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EVIDENCE-BASED PREDICTORS OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST SUCCES: THE ROLE OF KANJI, GRAMMAR, READING, AND LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between core Japanese language competencies Kanji, Bunpou (grammar), Dokkai (reading comprehension), and Choukai (listening comprehension) and success on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). This quantitative, predictive correlational research involved 60 students enrolled in Universitas Negeri Semarang Japanese language program. Based on the structural equation modelling and binary logistic regression analysis, the combined effects of Kanji, Bunpou (grammar), Dokkai (reading), and Choukai (listening) on JLPT outcomes were highly significant (χ^2 (4) = 42.957, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 73.4% of the variance (Nagelkerke R2.734). The model correctly classified 95% of cases, has an 88% accuracy for failures, and has a 98% accuracy for passes, indicating its robust predictive power. All four competencies were also significantly related to JLPT performance when considered separately (all $p < 0.001$). However, only Kanji ($p = 0.041$, odds ratio ≈ 1.69) and Bunpou ($p = 0.046$, odds ratio ≈ 1.77) were significantly associated with JLPT performance in the simultaneous model, as the impacts of Dokkai and Choukai were not significant. These findings imply that grammar, vocabulary and Kanji are fundamental elements for Japanese language learning, with reading and listening comprehension being heavily reliant on these skills. Therefore, because mastery of both lexical and syntactic skills appears to be a prerequisite for other abilities to meaningfully influence JLPT performance, this study recommends refining the integrative linguistic threshold concept and adopting a more comprehensive 'Foundational-First' pedagogical framework. It further suggests structuring weekly learning cycles to prioritize intensive lexico-syntactic automatization as the essential gateway to developing higher-order reading and listening proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

The affection for popular culture and the aspiration to align with Japan as a developed nation are no longer the predominant motivations for Indonesian people to pursue Japanese studies, particularly the language. The significant demand for labor in Japan's industrial and healthcare sectors has prompted the nation to establish employment opportunities for migrant workers (Djafri & Wahidati, 2020; Setyowati et al., 2012). The government of Indonesia and

its private sector have expressed support for this positive development by facilitating and training young Indonesians to work in Japan (Budianto, 2023). Concurrent with this phenomenon, there has been an increase in the number of students studying Japanese at universities, as well as an increase in the number of vocational training institutions (LPK) that facilitate training and send Indonesian workers to Japan. Indeed, within a relatively brief period, LPK students are expected to demonstrate Japanese proficiency at the N4 level or equivalent (Ratna et al., 2022). This situation and regulation enable them to promptly receive employment offers and embark on work opportunities in Japan. Failure to meet the minimum proficiency requirements can result in delays in students' departures for Japan and increased training costs that students must pay to the training institution.

As evidence of one's proficiency in Japanese, the number of Japanese language proficiency tests being administered has increased in frequency, so has the number of administrators (The Japan Foundation, 2024). The most prominent of these is the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), administered by the Japan Foundation. Certification of Japanese language proficiency has been demonstrated to influence the employability of students learning Japanese positively (Nishizawa et al., 2022). The certification of Japanese language proficiency has been shown to enhance students' capacity to pursue further studies in Japan or to conduct Japanese language research with greater efficacy (Abe et al., 2023). Furthermore, job seekers enrolled in Vocational Training Institutions (LPK) highly seek Japanese language proficiency certification as a prerequisite requirement to secure employment offers from Japanese companies.

In Indonesia there are two Japanese related program, Japanese Language Education and Japanese Literature programs in universities that offer courses focusing on acquiring Japanese language knowledge and practicing Japanese language skills. Universitas Negeri Semarang (Semarang State University) one of the Japanese language Education Programs, offers JLPT preparation classes to help students practice with test questions and experience a JLPT simulation test, to help students familiar with the format of the JLPT exam. These curriculums highlight the importance of comprehensive communication skills in Japanese and strategies for succeeding on the JLPT exam as fundamental components of the curriculum. Therefore, a balanced learning approach between language communicative learning and learning with the purpose for passing proficiency test is essential for helping students attain Japanese language proficiency (Nishimura, 2024; Takagi et al., 2021). The success in acquiring the JLPT qualifications and certifications can be utilized for further career advancement. The results of the JLPT can also function as an evaluative instrument for both the institution and the learners.

The JLPT examination is structured into a test with four sections. The initial section is *Goi* and *Kanji*, which assesses vocabulary and *Kanji* proficiency. Next, *Bunpou*, in the second section, assesses grammatical proficiency. *Dokkai*, in the third section, assesses reading proficiency. The fourth section is *Choukai*, which assesses the test taker's listening skills. These test sections are interconnected, as the *Dokkai* and *Choukai* sections focus on evaluating the test taker's language skills, and the *Goi, Kanji*, and *Bunpou* sessions measure the test taker's linguistic knowledge.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), represented in the JF Standard Tree as a conceptual framework and can be understood as a metaphor (Japan Foundation, 2017), language knowledge serves as the foundation of language learning, whereas language skill is the process of transforming language knowledge into meaningful activities. Despite the advancements made to the JLPT was intended to assess communicative language proficiency (Usami, 2012), a critique has emerged that highlight a perceived discrepancy within the the former and updated JLPT structure (Nishizawa et al., 2022). The updated evaluation versions of JLPT measure similar aspects with the former

version of JLPT, which is vocabulary, *kanji*, syntax, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension (Niveri & Rojas-Lizana, 2019).

Recently, a study regarding the affective factor suggests that cognitive anxiety of examinees negatively impacts Japanese reading comprehension of JLPT (Prasetya et al., 2025). In the context of a multicultural society, the intercultural method of teaching Japanese language shows a positive impact on students' communicative competencies (Risda et al., 2025). Other Research on affective and psychological factors is being conducted to determine their correlation with and influence on learner performance on tests such as the TOEFL and the JLPT (Izzatillayevna, 2023; Nishida & Yashima, 2017; Prasetya et al., 2025; Rosiah et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2024). From an evaluation perspective, while the affective or psychological factor influences research toward language proficiency tests becoming widely recognized, one area that has not yet been addressed is the extent to which a series of holistic Japanese language education programs influences JLPT pass rates (Chen, 2024; Hatasa & Watanabe, 2017; Ito, 2022; Tran et al., 2024).

The trend to improve learning effectiveness is becoming increasingly prevalent, with educators becoming more interested in researching ways to enhance student learning outcomes. Research on the effectiveness of methods or instructional models in teaching the Japanese language is well-established and widely conducted (Jiang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023; Liyuan, 2023), but the study examining which language skills and knowledge factors have a primary impact on JLPT success remains a relatively understudied area. However, foreign language learning is a combination of learning to acquire language knowledge and language skills to achieve a level of proficiency (Benito Durán et al., 2022; Japan Foundation, 2017; Kang et al., 2021). If the Japanese language proficiency test, such as the JLPT, is considered a means of assessing language competence and certification, then it is necessary to identify the Japanese language factors that most significantly contribute to passing the test. It is undeniable that compiling and developing a learning syllabus is the most challenging part of planning foreign language learning, especially Japanese language (Shinagawa et al., 2022).

Research examining learning outcomes from a series of relevant course conducted in the classroom on JLPT pass rates can address the research gap regarding the' influence level of variables if a series of dependent variables are tested simultaneously against the independent variable, namely the JLPT pass rates of students. Identifying the variables that exert the most significant influence on JLPT pass rates when tested simultaneously will have beneficial implications for curriculum policy regarding which courses should be emphasized as a foundation for learning to improve educational quality and student JLPT pass rates (Prasetya et al., 2025; Uchihara & Clenton, 2023). This is specific for courses such as *kanji*, *bunpou* (grammar), *dokkai* (reading comprehension), and *choukai* (listening comprehension), which are directly related to the types of test sessions included in the JLPT.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative and predictive correlational design (Charli et al., 2022; Weyant, 2022). The primary objective was to investigate which concurrent impact and academic performance in core Japanese language subjects could predict the outcome of the JLPT and measure its extent. This design is appropriate for the statistical analysis of the relationship between multiple independent variables and a single binary dependent variable, thereby identifying the predictive strength of each component of language learning outcome on a standardized proficiency test measure (Pandey, 2020; Weyant, 2022).

Research Participants

The sample consisted of 60 students from Universitas Negeri Semarang Japanese Language Education Study Program, all of whom took the JLPT in July 2025 held in central

Java. The 60 participants were all students from Universitas Negeri Semarang whom took the JLPT, thus representing the entire population of students from Universitas Negeri Semarang who took the JLPT. The Purposive sampling was employed to acquire a homogeneous data cohort from a standardized curriculum. This sampling strategy was crucial in controlling for instructional variability (Ames et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015), to ensure that the observed predictive relationships reflect genuine cognitive thresholds rather than artifacts of disparate educational backgrounds. The participants were from different academic year cohorts, with their corresponding JLPT test levels as follows: 16 of N5 level test takers were from the first-year student cohort, 24 of N4 level test takers were from the second-year student cohort, 14 of N3 test takers were from the third-year student cohort, and 6 of N2 test takers were from the fourth-year student cohort. Each cohort of test-takers is already studying the Japanese equivalent of the JLPT levels for which they are taking the test.

Instruments

The data was collected through the implementation of a documentation method. The study incorporated four independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables consist of the final course scores of the four core subjects from the previous semester are considered: *Kanji* (漢字), *Bunpou* (文法 - Grammar), *Dokkai* (読解 - Reading Comprehension), and *Choukai* (聴解 - Listening Comprehension). These scores were provided by course lecturers. The dependent variable used was the official result of the July 2025 JLPT, as provided by students, verified by the official JLPT test score, and coded as a binary outcome. The values 0 and 1 are assigned to "failed" and "passed" respectively.

The data for this study were collected from the students' learning outcomes during the odd semester. The decision to utilize data concerning students' learning achievements in the odd semester was made considering the scheduling of the JLPT during the even semester. For the reliability of the students' learning outcome data, the data were acquired directly from the respective lecturers through the university's online system. The respective lecturers in every variable course, such as *Kanji*, implements a team teaching strategy, thereby ensuring uniformity of assessment and score grading. Regarding the respondents' privacy, the respective lecturers who teach the subject and the students were informed of the conditions regarding the confidentiality of their identities and the protection of their data. Subsequently, the lecturers and students were provided with a detailed explanation of the data collection.

Data Analysis

The collected data was then analyzed using binary logistic regression and Structural Equation Modeling by utilizing IBM SPSS and AMOS. The selection of this statistical technique was established due to its optimal performance in predicting the outcome of a binary dependent variable (passing or failing the JLPT) from a set of continuous or ordinal independent variables (course scores). The significance level (alpha) was set at $p<.05$.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Q1 How significant is the concurrent impact of learning outcomes in kanji, bunpou (grammar), dokkai (reading comprehension), and choukai (listening comprehension) in contributing to the JLPT pass rate?

To address this first question, the researchers analyzed the data and interpreted the findings of the binary logistic regression results. The analysis evaluates the collective impact of these four learning outcomes first before determining their individual contributions.

Table 1
Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	28.572[a]	.511	.734

Table 2
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	42.957	4	.001
	Block	42.957	4	.001
	Model	42.957	4	.001

Table 2 shows that the omnibus tests or chi-square model coefficients yielded a highly significant chi-square value ($\chi^2(4) = 42.957$, $p < .001$), providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis. The statistical results indicated that students learning outcome performances in *kanji*, *bunpou, dokkai* and *choukai* is not merely correlated with, but is a significant predictor of their success on the JLPT. These findings contradict the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between academic performance and test success.

Beyond its statistical significance, The Nagelkerke R^2 value of .734 in this model presented in Table 1 demonstrates its strong explanatory power. These statistical findings indicate that the combination of the four competencies variables significantly impacts the probability of passing the JLPT and effectively accounts for approximately 73.4% of the variance in students performance. For a model in educational research, where outcomes are influenced by numerous external factors (e.g., motivation, study habits, test-day anxiety) (Córdova et al., 2023), a model that explains such a large portion of the outcome is exceptionally compelling.

Table 3
Classification Table[a,b]

	Observed		Predicted		
			JLPT_PASS_STATUS		Percentage
			.00	1.00	Correct
Step 0	JLPT_PASS_STAT	.00	0	17	.0
	US	1.00	0	43	100.0
	Overall Percentage				71.7
a. Constant is included in the model.					
b. The cut value is .500					

Table 4
Classification Table[a]

	Observed		Predicted		
			JLPT_PASS_STATUS		Percentage
			.00	1.00	Correct
Step 1	JLPT_PASS_STAT	.00	15	2	88.2
	US	1.00	1	42	97.7
	Overall Percentage				95.0
a. The cut value is .500					

This study statistical model demonstrates an exceptionally high degree of predictive accuracy. The classification in Table 4 shows that this study statistical model accurately predicted 95.0% of cases, a substantial improvement over the baseline prediction percentage of 71.7% shows in the Table 3. Furthermore, the statistical results in Table 4 demonstrate an 88.2% accuracy rate in predicting failures and a 97.7% accuracy rate in predicting JLPT successes. The statistical model's high level of accuracy demonstrates its usefulness in determining

students' likelihood of passing or failing the JLPT. In summary, the four foundational subjects and competencies variables are statistically and practically significant, providing a strong framework for predicting JLPT success. This finding aligns with the principles of a holistic approach to language education and supports the hypothesis that performance in these core areas is associated with passing the JLPT (Alam & Ahmad, 2025; Enferad et al., 2025).

Q2 To what extent does the simultaneous impact of learning outcomes of kanji, bunpou (grammar), dokkai (reading comprehension), and choukai (listening comprehension) and which is the strongest predictor of contributing to JLPT pass rates?

In order to address the second question, the analysis on the Table of Binary logistics, consisting of "variable not in the equation" and "variables in the equation" was done to interpret the simultaneous impact of each variable and presented as follows.

Table 5
Variables not in the Equation

Variables not in the Equation					
			Score	**df**	**Sig.**
Step 0	Variables	*Kanji*	27.984	1	.000
		Bunpou	24.014	1	.000
		Dokkai	22.540	1	.000
		Choukai	21.672	1	.000
	Overall Statistics		32.303	4	.000

Table 5 is generated at Step 0 of the analysis. At this stage, the model contains no predictors; it is a "null model" that only includes the intercept. The four predictor variables (*Kanji*, *Bunpou*, *Dokkai*, and *Choukai*) show a significance level of p <.001. When considered independently, this indicates that each skill has a firm and statistically significant relationship with the likelihood of passing the JLPT. This initial finding confirms that all four areas of study are highly relevant to test success on an individual basis.

Table 6
Variables in the Equation

Variables in the Equation							
		B	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**Sig.**	**Exp(B)**
Step 1[a]	*Kanji*	.525	.257	4.181	1	.041	1.691
	Bunpou	.568	.284	3.997	1	.046	1.765
	Dokkai	.349	.400	.760	1	.383	1.417
	Choukai	.010	.319	.001	1	.974	1.010
	Constant	-119.815	35.047	11.688	1	.001	.000
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: *Kanji, Bunpou, Dokkai, Choukai.*							

The table 6 present a statistical analysis to ascertain the significance of various factors in predicting success on the JLPT test. The variables in the table 6 are generated at Step 1, subsequent to the simultaneous entry of all four predictors into the model and present the final model and assess the contribution of each variable using a Wald test. The primary distinction is that the Wald test assesses the recognizable contribution of each predictor, while statistically controlling for the effects of all other predictors in the model (Kamble et al., 2019). The results indicate that *Bunpo* and *Kanji* retained statistical significance, with p-values of .046 and .041, respectively. In contrast, the effects of *Dokkai* and *Choukai*, with p-values of 0.383 and 0.974 were not statistically significant.

The pronounced discrepancy between these two tables offers the most significant insight of the analysis. This discrepancy, where individually significant variables become non-significant in a combined model can be explained by multicollinearity. Multicollinearity is

defined as the occurrence of interrelated predictor variables (Dalal, 2023; Tsao, 2023). This phenomenon, which is well-documented in the statistical literature, can be attributed to the absorption of its predictive power by the highly correlated and slightly stronger *Kanji* variable. Despite this, the results does not diminish its real-world importance but highlights that *Kanji* and *Bunpou* work together as powerful foundational blocks (Choi & Zhang, 2021).

To formally test the hypothesis that the foundational knowledge of *Kanji* and *Bunpou* influences JLPT success through the applied skills of *Dokkai* and *Choukai*, a series of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) mediation analyses were performed.

Table 7
SEM Analysis of *Dokkai* as a Mediation

Path	B (Estimate)	S.E.	p-value	B (Standardized)
Path a: IV→Mediator				
Kanji (v1)→Dokkai (v4)	0.256	0.09	0.009	0.4
Bunpou (v3)→Dokkai (v4)	0.203	0.088	0.02	0.324
Path b: Mediator → DV				
Dokkai (v4)→JLPT Pass	0.057	0.028	0.127	0.247
Path c': Direct Effect (IV→DV)				
Kanji (v1)→JLPT Pass	0.056	0.02	0.01	0.375
Bunpou (v3)→JLPT Pass	0.03	0.02	0.101	0.207
Indirect Effect (a*b)				
Kanji→Dokkai→JLPT Pass	0.015	0.01	0.071	0.099
Bunpou→Dokkai→JLPT Pass	0.012	0.01	0.081	0.08

Table 8
SEM Analysis of *Choukai* as a Mediation

Path	B (Estimate)	S.E.	p-value	β (Standardized)
Path a: IV → Mediator				
Kanji (v1) → Choukai (v5)	0.354	0.13	0.016	0.444
Bunpou (v3) → Choukai (v5)	0.267	0.116	0.012	0.343
Path b: Mediator → DV				
Choukai (v5) → JLPT Pass	0.032	0.03	0.269	0.174
Path c': Direct Effect (IV → DV)				
Kanji (v1) → JLPT Pass	0.059	0.025	0.02	0.396
Bunpou (v3) → JLPT Pass	0.033	0.022	0.094	0.228
Indirect Effect (a*b)				
Kanji → Choukai → JLPT Pass	0.011	0.013	0.198	0.077
Bunpou→Choukai→JLPT Pass	0.009	0.009	0.173	0.06

Table 7 shows the indirect effect of *Kanji* on JLPT pass status through *Dokkai* was not statistically significant (p = .071). Similarly, the indirect effect of *Bunpou* on JLPT pass status through *Dokkai* was not statistically significant (p = .081). Regarding *Choukai* as a mediator, Table 8 shows the indirect effect of *Kanji* through *Choukai* was not statistically significant (p = .198). Ultimately, the indirect effect of *Bunpou* through *Choukai* was also not statistically significant (p = .173). The non-significant indirect effects from the SEM analysis provide strong evidence against a mediation hypothesis. Instead, the findings support a direct effect model, where foundational knowledge (*Kanji* and *Bunpou*) has a powerful, unmediated impact on JLPT success. These results align with the logistic regression's conclusion that, once test-takers have adequately mastered fundamental competencies (namely *Kanji* and *Bunpou*), the predictive impact of applied skills, such as reading and listening, becomes statistically insignificant.

A thorough grasp of characters (*Kanji*) and grammatical principles (*Bunpou*) is necessary for the development of proficient reading skills (*Dokkai*) and listening skills (*Choukai*). Thus, the model has been engineered to recognize this overlap. In scenarios where all four variables are engaged in explaining the outcome, the model attributes the predictive capability of the

most fundamental skills, namely *Kanji* and *Bunpou.* Once the model has obtained the student's *Bunpou* and *Kanji* scores, the *Dokkai* and *Choukai* scores do not provide sufficient new and unique information to be statistically significant.

Discussion

The Variables not in the Equation in Table 5 confirm that all four skills are essential and individually correlated with success. In addition, the variables in the equation in Table 6 indicate the underlying structure of that success. In a multivariate context, the fundamental knowledge of *Bunpou* and *Kanji* is the most direct statistical driver. The impact of the applied skills, *Dokkai* and *Choukai*, is statistically absorbed by that foundation.

The results of this study provide substantial support for a "building block" model of language proficiency in relation to standardized testing. The structural foundation that arranges words into coherent communication is provided by B*unpou* (grammar), while *Kanji* and associated vocabulary are the essential lexical units. *Kanji* literacy encompasses knowledge of lexical units or semantics, as well as the recognition of *Kanji* writing, including orthographic recognition, and understanding the context in which it is used, along with the ability to connect it to a sentence (Hermalin, 2018). The importance of vocabulary and grammar is underscored by the JLPT's emphasis on these areas to assess test-takers' conversational skills. The test's multiple-choice format also rewards the test-takers' thorough comprehension of these essential concepts (Japan Educational Exchanges and Services, 2009; The Japan Foundation, 2025; Usami, 2012).

The study's findings that *Bunpou* is a powerful predictor for JLPT outcome align with past studies that assert the importance of grammatical knowledge before applied skills. A landmark study on L2 learners revealed that syntactic knowledge was a better indicator of reading comprehension than vocabulary breadth in both high- and low-proficiency learners (Shiotsu & Weir, 2007; Yalin & Wei, 2011). Similarly, a meta-analysis found that L2 reading comprehension was more strongly correlated with L2 grammar and vocabulary knowledge than with vocabulary knowledge (Jeon & Yamashita, 2014). The ability to decode sentence grammar has also been posited as the most critical factor in distinguishing which students pass or fail. Another important concept in compositional models of advanced reading, the integration of lexical knowledge (i.e., *Kanji*) to create meaning, has also been proposed in other studies to be ineffective without the presence of grammatical knowledge (Iwasaki, 2016; Kakihana, 2024; Otsuka & Murai, 2021).

According to Goh (2023) one of the most cognitively demanding tasks for learners and test-takers is understanding a second language (L2) in real-time. Compared to reading, which permits self-paced processing and regression, listening comprehension is challenging due to the continuous need to focus on transient acoustic signals. Listening comprehension is also challenging because learners need to identify and derive a word's meaning solely from its sound. In the context of the JLPT, although test-takers are unable to view *Kanji* during the listening section, a solid understanding of *Kanji* and the language associated with it is necessary for quick word recognition (Hino et al., 2017; Kakihana, 2024).

The lexical database of the brain is established through both written and spoken forms (Masrai, 2020). Therefore, a student who has acquired a wide range of *Kanji*-based vocabulary is more likely to recognize the word even if it was spoken quickly or sounded slightly distorted (Tateba et al., 2025). Having this lexical database has also been empirically shown to reduce the cognitive burden associated with processing novel lexicon in the Japanese language (Kawakami et al., 2001; Lu & Morgan, 2020; Masrai, 2020). Additionally, the large number of homophones (lexemes with phonetic similarities but different semantic interpretations) that make up the Japanese language system distinguishes it from other languages. A comprehensive understanding of the *Kanji* associated with these terms might enable quicker and more confident interpretation, even though context usually helps to explain the intended meaning.

Furthermore, *Bunpou* plays a more significant role in listening comprehension than in textual analysis and reading comprehension because spoken language requires real-time processing (Sadiqzade, 2024). During the JPLT, test-takers cannot review a sentence again during the listening section of the exam. Thus, test takers need to have a solid understanding of Japanese *Bunpou* to anticipate a statement's syntactical structure as it is being expressed (Mitsugi, 2017). The interpretation of a Japanese phrase is also significantly influenced by basic *Bunpou* elements, including syntax and grammatical particles, such that the meaning of a statement can be entirely changed by misinterpreting a single component (Cai & Min, 2024). Thus, a test-taker who has mastered *Bunpou* would be better able to understand the meaning in real-time during the listening section of the exam .

Nevertheless, the phenomenon mentioned above cannot be simplified into a simple binary classification. The dynamic nature of the interaction between *Kanji, Bunpou, Dokkai*, and *Choukai* is shaped by important factors, including the skill levels of the learners and the specific approaches taken to assess understanding and knowledge. The results of this study also support an often inconclusive discourse about the relative significance of syntactic and lexical information in second language reading and listening studies.

Although *Dokkai* and *Choukai* scores in this study were found not to be statistically significant for predicting JLPT success, it is still important to acknowledge the relevance of these skills. The study's findings also indicate that *Kanji* and *Bunpou* scores, which are the more fundamental variables in this model, can statistically represent *Dokkai* and *Choukai's* predictive capabilities. Therefore, without a strong foundation in *Bunpou* and *Kanji*, it is almost impossible to obtain a good reading comprehension score. The results of this study are supported by other empirical research (Iwasaki, 2016; Otsuka & Murai, 2021), which highlights the fact that *Kanji* proficiency and *Bunpou* knowledge form the foundation for higher-level language proficiency.

The influence of Bunpou and Kanji on the JLPT is more direct. In contrast, the impact of *Dokkai* and *Choukai* is likely mediated through *Bunpou* and *Kanji*. The results of this study also provide strong evidence in favour of the foundational model, or building blocks, of Japanese language proficiency put forth in the discussion. Overall, this study supports the "JF Standard tree" metaphor (Japan Foundation, 2017), and demonstrates how the foundational elements of language learning (namely *Kanji* and *Bunpou*) have a direct and substantial influence on JLPT performance.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that *Kanji* and *Bunpou* performance is the most significant and direct predictor of JLPT pass rates among the sampled Indonesian university students. Despite being integral components of communicative competence, *Dokkai* (reading) and *Choukai* (hearing) have a lower predictive value than *Bunpou* (grammar) and *Kanji* (vocabulary). The results support the hierarchical theory of language acquisition in which prior mastery of language fundamentals is essential for applied skills. The JF Standard Tree architecture, which emphasizes the fundamental role of language knowledge as a foundation for enabling higher-order language functions, is similarly consistent with the results. Additionally, the study advances the linguistic threshold theory by proposing a dual-threshold model, where successful language comprehension and application require the accomplishment of both lexical (*Kanji*) and syntactic (*Bunpou*) skills.

Furthermore, the pedagogical implications of this study are substantial. In curriculum designed for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), teachers are required to prioritize the explicit and sustained development of grammatical and lexical proficiency as the core and central pillars of instruction, particularly in the early and intermediate stages of language learning, and address difficulties in reading and listening. Instead of addressing and diagnosing reading and listening difficulties in the Japanese language separately, teachers should conduct

a diagnostic examination, as these issues may be caused by weak foundational knowledge rather than skill-specific weaknesses. This perspective questions an over-reliance on task-based or communicative methods that, in the context of JLPT, undervalue form-focused training. Thus, learners who want to perform well on high-stakes proficiency tests, such as the JLPT, and gain the ability to use the language in communicative practice will most likely benefit from a balanced pedagogy that combines communicative practice with rigorous grammar and *Kanji* instruction. Educators can also consider a "foundation-first" syllabus structure through systematic weekly scheduling, emphasizing knowledge and input activities on the earliest days of the week, and productive skills in the latter part of the week to ensure long-term retention in long-term memory.

Since this study was conducted in a Japanese language program at a higher education setting, future studies should be conducted in a range of educational settings, such as Japanese language schools and vocational training institutions, to collect more comprehensive empirical data and improve theoretical frameworks related to improving Japanese language competency. In addition, investigating whether the relative importance of these core competencies shifts across different proficiency levels would also be a valuable contribution to the field.

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