Japanese migrant teachers in Australia

The need for strategic professional development to maximise their linguistic and cultural capital

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Chronic teacher shortages are frequently cited as a barrier to the provision of continuous language education in Australian schools. Despite the increasing emphasis on learners' multilingual and multicultural competencies, the teacher workforce in Australia remains homogeneous. Migrant native speakers of the languages taught in schools bring valuable linguistic and cultural capital, but their career trajectories remain largely under-researched. Using a qualitative approach, this study employed semi-structured interviews to obtain an in-depth understanding of the initial motivations, pathways, and trajectories of four Japanese-born teachers who teach Japanese in Australian schools. It revealed that their initial motivation to become teachers was predominantly instrumental, particularly seeking permanent residency and capitalising on their native language skills. However, after qualifying, these teachers had limited career opportunities and, as a result, found employment in primary schools, where working conditions were less demanding and competitive. The study also identified institutional barriers that hindered these teachers' access to relevant professional development opportunities, constraining long-term growth and causing stagnation. These findings underscore the need for more strategic professional development policies and systemic support that enable migrant teachers to maximise their cultural and linguistic expertise in Australia's language education system.

Keywords: Japanese language, language teacher motivation, migrant teacher, professional development, Australia's teacher education

1.   Introduction

Global mobility in the 21st century has created more diverse classrooms with culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse students. This shift creates a need for educators with multicultural and multilingual awareness and skills, particularly in Australia, where approximately 23% of the population speak languages other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Teaching languages in schools is therefore vital for educating young people to be members of Australian society and meeting the needs of Australia's growing multilingual and multicultural society. However, the number of students learning languages in Year 12 has been declining nationwide for the last ten years (ACARA, 2023). While this is partly attributed to a lack of qualified teachers (Fillmore et al., 2024; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2016), overseas-born teachers with diverse backgrounds could play a key role in addressing this issue by filling the gap in the workforce and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity within schools (Collins & Reid, 2012; Fillmore et al., 2024).

Despite the fact that the Australian Curriculum acknowledges Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity, the teaching workforce remains largely homogeneous (Acton & Hennessy, 2023) and unrepresentative of the country's multicultural population (Cairns, 2021). According to the Australian Teacher Workforce Data, in 2020, 6% of respondents had completed their initial teacher education overseas, which is a 4% increase from 2019 (AITSL, 2024b). This reflects the existing pathways to becoming a qualified teacher and the difficulties in transferring teaching qualifications obtained abroad to the Australian system.

Recruiting migrant teachers — teachers born and partially or fully educated overseas — presents an opportunity to address teacher shortages and diversify the workforce. Migrant teachers bring distinct human and social capital from their home countries, enriching pedagogy and fostering a multilingual educational environment (Collins & Reid, 2012; Santoro, 2015). Their high intercultural competencies broaden and foster students' awareness of the global community (Dwyer et al., 2024). Research indicates that these teachers contribute to creating inclusive and safe classrooms, supporting minority students through empathy and shared experiences (Santoro, 2015), which leads to better academic outcomes (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). Students also benefit from having migrant teachers with first-hand knowledge and experience of the target languages when their exposure to those languages outside the classroom is limited. However, the professional trajectories of such teachers, and the challenges they face, remain underexplored, particularly in relation to the teaching of languages other than English in Anglophone countries. Although the different treatment and pathways of migrant teachers in these countries are acknowledged (Jee & Hashimoto, 2024), there are

limited insights into how teacher educators and policymakers could support and guide them in their challenging professional lives in a new country. To address this gap, this study examines the motivations, career pathways, and professional challenges of four Japanese migrant teachers in Queensland, shedding light on their integration into the Australian education system. Insights from this study will inform policies and practices for recruiting and supporting migrant teachers in Australia and beyond, ultimately enhancing teacher diversity and addressing language teacher shortages.

Initial motivations to become teachers

There is a large body of work devoted to teachers' motivations to pursue a teaching career and how these initial motivations influence their later professional lives. Teachers are often driven to teach by intrinsic and altruistic desires (Richardson & Watt, 2006), drawing on expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This theory posits that the level of success expectancy and value placed on their professional tasks significantly influences teachers' motivation and, therefore, subsequent outcomes. Lin et al. (2012) identified social utility values — the desire to contribute to society and shape future generations — as the strongest motivator for choosing a teaching career in the US and China. Similarly, Kissau et al. (2019) find that personal values attached to language education play a crucial role in attracting individuals to the teaching profession. They argue that, in addition to the aspiration to make a social contribution and shape the future of students, a personal attachment to the language also has a strong impact on these individuals' decision to become teachers.

Some studies highlight the important role of these initial self-valued motivations in teachers' future professional performance and well-being. Watt et al. (2014) found that teachers with high intrinsic and social utility motivations are more engaged in terms of professional development and leadership aspirations than those who lack such motivations. Other studies shed light on intrinsic and altruistic motivations for entering teaching profession. Teachers motivated by a love of teaching and the desire to make a difference in students' lives show greater satisfaction, supportive behaviour, well-being, work engagement and commitment, and provide more beneficial outcomes for learners than those with instrumental and extrinsic motivations (Pourtous & Ghanizadeh, 2020; Slemp et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2023). Moreover, Liu et al. (2019) argue that these motivational dispositions can change over the course of a teacher's professional career, and that continuous motivational support should therefore be provided. Teachers may lose motivation and develop maladaptive behaviour due to external constraints, such

as a lack of support from their school, even when they began their careers with intrinsic motivation (Lam et al., 2010). While these studies offer valuable insights, they predominantly focus on domestic teachers across various school subjects. How these findings apply to migrant language teachers who embark on a teaching career in a different environment remains an open question.

Challenges for migrant teachers

For many migrant teachers, adapting to new professional and cultural norms is a complex and challenging process (Nakahara & Black, 2007) even though they can be a significant "brain gain" for host countries (Collins & Reid, 2012, p. 45). One of the biggest challenges is a lack of recognition of migrant teachers' previous teaching experience and educational qualifications. Terhart (2022) reports that in many cases teachers' qualifications and extensive teaching experience in their home countries are not fully acknowledged, requiring them to undertake additional time-consuming training programs in the host country. In Australia, the complexity of the accreditation and bridging process, which varies by state and between the government and non-government systems, leads to a perception that obtaining registration is too difficult and too expensive (Cruickshank, 2004; 2022; Cruickshank et al., 2021).

Language proficiency requirements further complicate the transition for teachers from non-English-speaking countries (Collins & Reid, 2012). AITSL (2024a) specifies that teacher registration applicants who are not from the six listed English-speaking countries — namely, Australia, Canada, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the UK, and the US — must demonstrate a high level of English proficiency in the International English Languages Testing System (IELTS) or International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) tests. As Fillmore et al. (2024) point out, some Asian countries where English is widely spoken as an official language, such as the Philippines, India, and Singapore, are excluded from this list. One participant in the study by Cruickshank et al. (2020) took the IELTS tests five times, receiving insufficient marks in different skills each time, and ultimately gave up on becoming a maths teacher. Dwyer et al. (2024) argue that the English requirements, normally higher than for most tertiary programs, deter otherwise capable teacher candidates. Additionally, finding a job in their preferred locations is challenging for migrant teachers. Competition for positions in major cities is so strong that many migrant teachers end up accepting positions in regional areas instead (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017). How these challenges intersect with teaching an Asian language, such as Japanese, warrants closer examination, given that migrant teachers from different cultural backgrounds often

struggle with cultural adaptation to some aspects of the Australian school system, such as classroom management and pedagogy.

Japanese Language Teachers in Australia

In Australia, a variety of languages are taught from primary to tertiary level, and the availability of programs and conditions of teaching vary greatly in different states. Japanese is among the most commonly taught languages. In terms of language teacher profiles, there is a striking difference across languages. Sturak and Naughten (2010) report that teachers of Asian languages such as Chinese and Korean are mostly native-speaker teachers, accounting for around 90% and 83% of the teacher cohort of the respective languages. However, the opposite holds for Japanese: according to the Japan Foundation (2023a), only 27.9% of Japanese teachers are native speakers of the language. Regarding job opportunities, in line with the broader national teacher workforce trends across the Australian school system, there is a surging demand for Japanese teachers in remote and regional areas, especially in primary schools, while opportunities in urban areas are mostly limited to part-time or unpaid assistant roles (Spence-Brown, 2014).

Furthermore, there is little research into how Japanese migrant teachers, who are a minority within the Japanese teacher cohort, navigate cultural and professional adaptation and integration. This study addresses these gaps by providing in-depth insights into the motivations, career pathways, and professional challenges of Japanese migrant teachers in Queensland. Adopting a qualitative, exploratory approach, the study answers the following research questions:

RQ1. What motivated Japanese migrant teachers to pursue teaching Japanese in Queensland?

RQ2. What pathways did Japanese migrant teachers take to become registered Japanese teachers and to secure their teaching positions in Queensland, and what challenges did they encounter?

RQ3. How do Japanese migrant teachers in Queensland navigate their teaching experiences, professional integration, and development during their professional lives?

Methodology

Context and participants

This study is part of a larger project on Japanese language teachers' professional trajectories in Queensland, which received ethical clearance in accordance with the guidelines for the ethical review process of The University of Queensland (project number: 2023/HE001671). The broader project collected data from a total of 75 participants through a questionnaire survey ($n=75$) and follow-up interviews ($n=20$). These participants included both Australian-born and migrant teachers, and the present study focuses specifically on the interview data from migrant teachers.

The study is set in Queensland, Australia, where language education is compulsory from Year 5 to Year 8 in state schools, with continued language study encouraged beyond these years (Queensland Government, 2021). In relation to the current requirements to become a qualified Japanese language teacher in Australian schools, the Japan Foundation (2023b) states that a Bachelor of Education or Master of Teaching from an Australian university is required, and that teaching qualifications obtained overseas may be recognised but a high level of English proficiency is also required. Registration requirements in Australia have evolved over time, suggesting that experienced teachers who began their teaching careers decades ago may have followed different pathways. While the current educational framework in Queensland has a more structured approach to the teacher qualification process, it accommodates diverse pathways on a case-by-case basis, and the complexity of accreditation of overseas qualification and bridging process remains (Cruickshank, 2022; Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017; Fillmore et al., 2024). Furthermore, while the literature predominantly focuses on supporting early-career teachers in transitioning from pre-service to in-service phases, it is equally crucial to provide support to experienced teachers as they face challenges at their current career stage that differ from those encountered by early-career teachers (Sulis et al., 2023). This underscores the importance and relevance of exploring the professional trajectories of the teacher participants in this study, who possess extensive experience.

For data collection, invitation emails were sent to heads of the language departments of schools that offer Japanese, and snowball sampling was used through professional networks. This approach was chosen to reach out to as many of the estimated 300 or so Japanese teachers in Queensland schools as possible. Eligible participants were in-service primary and/or secondary school teachers currently teaching the Japanese language.

Given this study's focus on migrant teachers, we chose participants who were originally from Japan and who speak Japanese as their first language for the interview. There are ten participants who met these criteria and agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. Their profiles, including their educational backgrounds and qualifications, are presented in Table 1. Given the overall consistency of findings across the ten teachers, this paper focuses on four participants due to space constraints. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were given the pseudonyms Emiko, Eri, Haruka, and Megumi. These four participants were selected for the depth of their descriptions and for the way their diverse experiences and perspectives both exemplify and represent the key topics identified within the entire dataset. All were teaching at primary schools, three in state schools and one in a non-state school. Three of the teachers, who were in their 50s, had more than 20 years of teaching experience, while the other, who was in her 40s, had been teaching for 6 years.

Table 1. Participants' profiles

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Teaching experience (years)	Educational background/ qualification	Current employment	School type
T1 (Emiko)	52	20+	Bachelor in Japan Graduate Bachelor in Australia	Primary school	State
T2 (Eri)	56	20+	Bachelor in Japan	Primary school	Non-state
T3 (Haruka)	45	6	Bachelor in Japan Teaching licence in UK	Primary school	State
T4 (Megumi)	56	20+	Bachelor in Japan Bachelor Certificate in Australia	Primary school	State
T5	58	10	Bachelor in Japan Graduate Diploma in Australia	Secondary school	State
T6	41	no information	Bachelor in Japan Master in Australia	Secondary school	State
T7	54	20+	Bachelor in Japan Graduate Diploma in Australia	Primary school	State
T8	42	18	Bachelor in Australia Graduate Bachelor in Australia	Primary/ Secondary school	Non-state
T9	46	10	Bachelor in Japan Graduate Diploma in Australia	Secondary school	Non-state
T10	49	9	Bachelor in Japan Master in Australia	Primary school	Non-state

Data collection and analysis

Relevant data regarding the participants' initial motivations and career pathways as Japanese language teachers were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted on Zoom. The participants were asked to describe how and why they began their professional careers as Japanese language teachers in Australia and what their teaching experiences were like. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in Japanese by one of the authors to accommodate participants' language preference. The data collection process (online questionnaire and Zoom interview) spanned the period from May to November 2024. While we are mindful of the potential drawbacks of the interviewer's prior knowledge of and familiarity with some of the interviewees, we believe that such established rapport has fostered trust and openness, ultimately making the data collection process more fruitful (Roiha & Iikkanen, 2022). The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed through content and thematic analysis. This involved "the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

The analysis followed multiple steps. First, we read the interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the data. Next, one author coded the data using a deductive approach, applying predefined categories based on the research questions (i.e., the motivation to become a Japanese teacher, the pathways to entering and adapting to the teaching profession, and the current teaching experiences). This was complemented by an inductive approach, allowing new themes to emerge from the data. NVivo software was utilised to systematically organise and analyse the transcripts. These processes were conducted iteratively, leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomena through the participants' individual perspectives and experiences in relation to each research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of these findings, the coded data were reviewed by the other authors (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The final excerpts used in this study were translated from Japanese to English. These English versions were then back-translated into Japanese and compared with the original texts to ensure translation accuracy (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023).

Results

Initial motivation

The interview data revealed that the participants' initial motivation to become Japanese teachers was primarily instrumental — centred on career opportunities and migration pathways — while intrinsic and altruistic reasons, such as personal interest and cultural advocacy, were secondary. The initial goal of a number of the teachers was to live outside Japan, not to teach Japanese language overseas. They decided to teach Japanese because they thought it was a job that would be easy to find, leveraging their knowledge and skills especially in the context of living abroad:

> The reason why I came here was to pursue a Master of Psychology, but I ended up staying here. At that time, there weren't many Japanese language teachers — though that's still the case now — and I felt, "Maybe I'll want to teach Japanese." Plus, my mother was a teacher… In the end, I figured that if I was going to settle down here permanently, having a teaching qualification would be the best option. (Emiko)

> After quitting my job as a primary school teacher [in Japan], I went to the UK, lived with my boyfriend, and got married. At that time, when I thought about what I could do, considering my teaching experience, qualifications, and what I could teach, I felt that teaching Japanese might be the right choice.   (Haruka)

The other teachers did not originally set out to become Japanese teachers when they came to Australia. Their main reason for choosing the profession was to obtain a qualification that would enable them to live abroad for an extended period. Megumi and Eri reflected on their decisions to teach Japanese. "My initial goal was to live abroad for a while. As I came here for this reason, I thought that the quickest way to find a job would be to teach Japanese. That was my motivation" (Megumi). "It wasn't that I intended to get a teaching licence. Rather, at the time, when I was aiming to obtain PR [permanent residency], the independent skilled migration category included teaching qualifications, and I chose it" (Eri).

Some participants had secondary motivations that were more intrinsic and altruistic, including their desire to promote their own language and culture for international and national benefit and their interest in language learning and teaching. Megumi stated that "I felt that having the opportunity to teach my native language to others was a wonderful thing. I thought that this could also be beneficial to Japan, and I set a big goal with that in mind" (Megumi). Eri also explained one of her motivations:

> I originally had an interest in how people learn foreign languages, and that was part of my studies [at university]. When I started living in Australia, I thought that a job in which I could make use of what I had studied would be ideal... so, the only language I could teach was Japanese.   (Eri)

Individual pathways and challenges

The teachers in this study took diverse pathways to become Japanese teachers in Australia. Emiko, who had a Bachelor's degree in Japan, completed a two-year program, the Graduate Bachelor of Education,[1] to become a registered teacher. Similarly, Megumi obtained her Bachelor's degree in psychology in Japan and completed her Bachelor of Education Certificate to become a qualified teacher in Australia. By contrast, the other teachers had their Japanese qualifications recognised in Australia and did not have to complete an additional degree to teach Japanese. Haruka had been a primary school teacher in Japan and started teaching Japanese in the UK before migrating to Australia. In Eri's case, she simply completed some "Returning to Teaching programs" offered by the Queensland College of Teachers for international and returning teachers.

Although the paths to their Japanese teaching careers in Australia were diverse, all the participants found the transition process difficult, in terms of English proficiency, accreditation, employment, and professional and cultural adaptation. To become qualified teachers, they needed to pass the required level of IELTS or another recognised English proficiency test.[2] Eri shared her stressful experience with IELTS:

> I got my full registration... but the initial process was really tough. To get approved, I needed a score of 7 in all sections of the IELTS... I took the IELTS three times. I couldn't get all 7s in one test. So, I took it in parts. That means this time I got a 6 in Reading, and the next time I got a 7 in Reading, and so on. (Eri)

The process for recognising their previous education in Japan lacked clarity and consistency, causing stress and additional burdens. As Haruka had managed to transfer her Japanese teaching qualification to a British qualification, she assumed that the process would be similar in Australia. However, transferring her British

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1. This two-year degree was offered to students who had an overseas undergraduate degree. It is no longer available.

2. The required level of English proficiency has changed over time. For example, the author's institution currently requires an IELTS overall band score of 7.5 and a minimum score of 8 in Listening and Speaking and 7 in Writing and Reading for entry to the Master of Teaching (primary and secondary) and Bachelor of Education (primary and secondary) programs.

qualification to an Australian one proved more challenging than expected, although she eventually succeeded:

> I was told [I couldn't transfer my British licence to Australia]… and the reason was that although I did a bit of study in the UK, I didn't obtain a degree there. Your first degree — your undergraduate degree — is very important [in Australia]. If you only have a second degree, like a Master's degree obtained in the UK, it doesn't count… Just having a licence from an English-speaking country isn't enough. If you graduate from a university in an English-speaking country after four years of study and obtain a licence, then it's okay.   (Haruka)

In terms of employment, the four teachers were all employed at primary schools, rather than secondary schools, despite their advanced linguistic skills and cultural knowledge. In fact, the two teachers who were teaching at secondary schools (T5 and T9) were initially employed for teaching subjects other than Japanese such as mathematics and IT. Emiko chose primary education when completing her initial teacher education (ITE)[3] in Australia. Her Bachelor's degree in English literature from a Japanese university precluded her from having Japanese as a teaching subject at secondary school level. At the time, the positions migrant teachers were able to take were mainly primary schools in low socioeconomic, remote areas due to their lower competitiveness compared to Australian-born teachers (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017; Dwyer et al., 2024). Megumi recalled that "the place where I was assigned to work felt like a town completely isolated and left behind. It was very tough for me because there was no one to ask for help" (Megumi). Haruka had a similar experience, but acknowledged the advantage of working in an such area in terms of job security:

> It was a rough school. But at a school like that, you can quickly get a permanent position … In areas where there's a teacher shortage, the [teaching] conditions are often favourable [for teachers]. For example, they might offer you a permanent position quickly or be more flexible [about teaching contracts].   (Haruka)

The teachers also encountered challenges in adapting to a new professional environment in the initial stage of their teaching careers in Australia. Their lack of knowledge and training in Japanese language pedagogy was a major issue. Megumi pointed out that being a native speaker does not necessarily mean being a good language teacher without training. She struggled when she started her teaching career:

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3. ITE aims to ensure that graduate teachers start their teaching career with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be successful teachers in any Australian school (Australian Government, 2022).

> I hadn't been taught how to teach Japanese at university, and it caused quite a bit of trouble when I started teaching… I feel that if there had been classes on how to teach Japanese to English speakers, it would have been helpful… You really need to have a good grasp of Japanese grammar and its origins [to teach it effectively].
>
> (Megumi)

Cultural differences between Japan and Australia also posed challenges. Homework, which is common practice in Japanese schools, is one such example, as Haruka reflected:

> I wanted to give them more homework, but I was told [by the school] that if I gave them homework they would feel pressured, and it would cause anxiety, so I was told not to give homework. You have to write many times, do drills, vocabulary tests, etc. and build up [your knowledge and understanding] through that, but in Australia I am basically unable to ask them do that.   (Haruka)

Another example of cultural difference related to the diversity of Australian students. In contrast to the largely homogenous classrooms in Japan, Emiko observed that "There are many indigenous children. For them, English is a second language and Japanese is a third language, so it is difficult to make them interested in Japanese" (Emiko).

Current teaching experiences

Despite having to go through such long and daunting accreditation processes, the teachers generally displayed a positive attitude towards their current teaching and work environment. At the same time, however, the analysis identified an emerging theme of stagnation in professional development. All four teachers demonstrated their satisfaction with the current situation and their limited ambition and enthusiasm to improve the quality and effectiveness of Japanese language education in Australia. The following excerpts indicate that rather than striving to improve Japanese language pedagogy, the teachers were content with the status quo and showed limited interest in enhancing Japanese teaching within the broader educational context of Australian schools. "It is a very good school. Not every teacher has a Japanese language classroom like this. I am lucky… I am happy so far" (Emiko). "I'm able to teach a variety of subjects. For me, it [teaching Japanese] is not exactly my dream, but it's something I've wanted to do, so I'm very satisfied with what I'm doing now" (Haruka). In Eri's case, she displayed a sense of helplessness regarding her role as a Japanese teacher, showing low self-efficacy in performing her duties. She has shifted away from helping her students to improve their Japanese proficiency to playing the role of "babysitter," a shift that seems to

have been influenced by the perceived situational constraints at her school, which fails to value Japanese as a school subject:

> It [Japanese class] is to create non-contact time for [other] teachers... So, in short, I have to babysit. I'm trying my best to be the best babysitting person... Yes, so rather than trying my best to teach Japanese, my goal is to become someone who can enjoy babysitting while teaching Japanese... I do my best not to bother the homeroom teacher by taking care of them for one hour.   (Eri)

Similarly, Megumi lost the motivation to teach Japanese well because her school did not value Japanese language in the same way as other subjects such as STEM subjects:

> Compared to when I first started, I've received a lot more support, so I wouldn't say there's no back-up at all. However, there's still, what should I say, something like [disparity] between subjects — like, "This is an important subject, and this one isn't as much." From that perspective, I feel that [Japanese language] often gets deprioritised.   (Megumi)

She also noted that despite her interest in professional development, the school provided her with limited support in this respect. "I try to update my knowledge at least once a year because I don't want to be left behind... However, even when I want to attend conferences, it's difficult as the school doesn't easily approve it" (Megumi). These negative aspects of her work environment have made her question the value of her work and led her to consider leaving the profession.

In summary, the teachers in our study were normally content with their professional lives as Japanese teachers. However, at the same time, mainly due to institutional and curriculum constraints, they appeared to lose their motivation and their expectations about enhancing the quality of Japanese education. In some cases, their working environments induced a sense of helplessness, prompting them to consider a career change.

Discussion

Given the chronic teacher shortage and the increasingly diverse backgrounds of students in Australian schools, there is a growing need to explore strategies for recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. In particular, migrant teachers are attracting attention for their potential to address these issues because of their linguistic and cultural assets (Collins & Reid, 2012). This study has examined Japanese migrant teachers' motivations for Japanese teaching, pathways to qualification, and professional experiences.

The teachers interviewed in this project reported various types and layers of motivation for entering the teaching profession, including intrinsic, altruistic, and instrumental motivations. All of the teachers had instrumental motivation, seeing teaching Japanese primarily as a means of living in Australia permanently. They showed secondary motivation to further support this, such as leveraging their cultural knowledge and linguistic skills as native speakers of Japanese. These findings contrast with previous studies, which find intrinsic and social utility motivations to be the dominant factors among teachers (Kissau et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2012). One plausible explanation for this lies in the different career contexts. While past research has mostly focused on domestic teachers working in their home countries, this study examines Japanese migrant teachers in Australia. One previous study on migrant teachers shows that their desire to work abroad was stronger than their desire to seek stability or obtain a higher salary (Gu et al., 2021). This study highlights the fact that languages afford teachers international mobility — another dimension of instrumental motivation for choosing a language teaching career.

Regardless of their initial motivation, however, the teachers struggled to obtain accreditation, as previous research illustrates (Fillmore et al., 2024) and encountered difficulties adapting to the working environment in Australia. Megumi admitted that she was not equipped with sufficient teaching skills, and Haruka noted her unfamiliarity with Australian school systems and teaching methods. These findings suggest the importance of providing support to migrant teachers to facilitate their smooth transition to a new country. Previous research points out that credential recognition alone does not ensure a smooth transition for migrant teachers (Cruickshank, 2022; Cruickshank et al., 2021; Fillmore et al., 2024). Indeed, there is a need for systematic and structured support for migrant teachers. This study argues that these teachers should be provided with additional preparatory professional courses or training before they start their new career as qualified teachers. This would benefit teachers by increasing their awareness of their professional responsibilities as well as easing the adaptation process (Nakahara & Black, 2007).

The consequences of these motivations warrant further attention, especially in relation to professional engagement. Teachers who began their careers for instrumental reasons tended to demonstrate limited ambition to improve their teaching skills or contribute to the development of Japanese language education. Although some showed secondary forms of intrinsic motivation, suggesting that their engagement was not solely extrinsically driven, the persistence of extrinsic motivations may lead to undesired consequences, such as a lack of interest in self-improvement and professional development, low work-place engagement, and poor career retention (Pourtous & Ghanizadeh, 2020; Slemp et al., 2020). One

example is Megumi, who considered leaving the profession, a situation possibly influenced by her initial goal of securing permanent residency. After navigating the arduous teacher registration process, some teachers apparently became content with the status quo, and this lack of further goals may lead them to stop pursuing further professional development (Kunter & Holzberger, 2014). A lack of social support and the marginalised status of language education in Australia may also contribute to this motivational pattern, as motivation is largely shaped by support from others (Lam et al., 2010). This underscores the importance of sustained professional development to nurture greater intrinsic motivation, in order to prevent stagnation and disengagement and enhance teaching quality (Slemp et al., 2020).

Lack of interest in professional development, however, should not be interpreted only as a result of the challenges posed by limited social support and institutional constraints. These teachers' satisfaction with their current roles may also reflect their limited awareness of their positioning in the broader Australian educational landscape. Teachers whose primary goal was to migrate to Australia permanently may have fewer opportunities or incentives to critically reflect on how they can advance Japanese education and foster the multicultural and multilingual competencies of Australian students. Regardless of their background, it is essential that all teachers develop a strong sense of professional responsibility to nurture these values within Australian schools. To this end, it should be emphasised that migrant teachers also need to play their part in order to constitute a "brain gain" (Collins & Reid, 2012, p. 45) that enhances cultural and linguistic understanding in schools and society (Fillmore et al., 2024).

Considering these findings, should future recruitment focus exclusively on those with intrinsic motivation? This study argues that such an approach is unrealistic. Given that motivation is incremental and malleable (Liu et al., 2019), a more viable strategy could be to implement institutional measures that foster intrinsic motivation throughout a teacher's career, such as encouraging them to develop a goal or vision as a Japanese teacher (Kunter & Holzberger, 2014). This can be achieved through institutional support of teachers' basic psychological needs and self-efficacy (Slemp et al., 2020; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). By doing so, teacher shortages and the underrepresentation of multicultural and multilingual perspectives in the Australian teaching workforce may be more effectively addressed.

Beyond individual motivations, this study also identified structural barriers that constrain migrant teachers' capital. Despite their expertise, Japanese migrant teachers had limited access to teaching positions in secondary schools. Some managed to find employment in primary schools in remote, low socioeconomic areas where they felt isolated and unsupported. This trend is consistent with past

research on migrant teachers (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017). Similarly, the Japan Foundation (2023a) global survey shows that the highest percentage of teachers who are native speakers work in primary schools (38.9%), compared to secondary schools (11.5%), which is an increase from 37.4% in the previous survey. While local non-native speaker teachers often face challenges in teaching advanced levels and conveying linguistic and cultural nuances (Mills & Allen, 2007), Japanese migrant teachers face difficulties in finding employment in secondary schools. This may be due to the competitiveness of secondary teaching positions and/or the lower appeal of primary teacher positions among locally grown teachers (Collins & Reid, 2012). However, in the context of language education, undervaluing migrant teachers' expertise and sidelining them from roles where their contributions could be most impactful implies a waste of human capital and a missed opportunity to enhance Japanese language education and broader intercultural understanding in Australia. To challenge this filling-the-workforce-gap discourse of Japanese migrant teachers, it is essential to explore strategies for better leveraging their capabilities and raising policymakers' awareness of the skills these teachers bring when they migrate to Australia.

Implications

These findings suggest several courses of action for policymakers and teacher educators to enable smooth transitions and facilitate the continuous professional development of migrant teachers. The authors recommend expanding teaching assistantships and mentorship opportunities for migrant teacher candidates before they formally enter the profession. Despite potential challenges such as funding constraints, these practical experiences help develop essential skills as effective Japanese teachers and support the professional identity of migrant teachers, strengthening their resilience and their motivation for continuous professional growth (Slemp et al., 2020). Schmidt et al. (2010) report the successful implementation of such an initiative in Canada, which helped migrant teachers navigate challenges and adapt to the Canadian education system through personalised support in coursework, practical experience, language development, and professional learning. Such practices could be adapted to the Australian context, and policymakers could consider making these additional supports a recommended or required component of initial teacher education to ensure migrant teachers enter their classroom with confidence and commitment.

Moreover, equally important is the provision of professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of migrant teachers, such as targeted workshops and information sessions, to foster intrinsic and social utility motivations

(Kunter & Holzberger, 2014). This study found low levels of professional development engagement and curiosity among Japanese migrant teachers, possibly due to issues of relevance because of their native-speaker status or the motivational challenges identified in the interviews. While their dedication to daily work is evident, we recommend that these teachers cultivate a stronger sense of belonging to the broader Japanese education system in Australian schools. Encouraging their active participation in such initiatives can deepen their awareness of current issues in Japanese language education and encourage collaborative discussions on potential improvements, thereby reinforcing these teachers' sense of purpose. Schools can also further support Japanese language teachers by affording them greater autonomy and responsibility (Slemp et al., 2020), involving them in decision-making processes and providing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. Finally, teacher educators can complement these efforts by facilitating professional development opportunities where teachers with shared goals can enhance their competencies and build a stronger sense of affiliation. In this regard, we have recently established a networking community for Japanese language teachers in Queensland to promote collegial support and self-efficacy, share pedagogical practices, and advance Japanese language education. This initiative has successfully fostered mutual support beyond geographical boundaries, as Australian-born teachers can maintain their language skills through interaction with Japanese migrant teachers, while the migrant teachers gain insights into diverse teaching approaches.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that Japanese migrant teachers in Australia often enter the profession primarily for instrumental reasons, such as seeking permanent residency, rather than intrinsic or altruistic motivations. Despite successfully navigating complex qualification pathways, the teachers in our study faced significant professional challenges (e.g., limited career mobility and difficulties adapting to a new environment). Some experienced a notable sense of stagnation in their careers, which contrasts with the commonly promoted discourse of teachers as lifelong learners. These findings underscore the need for continuous, targeted support and professional development strategies that not only aim to smooth migrant teachers' professional adaptation process but also support their long-term professional growth and commitment to educational development. Such initiatives could help alleviate the teacher shortage, leverage the human capital of migrant teachers more effectively, and ultimately enhance the quality of education in Australia.

This study is not without limitations. Despite the in-depth insights provided, the small-scale, qualitative, exploratory nature of the study limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research should investigate the transferability of these results to other contexts and samples. Additionally, this study's cross-sectional, retrospective design may not fully capture the dynamic nature of teachers' professional experiences. Longitudinal studies that track migrant teachers over time could provide a more nuanced understanding of their evolving motivations and professional engagement. Comparative studies that explore the different experiences of language teachers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds could also further enrich our understanding of the professional lives of language teachers. Finally, it would be interesting to conduct intervention studies addressing the impact of the suggested professional development strategies on migrant teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and retention. These insights will offer practical guidance for policy and practices, which will be vital for informing evidence-based strategies that enhance Japanese language education in Australia and, more broadly, a multicultural and multilingual teaching workforce worldwide.

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