

Report of the J-GAP Japanese Language Background Survey

Initial survey on the current situation of continuing learners of Japanese in Ontario, Canada

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Background of this survey

This survey was conducted by the Canadian Association for Japanese Language Education (CAJLE) as one of the first actions of the Japanese Global Articulation Project (J-GAP) in Canada (J-GAP Canada). J-GAP is a project of the Japanese Language Education Global Network², aiming at achieving articulation in Japanese language education world-wide. Its objectives have been set at each location according to the local situation of Japanese education, but all aim at better articulation to support the learner to continue learning for higher proficiency.

The J-GAP project was proposed at the International Conference on Japanese Language Education in 2010. This is because a number of issues related to poor articulation were discussed there: for example, learners are often required to repeat elementary-level courses when they move to the next institution according to their age and academic progress, and in some cases no placement tests are conducted even though learners have prior learning experience (e.g. (Tohsaku, 2011).

Ontario has the second largest population of learners of Japanese in Canada (Japan Foundation, 2009); however, the Ontario Ministry of Education has not designed an elementary-secondary curriculum for Japanese language in particular. It has the Ontario Curriculum for classical and international languages (G9-10, 1999; G11-12, 2000), which includes Japanese language and other languages besides English, French and native Canadian languages. But this is to say that the curriculum does not consider language-specific features and environment. According to the survey by Japan Foundation in 2009, the estimated number of learners of Japanese in British Columbia(BC) was 14,076 (51.2% of total number of learners of Japanese in Canada), which is the largest population of learners, and that in Ontario was 6,380 (23.2%). That in Alberta (AB) was 4,083 (14.9%), which has the third largest population of learners. BC and AB have their own curriculum for Japanese language.³ It is predictable that learners of

¹ Arimori and Aoki developed and conducted the survey, and after the data collection, Mitsui joined the team and analyzed the data, drew conclusions and wrote this report.

² The Japanese Language Education Global Network is a cooperative network involving CAJLE, Nihongo kyooiku gakkai (The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language), American Association of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ) and six other international associations which have agreed to exchange information and co-operate to promote research and education.

³ BC has International Language Curriculum, which includes Integrated Resource Package for Japanese, Grade 5-12 (1997) and Elementary-Secondary curriculum (2010). AB has the common curriculum framework for international

Japanese in Ontario struggle to continue to learn toward higher proficiency compared to their counterparts in BC and AB. Further, the current situation of learners who continue to learn Japanese from one institution to another in Ontario has not been well known. In fact, many educators in Ontario expressed just having a sense of some tendencies, such as that learners who have taken courses in BC schools may be placed in higher classes than learners who have taken courses in other provinces; however, such tendencies have never been researched systematically. In order to support continuing learning Japanese language for higher proficiency, it is necessary to understand the current situation and general trends among learners continuing to study Japanese to the post-secondary level.

J-GAP Canada has established three objectives: 1) networking, 2) information sharing, and 3) identifying gaps among programs/courses. While J-GAP Canada has taken action to promote networking and information sharing about programs through meetings⁴, we decided to take this preliminary survey in September 2012 to gather information about how the learners of Japanese language in Ontario continue to learn from one institution to another, as the first step toward meeting the third objective.

Purpose and questions

The purposes of this survey are to investigate the current situation of learners continuing to learn Japanese language at the postsecondary level in Ontario. The survey was designed to answer the following questions: 1) what trends are there in the learning history of current postsecondary Japanese-language learners who began learning before the postsecondary level in Ontario?; 2) how were continuing learners from other institutions placed in the first course they took at their current institution?; and 3) do Japanese-as-a-heritage-language learners take Japanese courses at such institutions? If yes, at which institutions?

Methods

All 10 universities⁵, 3 community colleges, and 2 language schools⁶ where Japanese courses at the postsecondary age in Ontario were offered in 2012 were invited for this survey.

The participants in this survey were 272 learners of Japanese language (46.7%) at 5 out of 10 universities, 0 out of 3 community colleges and 2 out of 2 language schools, which were willing to participate in it. In addition, there were 44 invalid responses: the researcher found that about half of those respondents did not have any prior learning experience, contrary to the survey instructions; other surveys were incomplete or otherwise unusable. There were 164 participants taking courses at universities, and 108 at Japanese language schools.

languages (2001), including specific documents for Japanese language and culture developed between 2005 and 2010, with Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

⁴ CAJLE Ontario Chapter has maintained a “Continuing Learning Japanese Series” co-sponsored with the Japan Foundation, Toronto since 2009, and since 2011 this series has been carried out by J-GAP Canada and the Japan Foundation, Toronto.

⁵ In Ontario, eleven universities offer a Japanese program. However, one of them did not offer courses in 2012.

⁶ Because of the inclusion of language schools, it is possible that a few high school-age students may be included.

A questionnaire was prepared according to the educators' interests, and finalized at the J-GAP meeting in August, 2012 (Appendix 1). In September, each institution asked for volunteers to take the survey who had prior experience learning Japanese language before coming to their current institution.

The researcher who joined this project after data collection had been completed, reviewed and reexamined the original questionnaire and the research questions to ensure that the data were properly analyzed in a manner that best addressed those questions. The questionnaire covered four main topics as follows:

- A) Informal learning experience
- B) Formal learning experience
 - (1) Institutional information
 - (2) Regional distributions of the institutions
 - (3) Japanese-as-a-heritage-language schools
- C) Experience living in Japan
- D) Placement

Section A, informal learning experience, was investigated through question II-1 on the questionnaire, about type and years of prior learning experience of Japanese. Section B, formal learning experience, was investigated through question II-2, about the variation of institutions where the students took courses before coming to the current institution, including the regional distributions of those institutions and heritage schools. Section C, living in Japan, was investigated through question II-3, about prior experience of attending schools in Japan. Through the researcher's reexamination of the data, the numbers and details of respondents who lived in Japan but did not go for schooling purposes were determined. Finally section D, placement, was investigated through question II-2, the first placement of the learners with prior formal learning experience, when they took courses at the postsecondary schools; through question III, the methods of placement for the first course; and through question VI, about students' experience with the first course with respect to five aspects of Japanese language learning.

In order to answer research question 1, the researcher examined section A, B-(1), (2), and C. To answer research question 2, section D was examined, and for research question 3, section B-(3) was particularly focused on and examined.

Results

The results of the survey will be presented by answering the research questions.

Question 1: What trends are there in the learning history of current post-secondary Japanese-language learners who began learning before the post-secondary level in Ontario?

This question will be addressed in three parts, in accordance with the survey: informal learning experience, formal learning experience, and learners' experience living in Japan.⁷

A: Informal learning experience

Table 1 shows the result of survey question II-1, whether respondents had informal learning experience before arriving at their present institution. Sixty-two percent of learners had informal learning experience before coming to their present institution, while in turn, 37.9% of learners came to their present institutions without prior informal learning experience.

Table 1
Informal learning experience of Japanese

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	169	62.1
No	103	37.9

In Table 2, the type of informal learning experience is shown.⁸ Among them, 132 learners had studied on their own, 31 had learned Japanese with a private tutor or teacher, and 22 of them gave other answers: learning by watching anime and/or Japanese movies, and reading manga, which related to their hobbies. Only a few learners answered that they had learned by communicating with Japanese family members or had lived in Japan for a couple of years when they were children, and one student had taken an on-line course.

Table 2
Types of informal learning experience

Answer	Count
Self-study	132
With private tutor/teacher	31
Others	22

B: Formal learning experience

(1) Institutional information

The count of reports of prior formal learning experience, by type of institution, is presented in Figure 1. The total count of reports of types of institution where respondents had had prior formal experience was 238. Considering the number of participants reporting prior

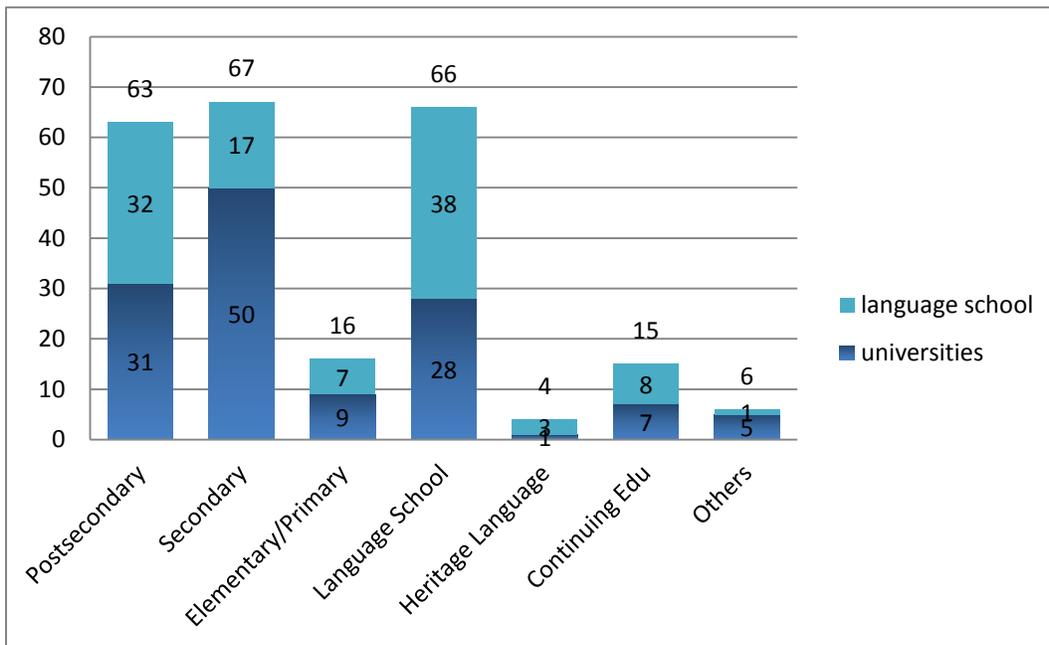
⁷ The questionnaire could not obtain accurate information about exact length of learning experience.

⁸ The instructions of the questionnaire were to check all that apply, and the numbers indicates the count.

experience at formal learning institutions, which is 164, many of them had experience at two or more institutions before arriving at their present universities and language schools.

Figure 1

Details of formal learning experience of Japanese by type of institution



Among the total count of 238 reports of prior formal learning, credit courses at secondary schools were most frequently reported, with a count of 67, followed by 66 reports of language schools. Next, learners who reported having taken such courses at postsecondary level were 63. Indeed, 196 reports out of 238 (82.4%) fell into these three groups. On the other hand, there were 17 reports (7.14%) of having taken courses at elementary/primary levels; those at continuing education schools were 15 (6.30%); those at heritage language schools were 4 (1.68%) and those at others, such as studying at a culture center, were 6 (2.52%).

Of the 238 reports of prior formal learning experience, 132 were from respondents now at universities, and 106 from those at language schools.

(2) Regional distributions of the prior institutions

The regional distributions of the formal learning institutions where the learners had previously studied are shown by country in Figure 2 and by province in Figure 3.

Figure 2
Countries of the prior formal learning institutions

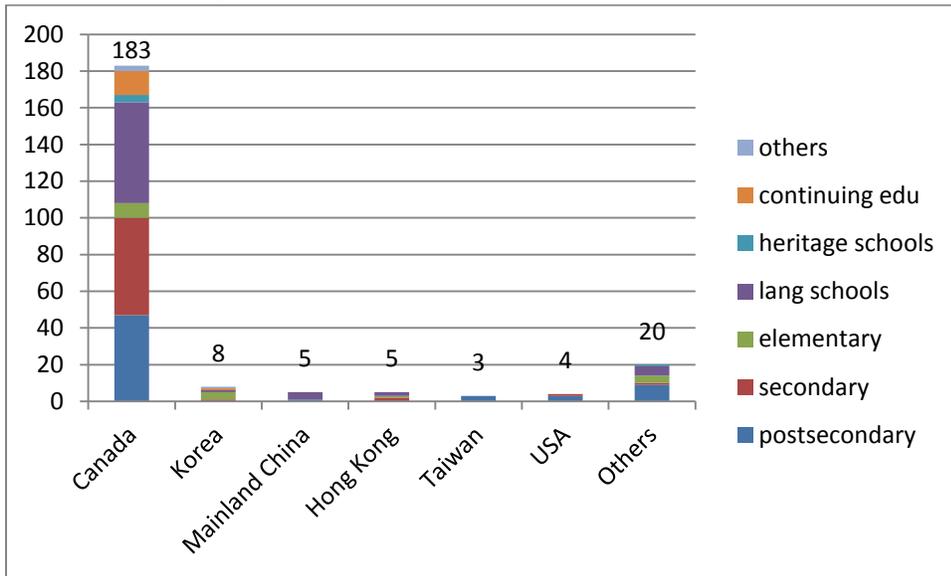
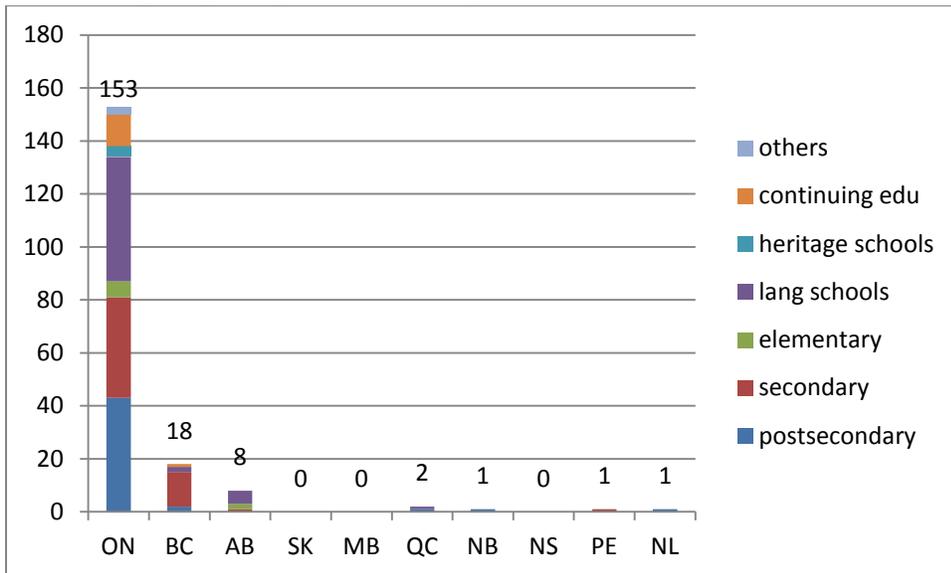


Figure 3
Province of the prior formal learning institutions



In both Figures, the numbers reflect the count of the answers; however, these are not accurate numbers, since not all respondents fully completed the relevant sections of the questionnaire. Still, both figures show that the institutions of learners with prior formal learning experience were mostly in Ontario, Canada. The countries included in “others” were such as Japan, Australia, England, France, and Mauritius. One of the issues raised above was the question of learners in Ontario with prior learning experience at BC secondary schools; there were 18 such

respondents in the present survey (9.78 %). Fourteen learners out of those 18 continued to learn Japanese at universities, and 8 out of those 14 were at the same university.

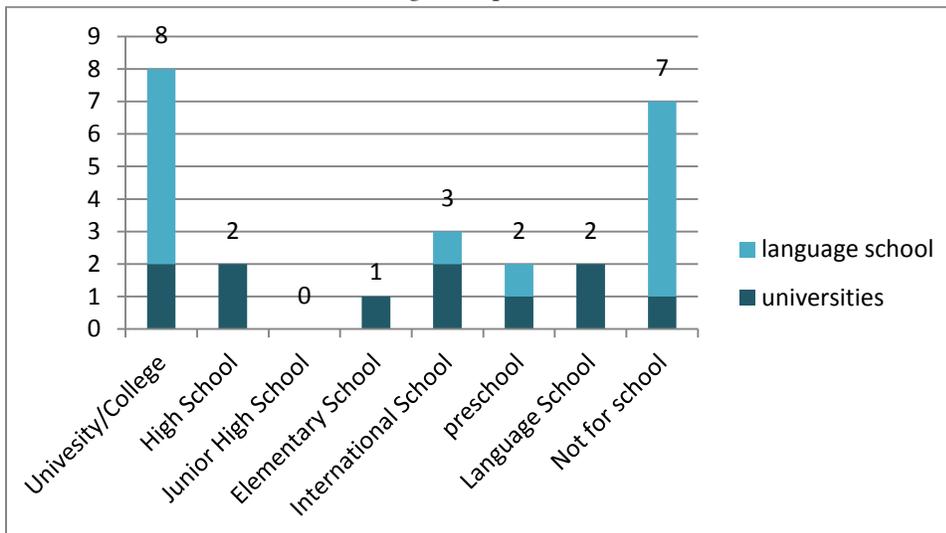
Table 3 presents the learners' experience living in Japan. Only 25 learners out of the total of 272 participants answered that they had lived in Japan.

Table 3
Experience living in Japan

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	25	9.1
No	247	90.8

The institutions they attended while living in Japan were shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Institutions attended while living in Japan



Fourteen out of the 25 learners were now taking courses at language schools and 11 were at universities. Eight of them had experience attending language programs at Japanese universities, and 7 of them had lived in Japan for research or business. Meanwhile, learners who attended general educational institutions in Japan before postsecondary age tended to continue to learn Japanese at universities in Ontario.

Question 2: How were the learners placed in the first course they took at their current institution?

To answer this question, I will describe the first course placement at the postsecondary level by how the placement was conducted, the result of the first course placement at the postsecondary level, and the learners' self-evaluation of the placement.

Table 4 shows the results of the question whether the learners were assessed by a placement test and/or interviews when they took their first course at the current institution. Sixty-five percent of learners answered that they took a placement test or interview, whereas 34% of learners answered that they did not. Sixty-four out of 92 learners (69.6%) who answered no belonged to two of the 7 institutions which participated in this survey.

Table 4
Implementation of the placement for the first course

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	176	64.7
No	92	33.8
No response	4	1.5

Among the 176 learners who answered yes, the most common placement method was interview only (42.6%), then both interview and test (36.4%), and finally test only (21.0%) (Table 5).

Table 5
Types of placement method

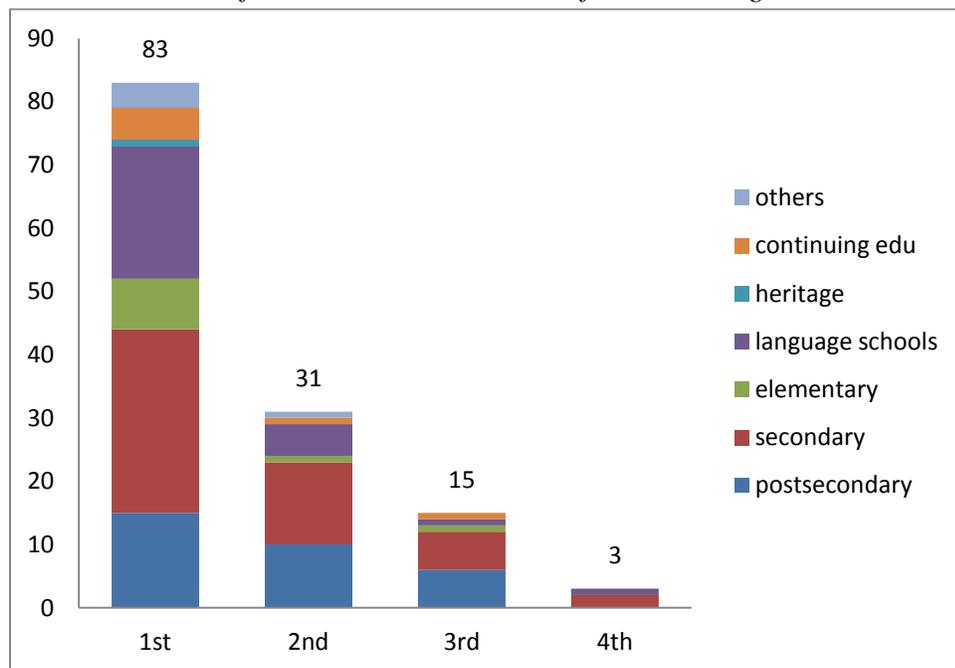
Answer	Count	Percentage
Interview	75	42.6
Interview and test	64	36.4
Test	37	21.0

Next, the result of the first university course placement of the university learners with prior formal learning experience is shown in Figure 5.⁹ Indeed, all 5 universities participating in this survey offered first- and second-year courses, and 4 universities offered a third-year course. Only 2 universities offered fourth-year courses.

⁹ The researcher is aware that course titles do not precisely reflect learners' actual proficiency levels and each institution associates a different meaning with those titles (e.g. Mitsui, 2008). However, for this survey, the learners' perceptions about the tendency to be placed in "beginner" courses was a central focus, and the institutions' classification of courses from first- to fourth-year or beginner/intermediate/advanced were adopted as reported. One of the universities offered a "beginner-level" course for learners with prior experience. After consulting with the instructor, the course was included in the present research as beginner-level, in view of students' actual proficiency level.

Figure 5

Placements in the first course at universities for continuing learners

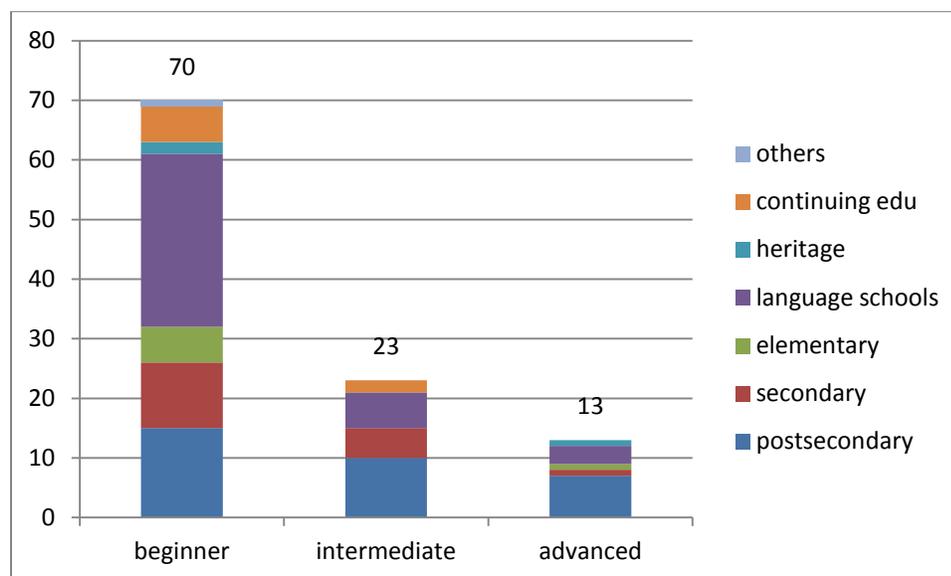


Despite the learners' experience of learning Japanese at formal institutions, 83 out of 132 learners with prior formal learning experience (62.9%) were placed in first-year courses at the universities. About half of learners who had previously taken courses at different postsecondary institutions (15 out of 31 learners, 48.4%) as well as at secondary schools (29 out of 50 learners, 58.0%) were placed in the first-year course. That is to say, these learners took a beginner's class more than once, and possibly more than twice. In particular, the group of learners with prior formal learning experience with the highest percentage taking first-year courses at the universities was those whose prior experience was at language schools (21 learners out of 28, 75.0%), though the highest *count* of learners who repeated first-year courses was of those with experience at secondary schools (29 out of 83, 33.7%).

With respect to the first course placement at language schools of the 106 learners with prior formal learning experience, the result is presented in Figure 6. Again, despite their prior formal learning experience, 70 out of those 106 learners (66.0%) were assigned to the beginner level. In fact, except for those whose prior experience was at the postsecondary level, more than 64.7% of learners were assigned to the beginner level.

Figure 6

Placements in the first course at language schools for continuing learners



According to the results shown in Figures 5 and 6, more than 60% of learners were assigned elementary-level courses. The percentage of those learners' previous formal learning institutions is shown in Table 6. Compared to those learners with prior experience at the postsecondary level, those with experience at the elementary level, at language schools, at the secondary level and in continuing education more often tended to repeat the elementary-level course.¹⁰

Table 6

Count and percentage of placement at the first-year course at universities and at the beginner course at language schools

	Universities		Language schools	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Postsecondary	15	48.4	15	46.9
Secondary	29	58.0	11	64.7
Elementary	8	80.0	6	85.7
Language schools	21	75.0	29	76.3
Heritage schools	1	100	2	66.7
Continuing education	5	71.4	6	75.0
Others	4	80.0	1	100
Total	83		70	

¹⁰ Most learners who learned at heritage schools and other places were assigned to elementary courses. However, the total number of learners was too small to consider the tendency.

Table 7 shows the learners' self-evaluation on their first course they were placed in at the current institution. More than 60% of learners found the placement was suitable. Compared to input skills (listening and reading), output skills (speaking and writing) were evaluated as relatively challenging for them. There were respondents reporting "not applicable" about kanji, and this is probably because the learners were placed in a first-year course in which kanji was not taught from the first class.

Table 7

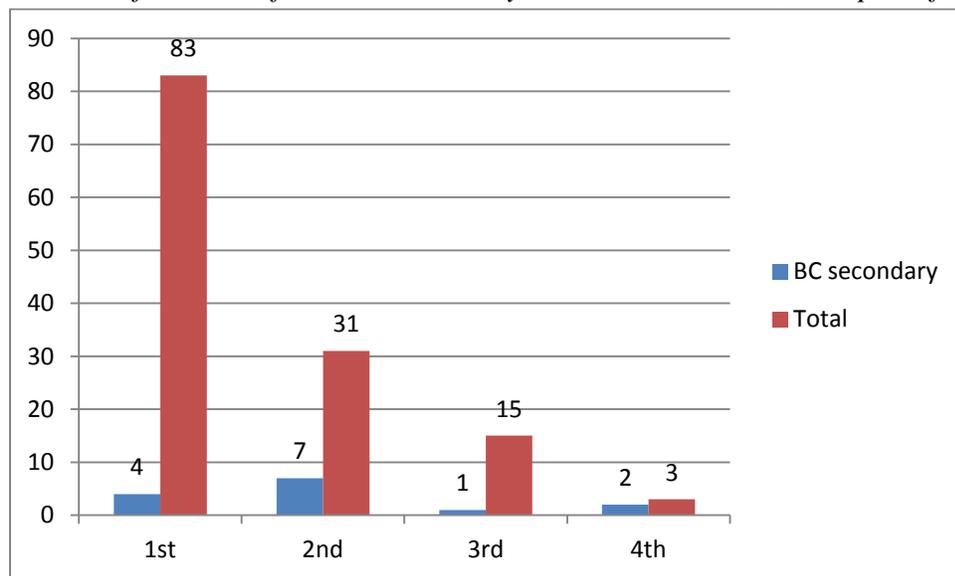
Learners' self-evaluation on their first course at the current institution

Answer	Speaking		Listening		Reading		Writing		Kanji	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Easy	53	19.5	69	25.4	73	26.8	53	19.5	70	25.7
Suitable	188	69.1	171	62.9	169	62.1	184	67.6	145	53.3
Difficult	24	8.8	24	8.8	22	8.1	26	9.6	39	14.3
No answer	7	2.6	8	2.9	8	2.9	9	3.3	10	3.7
Not applicable									8	2.9

Finally, among all those learners, the ones from BC secondary schools were of particular interest in this survey, as we mentioned earlier, though there are significant differences in administrative structures and the learning and teaching environment. The total count of learners who responded as having experience taking courses at BC secondary schools were 14. This was only 5.14% of all respondents, and 10.6% of all learners who reported having prior formal learning experience. Figure 7 shows the number of learners from BC secondary schools and the total number of learners with prior formal learning experience. The numbers of all learners with prior formal learning experience is significantly reduced as the course-year goes up, whereas the numbers of learners from BC secondary schools were somewhat more evenly distributed, and half of them were placed in a second-year course.

Figure 7

Number of learners, from BC secondary schools and in total, with prior formal experience



The purposes of those learners in coming to postsecondary schools in Ontario were not a focus of this survey. However, it is possible that the learners who came to Ontario for postsecondary education from BC were academically strong in general as well as in Japanese language as a subject, and further investigation would be needed to determine whether there are any significant differences between Japanese language education in BC and Ontario.

Question 3: Do Japanese-as-a-heritage-language learners take Japanese courses at such institutions? If yes, at which institutions?

As we see in Figure 1, only 4 learners among all 272 participants (1.67%) of this survey continued to learn Japanese language from Japanese-as-a-heritage-language schools, considered formal learning institutions. Only one took a university course, and s/he was placed in a first-year course.¹¹

On the other hand, 3 such learners took courses at language schools. Two of them were placed at a non-true-beginner level, and indeed, both of them took courses for more than 4 years. In the same institution, one learner who took courses for up to 3 years at heritage schools was placed at the advanced level.

¹¹ This respondent gave no information about how long s/he had learned Japanese at the Japanese heritage school and what type of opportunities s/he had for using Japanese as a heritage language.

Summary and for future study

This survey was implemented as one of the projects of J-GAP Canada, which was the first attempt to discern the trends of learners' continuing study of Japanese in Ontario, and found that the Japanese programs in Ontario need much more support in order to provide well-articulated educational programs which help to attain learners' goals effectively (Byrnes, 1990). Indeed, the articulation issues Duff (2004, 2008) and Wallinger (2006/2007) pointed out are shown in the results in this survey. One of them is that many learners were assigned to first-year (beginner-level) courses, even though they have prior learning experience whether in a formal or informal setting. For the learners, this is very discouraging to continue to learn, as their prior experience feels discounted rather than being channeled toward achieving higher proficiency. Duff (2004, 2008) pointed out a couple of tendencies contributing to this phenomenon. One of the reasons was that the foreign language course requirement at most high schools and universities, if any, is only for one or two years. The present survey did not investigate such requirements; however, only 2 universities offered fourth-year level courses among all 5 participating universities, and advanced-level courses were very limited in terms of numbers and types. In fact, there is no university offering a Japanese major. The fact that only 3 learners with prior learning experience were placed in a fourth-year course (see Figure 5) raises the possibility that no appropriate course was offered for advanced learners at university. On the other hand, language schools are free from this kind of restriction; however, the fact that their courses are not for credit may also be an influence. As we see in Figure 6, the learners' placement was heavily inclined to the beginner level, and only 12.3% were placed at the advanced level.

The second issue Duff (2004, 2008) raised is articulation between coursework for heritage language background students and coursework for non-heritage language students, foreign language learners. Duff discussed this issue focusing on Mandarin learners, a population which is quite large in BC, making it something of a special case in the heritage language context. However, even if they are not as numerous, heritage learners of Japanese seem to be increasing. According to the survey by the Japan Foundation (2006), the total number of students at three Japanese heritage schools in Ontario is 390, and this number increased to 451 in their newer survey in 2009. Considering this number, the current survey found only 4 continuing learners from heritage schools, surprisingly few, and only 1 among them continuing to learn Japanese at a university. Again, although further research is needed, this may indicate that learning at heritage schools is not given as much recognition as one might hope, even though parents and learners themselves invest tremendous time, money and effort, and also that there may be a somewhat large gap between heritage language school curriculum and the curriculum of foreign language programs at postsecondary level schools. Even though the number is not as large as Mandarin-as-a-heritage-language users' populations, the number of users of Japanese-as-a-heritage-language can be expected to increase by the fact that Japanese has the highest proportion of out-group pairing among visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2010). The preparation and implementation of advanced-level courses for heritage-stream learners, among other types of

advanced-level courses, would probably invite more learners to continue to learn Japanese language.

Finally, Duff (2004, 2008) mentioned, in the context of Asian countries, a gap between the elementary level and the junior high school level regarding focus of instruction: game and oral activities-centered vs. traditional grammar-based or translation-oriented approaches. Except for the learners with prior learning experience at the postsecondary level, the percentage of the learners who were assigned to the beginner level, in other words, who repeated the elementary level, was mostly more than 65% (see Table 7). This survey did not include the type of pedagogical approaches, the teachers' training background, department structures, and so on. However, all of these are factors influencing the implementation of the programs and courses (e.g. Miyagawa, 1995), and should be investigated for future study. In particular, Ontario does not have a set curriculum for Japanese language at the elementary-secondary level, and the contents vary by the educational boards and schools. Meanwhile, from the results of this survey about placement, learners felt output skills, speaking and writing, to be more challenging. Generally, all schools may be encouraged to put greater effort into developing their learners' speaking and writing proficiency.

This survey was the first attempt to capture the current situation of learners who continued to learn Japanese across programs in Ontario, a situation which was little known, and it will contribute to further investigations as mentioned above. As for J-GAP Canada, this survey could not actually have been carried out without cooperation from the educators who participated in it, and without communications at regular meetings. As the result shows, most of the learners who continued to learn Japanese at the postsecondary-level institutions in Ontario came from institutions in Ontario (see Figures 2 and 3). Again, as earlier indicated, Ontario has the second-largest number of learners of Japanese in Canada, following BC. The results from this survey should be taken seriously in order to foster learners' further learning and development of higher proficiency. Thus, significant fundamental support for research and implementation are needed in order to help learners who continue to learn Japanese, and stakeholders such as parents, to have productive experiences.

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Appendix

J-GAP Japanese Language Background Survey

This survey is being conducted by J-GAP (Japanese Global Articulation Project) to investigate the Japanese-language study backgrounds of individuals currently studying Japanese. We hope to improve continuity across programs to make it easier and more efficient for students to continue to study Japanese. Your input will help us improve Japanese language education in Ontario. **If you have studied Japanese elsewhere (including self study) prior to the school where you are currently studying, we would very much appreciate your taking a few moments to answer the following questions.**

The aggregate results may be shared with Japanese language teachers and the public for this purpose. No personal identifying information will be disclosed. Some schools may also use this survey to aid them in student placement.

I. Name of Current School: _____

Code/Name of Current Course: _____

Code/Name of First Course You Took at Current School: _____

II. Prior to taking a Japanese course at my current school,

1. I studied Japanese informally

How (check all that apply): self study with a private tutor/teacher others → specify: _____
Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

2. I took a course/courses at (check all that apply)

Postsecondary School (University, College)
Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

Secondary School
Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
Grades: G9 G10 G11 G12

Elementary/Primary School
Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
Grades: G1 G2 G3 G4 G5 G6 G7 G8

Language School
Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

Heritage Language School
 Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
 Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

Continuing Education
 Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
 Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

Others → specify: _____
 Location: Ontario Other Province → specify: _____ Other Country → specify: _____
 Duration: up to 6 months up to 1 year up to 2 years
 up to 3 years up to 4 years more than 4 years

3. I lived in Japan for _____ years.

Attended: University/College High School Junior High School
 Elementary School International School Kindergarten/Nursery School
 Language School

III. Was there a placement test/interview to assess your level when you first took a course at your current school?

Yes → Interview Test Interview & Test
 No

VI. Was the level of the first course you took at your current school suitable for you?

Speaking: easy suitable difficult
 Listening: easy suitable difficult
 Writing: easy suitable difficult
 Reading: easy suitable difficult
 Kanji: easy suitable difficult

Thank you very much!
 ありがとうございました。