learning, and boredom as demotivating factors. In the institutional context of the present study, Suryadi and Rosia (2018) investigated Japanese language learning motivation among students at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. Research in other foreign language learning settings has also considered the relevance of instructional conditions. Prasetya and Raharjo (2023), for instance, examined demotivating factors in Moodle-based English learning across online and hybrid settings. Meanwhile, Yanzhi (2022) reviewed research on demotivation among foreign language learners. Together, these studies provide a basis for examining how learner-related difficulties and educational conditions feature in students, accounts of declining motivation.

Accordingly, this study examines questionnaire responses from 74 students in the Japanese Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It addresses three questions: What internal and external factors do students associate with demotivation in learning Japanese? What learning behaviours do they report in connection with declining motivation? What forms of instructional and environmental support do they suggest? Through a descriptive qualitative analysis supported by frequencies and percentages, the study aims to inform Japanese language instruction that responds to students' reported difficulties and learning needs. Its contribution lies in a situated account of learner perspectives rather than an explanation of causal relationships or a generalisation to all university learners of Japanese.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, supported by descriptive summaries of close-ended questionnaire responses, to examine students' experiences and perceptions of demotivation in Japanese language learning. The qualitative component focused on students' accounts of perceived demotivating factors, learning behaviours associated with declining motivation, and suggestions for supports. Frequencies and percentages provided an overview of the closed-ended responses. Consistent with the emphasis on meaning and context in qualitative research (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021), the study sought to describe participants' perspectives within a particular educational setting.

Participants

The participants were 74 students enrolled in the Japanese Language Education Program at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They comprised 31 students from the 2022 entry cohort, 25 from the 2023 cohort, and 18 from the 2024 cohort. Eligibility required the completion of at least one academic year, equivalent to two semesters of university coursework. This criterion was intended to ensure that participants had sufficient experience of university-level Japanese language learning to reflect on its demands and their learning experiences. The questionnaire was distributed to eligible students, and participation was voluntary.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered using Google forms. The questionnaire contained 29 items: 21 dichotomous questions with "yes" or "No" response options, three multiple-choice questions, and five open-ended questions. Closed-ended items gathered information about participants' learning background, perceived difficulties, and reported learning behaviours. Open-ended items allowed participants to explain their experiences and suggest ways to improve learning conditions. These responses provided opportunities for elaboration beyond the predetermined options, consistent with the purpose of open-ended questionnaire items discussed by Cohen et al. (2007).

The questionnaire covered five areas. Items 1-4 addressed Japanese language learning experiences before university and reasons for enrolling in the program. Items 5-17 examined learning difficulties and learner-related experiences, including limited prior knowledge, feelings of falling behind, low self-confidence, declining interest, boredom, and perceptions of learning outcomes. Items 18-23 addressed instructional and environmental conditions, including lecturers' explanations and teaching methods, learning facilities, the campus environment, and influences outside the university. Items 24-27 concerned learning behaviours and intentions associated with declining motivation, including procrastination, incomplete assignments, class attendance, and thoughts of leaving the program. Item 28-29 elicited suggestions for reducing boredom and supporting motivation.

An expert reviewed the questionnaire before its administration. No pilot study was conducted. The review therefore formed part of the instrument development process and was not treated as evidence of established empirical validity or reliability

Data Analysis

Close-ended responses were summarised using frequencies and percentages to describe patterns within the participating group. These summaries supported the interpretation of students' accounts; they were not used to test causal relationships or make population-level estimates.

Open-ended responses were analysed using the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). During data reduction, responses were read to identify statements relevant to the research questions. Statements expressing similar meanings were coded and grouped into categories concerning perceived demotivating factors, reported learning behaviours, and suggested support.

For data display, related categories were organised into descriptive accounts of the findings. Anonymised excerpts from students' responses illustrated the experiences represented within each category. The qualitative accounts were considered alongside the closed-ended responses patterns to describe both the distribution of reported experiences and the explanations students provided.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire was completed by 74 students: 31 from the 2022 entry cohort, 25 from the 2023 cohort, and 18 from the 2024 cohort. Their responses revealed varied experiences of learning Japanese before entering university. Forty-four respondents (59.5%) reported prior Japanese language learning, while 19 (25.7%) reported receiving Japanese instruction or participating in Japanese language extracurricular activities in high school. Thirteen respondents (17.6%) had attended Japanese language courses before university. These responses describe different aspects of prior learning and should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive categories.

Table 1. Number of Respondents

Cohort	Number of Students	Percentage
2022	31 people	41,9%
2023	25 people	33,8%
2024	18 people	24,3%
TOTAL	74 people	100%

The use of questionnaires in descriptive qualitative research aims to obtain an in-depth picture of the respondents' experiences and perceptions. Data collected through questionnaires allows researchers to identify

patterns, themes, and trends of demotivation experienced by students based on their subjective experiences in learning Japanese.

2. Background of Japanese Language Learning Experience

Based on the questionnaire results, the students' prior experience learning Japanese before entering the Japanese Language Education Program at UMY reveals a diversity of backgrounds. Of the 74 respondents, 44 students (59.5%) reported having studied Japanese before college. However, only 19 students (25.7%) had received instruction or participated in Japanese language extracurricular activities in high school, while 13 students (17.6%) had taken Japanese language courses before entering UMY's Japanese Language Education Program. These findings indicate that initial experience in learning Japanese is not always gained through formal education in school or courses but can also come from other learning pathways, such as self-study. These differences in experience provide an important context for understanding students' readiness when taking Japanese language courses. Students who lack a foundation in Japanese may need more time to understand course material and adapt to the demands of the course. This situation may be linked to students' perceptions of difficulty in understanding the material and their self-confidence, although prior learning experiences cannot be directly considered a determinant of their motivation to learn.

These differences in Japanese language learning backgrounds have an impact on the learning process in the classroom. Students who do not have a basic knowledge of Japanese tend to have difficulty following the lecture material. This situation causes them to feel left behind compared to their classmates who have studied Japanese before. Ultimately, this situation has the potential to reduce their motivation to learn Japanese.

These findings indicate that differences in Japanese language learning backgrounds prior to entering university play an important role in shaping students' readiness to learn. Students who do not have a background in learning Japanese tend to experience a gap in understanding compared to other students who already have such experience. Meanwhile, students with prior experience in learning Japanese tend to be more confident and adapt more easily. This gap creates psychological pressure for students without prior experience in the form of a lack of confidence and feelings of being left behind, which ultimately has the potential to reduce students' enthusiasm for learning. Without prior experience, students are prone to cognitive and affective difficulties. This condition is in line with the view that differences in students' initial readiness in learning Japanese can affect the sustainability of their learning motivation. This condition has the potential to trigger demotivation if it is not balanced with adaptive learning strategies or variations and adequate academic support.

3. Internal Factors Associated with Demotivation

a. Perceived Learning Difficulties and Feelings of Falling Behind

The perception of difficulty in understanding the material is one of the internal factors associated with student demotivation in Japanese language learning. Based on the survey results, 40 out of 74 respondents (54.1%) reported having difficulty understanding Japanese because they lacked prior foundational knowledge. In addition, 58 respondents (78.4%) felt they were falling behind compared to classmates who had studied Japanese before. In fact, 69 respondents (93.2%) reported having difficulty with certain courses, while 42 respondents (56.8%) felt that the Japanese language material was too difficult to follow.

These difficulties are not only related to understanding the material in general but also arise in specific courses. Of the 70 respondents who answered the question about which courses they found difficult, Hyogen Bunkei (grammar) was the most frequently selected course, chosen by 49 respondents (70%). Next, "Kaiwa" was selected by 34 respondents (48.6%) and "Dokkai" by 30 respondents (42.9%). These findings indicate that students experience learning difficulties in several aspects of Japanese language learning, including grammar, speaking skills, and reading comprehension. However, these data reflect students' perceptions of difficulty and do not directly measure the objective level of difficulty for each course.

The responses to the open-ended questions also provide insight into students' experiences when facing learning difficulties. Some respondents noted that the sheer number of characters they had to learn and the difficulty in retaining the material posed unique challenges. This was evident in responses such as "there are too many kanji" and "it's easy to understand but easy to forget, so learning isn't as effective as it could be." These responses indicate that students' challenges do not always lie in their ability to understand explanations, but also in retaining and recalling the material they have learned.

In addition to difficulties understanding the material, feelings of falling behind other students also emerged in the open-ended responses. One respondent stated, “I feel like I’m already far behind, so I have no motivation to study.” This statement shows that perceptions of one’s own abilities can be linked to students’ emotional responses when facing academic demands. When students struggle to keep up with the material and feel they are falling behind, this learning experience has the potential to lower their self-confidence and diminish their motivation to continue learning.

These findings broadly correspond with Yamashita’s (2020) identification of course difficulty as a demotivating factor among Indonesian university learners of Japanese. The present responses add contextual detail by showing how difficulty was described through insufficient foundations, problems retaining material, and perceived differences between classmates. They suggest that the motivational significance of difficulty may depend partly on whether students regard progress as achievable. This interpretation remains tentative because the questionnaire did not track changes in motivation over time.

b. Low Self-Confidence

Low self-confidence is one of the internal factors associated with students’ lack of motivation in learning Japanese. Based on the survey results, 43 out of 74 respondents (58.1%) stated that they lacked confidence when learning Japanese. In addition, 56.8% of respondents stated that their educational background was one of the factors contributing to their lack of confidence. These findings indicate that more than half of the respondents experience psychological barriers in the Japanese language learning process.

Low self-confidence is evident in students’ hesitation to use Japanese, particularly when speaking or participating in learning activities. The fear of making mistakes can lead students to remain silent, be reluctant to try, or reduce their involvement in language practice. This situation can limit students’ opportunities to practice and develop their skills. In addition, students who feel they are falling behind their peers may become increasingly doubtful of their own abilities, especially when they believe their Japanese language skills are not yet sufficient to keep up with the coursework.

These findings align with those of Gao and Liu (2022), who explain that demotivation in foreign language learning is related to the interaction between internal and external factors. In the context of this study, low self-confidence is an internal factor that may be related to students’ experiences while learning Japanese. When students feel anxious or uncertain about their abilities, they are likely to become less active in the learning process. If these feelings coincide with difficulties in understanding the material or an unsupportive learning environment, student motivation is also likely to decline.

Thus, low self-confidence is not only related to students’ perceptions of their own abilities but can also be reflected in their engagement during the learning process. These findings suggest that efforts to reduce demotivation should take students’ psychological state into account, including providing opportunities to practice without excessive fear of making mistakes and creating a supportive learning environment. However, the results of this study indicate a correlation based on respondents’ perceptions and do not prove that low self-confidence directly causes demotivation in every student.

4. External Factors Associated with Demotivation

a. Teaching Methods and the Pace of Instruction

Based on the responses to the open-ended questionnaire, instructors’ teaching methods are one of the external factors associated with student demotivation in Japanese language learning. Several respondents noted that the teaching methods used tended to be monotonous and lacked interactivity. This is evident from respondents’ comments describing the teaching methods as “monotonous, non-interactive” and “too monotonous and textbook-oriented.” In addition, some respondents felt that the learning approach was still one-sided and did not sufficiently involve students in discussions. These findings indicate that a variety of teaching methods and student engagement are aspects that need to be addressed in the Japanese language learning process.

In addition to monotonous teaching methods, the pace and clarity of the material presentation were also issues raised by respondents. Some students stated that instructors sometimes explained the material too quickly, rushed through it, or merely provided an outline without detailed explanations. One respondent noted that the instructor’s explanations were “too fast and only covered the outline—not very detailed.” This situation can make it difficult for students to follow the explanations, especially when they have not fully understood the

material but the lesson has already moved on to the next topic. Respondents' answers also indicated that this issue is not only related to the speed at which material is presented but also to the use of language that is considered difficult and explanations that are convoluted.

Another issue relates to instruction that is overly lecture-centred, as well as discussions perceived as straying from the course material. This is evident in responses such as "too many lectures" and "too many discussions unrelated to the course." Some respondents also noted that instructors spent too much time lecturing and did not provide enough opportunities for discussion or hands-on practice. One respondent stated that learning that consists solely of lectures without examples, exercises, or interaction can cause students to become bored quickly and struggle to grasp key points. In addition, respondents also highlighted the lack of varied teaching methods and media. One response even pointed out that Japanese language learning should not rely solely on textbooks or modules but should also utilize other media, such as digital vocabulary cards, Japanese-language news, and various forms of Japanese language exposure through the media.

The findings indicate that students' perceptions of lecturers' teaching methods are not only related to how the material is presented but also to the variety of learning activities, opportunities for interaction, and the suitability of the methods to students' learning needs. Nevertheless, the respondents' answers also revealed other factors, such as the volume of assignments, exam times considered too short, and personal factors that influence the learning process. Therefore, teaching methods cannot be viewed as the sole cause of student demotivation. However, teaching methods are one of the external aspects that emerge in the respondents' learning experiences and are related to their perceptions of the Japanese language learning process.

These findings can be linked to Ushioda's (2025) perspective on faculty engagement in the learning process and its relationship to student motivation. The role of faculty members is not limited to delivering course content but also involves efforts to create learning experiences that sustain student engagement. In this study, teaching methods that lacked variety and a pace of material delivery that was too fast were perceived by some respondents as less supportive. These conditions indicate that students' experiences during the learning process must be taken into account when understanding the emergence of demotivation. Therefore, varied teaching methods, step-by-step explanations of the material, and opportunities for interaction during instruction can be considered to create a Japanese language learning experience that better supports student motivation.

b. Social Relationships and Opportunities to Use Japanese

Based on the questionnaire responses, the campus environment is one of the external factors related to students' experiences in learning Japanese. In this study, the campus environment includes interactions with instructors, classmates, and campus organizations, as well as facilities and opportunities to use Japanese. The respondents' answers indicate that some students feel the campus environment is not very supportive of the learning process, while others do not view the campus environment as an obstacle. These differing responses indicate that students' experiences within the learning environment are not always the same.

One aspect of the campus environment that emerged in the respondents' answers was their relationships with classmates. When asked to identify campus environmental factors they felt were not supportive of Japanese language learning, several respondents cited classmates as one of the influential factors. One respondent stated that their classmates "don't give newcomers a chance" because they always want to stand out. Another respondent also mentioned the presence of a toxic social environment. These responses indicate that relationships among students can affect comfort in the learning process, particularly when students feel they lack support or opportunities to grow alongside their classmates.

In addition to classmates, respondents also cited professors and campus organizations as aspects of the environment they perceived as lacking in support. However, the responses provided did not always explain in detail the specific problems encountered in these two areas. Therefore, these findings should be understood as students' perceptions of the campus environment, rather than as evidence that professors or campus organizations as a whole do not support Japanese language learning. This also indicates that students' experiences with the learning environment can vary depending on the situations they encounter.

Another aspect that emerged in the respondents' answers was facilities and opportunities to practice Japanese. Some students stated that Japanese language facilities were still inadequate. Additionally, some respondents highlighted the limited opportunities to use Japanese outside of class activities. One respondent noted that discussions about the Japanese language outside of campus almost never take place, except occasionally with friends who share a similar interest. This finding suggests that opportunities to use Japanese in

daily interactions are an important aspect for students. Nevertheless, the limitations of facilities and opportunities for practice are two distinct issues, so both need to be understood based on each respondent's individual answers.

Outside the campus environment, respondents' answers showed that family and friends can serve as sources of both support and pressure in learning Japanese. Some respondents stated that family support made them even more motivated to achieve their goals through their Japanese language skills. Support from friends also took the form of invitations to study together, work on assignments, and encouragement to keep learning. However, there were also respondents who felt belittled by their families or experienced pressure due to others' expectations regarding their Japanese language proficiency. One respondent stated that these expectations actually made them feel insecure. Thus, the environment outside the campus is not always associated with a decline in motivation but can also serve as a source of support that helps students maintain their enthusiasm for learning.

In addition to social support, respondents also mentioned several other factors that influence their enthusiasm for learning, such as economic conditions, job prospects, personal interests, social media, and Japanese-language entertainment content. Some students revealed that their interest in anime motivated them to learn Japanese so they could understand conversations without relying on translations. There were also respondents motivated by job opportunities and the desire to use Japanese in their future lives. Conversely, perceptions of limited job prospects or a lack of interest in the Japanese language may be linked to a decline in motivation to study. The diversity of these responses demonstrates that students' motivation is not only related to their experiences on campus but also to their goals, interests, and life circumstances outside of their studies.

These findings align with the discussions by Gao and Liu (2022) and Ushioda (2025) regarding the role of external factors and learning experiences in demotivation in foreign language learning. In this study, the external factors identified included relationships with classmates, perceptions of the on-campus learning environment, and limited opportunities to use Japanese outside of class activities. In addition, environments outside the campus, such as family and friends, also exert varied influences on student motivation. Support from family and friends, as well as exposure to Japanese through the media, can help maintain enthusiasm for learning, whereas an unsupportive social circle and pressure from the surrounding environment can act as barriers. These findings indicate that external factors do not necessarily diminish motivation but can serve as both sources of support and obstacles in the Japanese language learning process. Therefore, both the campus environment and the off-campus environment must be considered when analyzing student demotivation.

5. Reported Learning Behaviours and Intentions

The questionnaire results indicate that the demotivation experienced by students is related to their academic behavior and their engagement in the Japanese language learning process. The resulting impacts include a tendency to procrastinate on assignments, failure to complete assignments, reduced attendance in classes, and, among some students, a desire to give up or drop out of the program. These findings suggest that demotivation is not only related to students' feelings or perceptions toward learning but also manifests in their behavior during academic activities.

Twelve respondents (16.2%) reported rarely attending Japanese classes in full. Some students also expressed thought of leaving the program. Such intentions warrant attention, but they should be distinguished from actual withdrawal. Similarly, the attendance responses describe students' accounts rather than independently verified attendance records.

Procrastination and incomplete assignments may indicate difficulties sustaining engagement, but the questionnaire does not establish their direction of relationship with demotivation. Students may postpone work when they feel discouraged; unfinished work could also make subsequent learning feel more difficult. The findings therefore support examining these experiences together without assuming a fixed sequence.

6. Students' Suggestions and Pedagogical Implications

Students requested more varied and interactive activities, gradual and detailed explanations, a relaxed classroom atmosphere, and encouragement from lecturers. These suggestions corresponded closely with their reported concerns about monotony, instructional pace, and confidence. They indicate that participants regarded support as involving both access to understandable material and conditions that made participation more comfortable.

Several instructional responses could be considered on this basis. Explanations accompanied by examples and checks of understanding may help lecturers identify where students need further clarification. Opportunities for

review and repeated practice may address the reported gap between understanding material and retaining it. Structured pair or small-group activities could also provide additional opportunities to use Japanese, particularly when participation is organised to include students with different level of prior experience. These are implications drawn from participants' accounts, rather than interventions evaluated by this study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' perceptions of demotivation in Japanese language learning at Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. The findings identified perceived learning difficulties and low self-confidence as internal factors. Students' accounts also suggested connections between these dimensions: perception of falling behind classmates accompanied concerns about confidence, while rapid explanations and limited opportunities for practice featured in descriptions of learning difficulties. Demotivation was thus described through both personal experiences and the conditions of university learning.

Respondents reported procrastination, incomplete assignments, limited class attendance, and thoughts of leaving the program in connection with declining motivation. Their suggestions emphasised varied and interactive activities, explanation delivered at a manageable pace, and a supportive classroom atmosphere. These findings suggest that instructional responses should address students' understanding of the material alongside their confidence and opportunities to participate. However, the proposed forms of support reflect students' preferences and implications drawn from their accounts; their effectiveness was not evaluated.

The study provides a contextual account of learner perspectives within one Japanese Language Education program. Its reliance on self-reported questionnaire responses limit conclusions about casual relationships, changes in motivation over time, and experiences beyond the participating group. Future research could combine repeated data collection with interviews or classroom observations to examine how motivation develops and how students respond to instructional support. Such work could clarify when learning difficulties become discouraging and what helps students sustain their engagement.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this work the authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o in order to enhance readability and perform grammar checking. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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