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**Increasing Vocabulary to Enhance Japanese Language Competence in  
Mexican Students**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES  
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LICENCIATURA EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction to the problem**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Vocabulary is an essential tool to learn and enhance language competence and , therefore, it is important to know enough vocabulary to achieve an effective and meaningful communication with foreign people or advance second language learners. Without vocabulary knowledge, learners cannot express their ideas or feelings, and it is essential to help learners to understand texts, conversations, etc.

Tovar (2016) mentions that learners are more confident to understand and interpret the meaning of some unknown words if they have more frequent exposure to vocabulary. Thus, learning novel words by being in contact with them makes possible the vocabulary improvement, In addition, Tovar (2016) says that by knowing the appropriate vocabulary, language learners can communicate with others, even though they do not have enough grammar structure knowledge. This means that it does not matter if students do not know those complex structures from the foreign language, the important thing in communication is having the correct words to tell what you want to say, your ideas, and how you are feeling. Thence, the grammar structure is just a plus when language learners try to communicate, indicating that words are a fundamental part of learning a new language just because it is one of the main components to construct sentences. The knowledge of vocabulary could be taken as a strong indicator for having successful communication in language.

Vocabulary is necessary to construct a powerful foundation for any language learner, which makes them able to recognize words including their reading form, and their meanings. Fortes (2007) argues that the comprehension and use of the language depends on the amount of vocabulary known to express without difficulties. Then, vocabulary size demonstrates the

student's ability to manage or dominate the foreign language, and limited vocabulary is a big obstacle students must deal with.

However, vocabulary study has been undervalued during the language learning process, and it does not receive the attention it deserves, but it can turn different when the students realize about what they know is not enough. If students simply study more words, it is expected that they will achieve the language level.

Therefore, and as it was mentioned, vocabulary is fundamental and essential to improve foreign language competence. And more importantly, by already realizing this fact is relevant, it would be a good starting point to study unfamiliar words when learning new languages like Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or any other. Naturally, every language has its complexity, but in relation with Japanese (which this thesis is focused on), it is a completely new world because its 3 types of writing (hiragana, katakana, and kanji). Thereby, most of the Japanese language learners tend to look for study alternatives to learn vocabulary when they are overdue in highest levels. But it is not too late to find the correct activities that could adjust to the students' needs to study vocabulary and improve their language competence.

## **2.0 Statement of the Problem**

LEI students from 4 to 6 level in CELE (Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras) are having problems in their Japanese language competence due to a lack of vocabulary. It is evident that learning the third language vocabulary usually is a big challenge for them, even more, for a new completely unknown language like Japanese, which includes that unfamiliar writing way, and it tends more difficult to learn.

One of the problems that most language learners concern is that they cannot remember what most words mean. Lack of vocabulary is a serious obstacle to develop an adequate or an

expected language proficiency; this can cause students feel stagnancy and dubiety during the language learning process. In addition, it is observable in some learners who do not know how to answer the teacher's questions or how to participate in the activity that requires the creation of a single short sentence, even if it does not demand too much effort but, unfortunately, students tend to fail because of the lack of vocabulary.

For example, Japanese is complex due to its writing, and its hundreds of kanjis, including their reading ways. As Rose (2019) states, standard Japanese is rooted within an independent language family of Japonic languages. As such it does not share historical linguistic origins with other world languages, like Indo-European languages do. Thus, Japanese is fundamentally different from other languages, especially in its linguistic, phonological, syntactical and morphological dimensions. That is why students must memorize to communicate or perform, although grammar structure is not complex.

On the other hand, there would be plenty of resources that language learners can use to study novel words like dictionaries, translators, etc., but there are no techniques, guides or steps, activities, or strategies, to do it effectively. At the end, most of those language students will not know how to continue their language study; they will decide to quit the language courses to find new options, but it would not be the correct or alternative answer because it will appear a new tedious cycle of not knowing how to study vocabulary even if students decide to start over again with a new foreign language.

### **3.0 Justification**

The students' interest in learning different languages has been increased due to different individual or contextual factors and reasons. Sometimes, it is obligatory to learn and certify a third language, during the time they are studying the LEI bachelor in the language's faculty, as a

requirement to graduate from the college with a proficient level (N5 at least), which is an equivalent to A2 in CEFR. Therefore, it is important to maintain a self-study, in addition to CELE's courses, to increase their language competence.

A major knowledge of vocabulary helps language learners to understand the lessons they are about to learn. Secondly, students would communicate with the others without all those issues they had before. It is obvious that with the adequate amount of vocabulary, learners are able to express themselves in more precise ways. Therefore, advanced vocabulary knowledge will create a wide road for a great academic performance and opportunities to find more jobs, even if students want to travel to Japan in the future for an academic exchange or just for vacations, it would be amazingly useful to know how to communicate with Japanese people.

#### **4.0 General Objective**

To investigate strategies or activities, experiences, perceptions, as a guide to study Japanese language vocabulary for LEI students to increase and enhance their language competence.

#### **5.0 Research Question**

- What are the Japanese students' vocabulary study difficulties they have to deal with?
- Which activities are used by Japanese students to support vocabulary study and practice?
- What are the most noticeable students' achievement in their Japanese studying process?

#### **6.0 Methodology**

Seen from Qualitative perspective, and based on Social Constructivism paradigm, this research is carried out with the Case Study methodology. Accordingly, Qualitative Research oversees the study of human phenomena, which can include individuals, societies, and cultures, to get people's opinions or perceptions. Besides, social constructivism studies something that

researchers are living with to obtain a general understanding of situations, to know stakeholder perspectives and the complexity of a whole. And, Case Study, as its name indicates, is used to study a particular case or research problem. It is applicable to phenomena in the real world and when not much information is known about the phenomenon or to add strength to what is already known.

## **7.0 Significance of the Study**

The interest in studying Eastern Asia languages, such as Japanese, is an increasing tendency worldwide. Learning an entirely different language implicates horizon expansions in professional development and performance leading to great opportunities. It is a vital necessity nowadays. Japanese is one of the greatest languages in the world, being the 3<sup>rd</sup> most used language on the internet. Furthermore, Japan is the second biggest economy in the world, which clearly shows the vitality of learning their language, but it is uncommon in western continents. Recently, the Japanese language has been gaining a significant impact in Mexico due to its cultural influence on the new generations. Therefore, this study is oriented to support Mexican students to gain confidence, strengthen their Japanese language competence, and no longer fear studying the language anymore. Besides, the Japanese language is not that common in Mexico so, talking about teaching aspects, this research pretends to guide professionals about how to learn and teach the language focusing in vocabulary learning. There are not enough Japanese language teachers because it is a complex language. Therefore, Language Teaching Bachelor will have an advantage within their enforcement when teaching or taking any other business work opportunity. Thereafter, thanks to vocabulary, language students will perform in other Asian countries where the language is spoken too, and possibly collaborate with transnational companies in the future. Rose, et al. (2021) explain that Japanese language was introduced to many universities to improve academic,

cultural and economic exchanges. Subsequently, interest in Japanese culture such as food, manga, goods, household products and cars has been growing. This cultural aspect is related to an integrative orientation and professional factor such as good career prospects or fulfilling the university course requirement.

### **8.0 Key terms**

Vocabulary learning, vocabulary learning activities, second language learning, second language improvement.

- Vocabulary learning is the process of learning foreign language words
- Vocabulary learning activities are those that facilitate the process of studying words like apps; watching movies, TV, etc.; memory games, flashcards or using a dictionary.
- Second language learning refers to a nonnative language of the environment which a learner is living in and implies that learner resides in a context where the language learning is spoken.
- Second language improvement refers to the human capacity to perform other than the first language once it has been learned.

## Chapter II. Contextual theoretical framework

### 2.0 Introduction to the chapter

The intention of this chapter is to explain each vital component and concept of this research project, including an overview of the Japanese language vocabulary explanation to understand why it requires special attention to learn vocabulary, as well as the difficulty aspects of the language, a study of the preferred vocabulary learning strategies and methods, and the factors that affect the vocabulary learning process.

### 2.1 Japanese vocabulary categories

This part of the chapter pretends to break down the vocabulary categories mentioned in this investigation (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions) to give a sample of the Japanese words' complexity, and to comprehend why it is important for Japanese language learners to focus on this part of the language to do not give up their learning in the future.

#### 2.1.1 Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji

First, before learning Japanese language vocabulary, it is essential to know and understand that the language has three types of writing ways called: *Hiragana*, *Katakana* and *Kanji*. The first two are known as “Japanese syllabaries”, a collection of 46 syllables each one, arranged and read in the traditional way, top-down and right-left:

**Table 1.** *Hiragana syllabary*

ん	わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ
	り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い	
	る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う	
	れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え	
	を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	お

Source: own creation

**Table 2.** *Katakana syllabary*

ン	ワ	ラ	ヤ	マ	ハ	ナ	タ	サ	カ	ア
		リ		ミ	ヒ	ニ	チ	シ	キ	イ
		ル	ユ	ム	フ	ヌ	ツ	ス	ク	ウ
		レ		メ	ヘ	ネ	テ	セ	ケ	エ
	ヲ	ロ	ヨ	モ	ホ	ノ	ト	ソ	コ	オ

Source: Own creation

Transcribing these two syllabaries into *romaji* or western writing, the two tables would sound as follows:

**Table 3.** *Syllabaries pronunciation.*

<b>n</b>	<b>wa</b>	<b>ra</b>	<b>ya</b>	<b>ma</b>	<b>ha</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>ta</b>	<b>sa</b>	<b>ka</b>	<b>a</b>
		<b>ri</b>		<b>mi</b>	<b>hi</b>	<b>ni</b>	<b>chi</b>	<b>shi</b>	<b>ki</b>	<b>i</b>
		<b>ru</b>	<b>yu</b>	<b>mu</b>	<b>fu</b>	<b>nu</b>	<b>tsu</b>	<b>su</b>	<b>ku</b>	<b>u</b>
		<b>re</b>		<b>me</b>	<b>he</b>	<b>ne</b>	<b>te</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>ke</b>	<b>e</b>
<b>(w)o</b>	<b>ro</b>	<b>yo</b>		<b>mo</b>	<b>ho</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>so</b>	<b>ko</b>	<b>o</b>

*Source:* own creation

As it is noticeable, the tables arranged in columnar order from left to right: あ-column, か-column, さ-column, and so forth. Also, there are vertical rows arrangement in which the vowel letters (あ、い、う、え、お) have their own row: あ, か, さ, た, な, は, ま, and so on.

Normally, as it is shown in *Minna no Nihongo* by Takahashi & Nakanishi (2012) before starting learning the Japanese language, it is suggested to commence learning Hiragana, then Katakana, and then Kanji, in complexity order because Japanese will become easier to study after having learned those syllabaries, which, at the same time, will help students to read Kanji. Hiragana is used for *kana* suffixes following a kanji root, referring to nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Most of the time, it is used for beginners to write no kanji words to learn the language. Katakana is used to write foreign places, words, and names, for example: ミルク, which means *milk*. Most of the words written in Katakana are taken from English language, like the mentioned word. Some other examples:

**Table 4.** *Use of katakana writing*

Japanese	Translation
ビデオ	Video
ラジオ	Television
スプーン	Spoon
バスケットボール	Basketball

*Source:* own creation

After learning these two syllabaries, it would be easier for students to moving on with the language. It is vital, fundamental and, thus learners will be able to read and write words, then phrases, and then sentences subsequently. Otherwise, Huan (2019) says that it is important to know that Kanji are ideographic characters adopted from the Chinese language (without necessarily maintaining the same meanings), which are used for conceptual words of adjectives, nouns, verbs, and for Japanese proper names. These are some examples of kanji:

**Table 5.** *Kanjis of Adjectives, Nouns, Verbs, and Japanese Proper Names*

Type of Word	Kanji	Hiragana	Translation
Noun	魚	さかな	Fish
Noun	肉	にく	Meat
Noun	卵	たまご	Egg
Verb	行きます	いきます	Go
Verb	飲みます	のみます	Drink
Adjective	晴れ	はれ	Sunny
Adjective	新し	あたらし	New
Japanese name	山田 さん	やまだ さん	—

Source: own creation

Now, with this basis, it is time to go to the next part in which exist Japanese variation sounds. First, some of these columns (か, さ, た and は) have ‘voice variants’, where can be given a diacritic mark called ‘濁点[だくてん]’, and there is one additional for は+°, it is called ‘半濁点[はんだくてん]’, to indicate they are voiced differently, changing their pronunciation:

**Table 6.** *Voice variants from Hiragana and Katakana syllabaries.*

か	(ga) が	ガ	(gi) ぎ	ギ	(gu) ぐ	グ	(ge) げ	ゲ	(go) ご	ゴ
さ	(za) ざ	ザ	(ji) じ	ジ	(zu) ず	ズ	(ze) ぜ	ゼ	(zo) ぞ	ゾ
た	(da) だ	ダ	(ti) ぢ	ヂ	(tu) づ	ヅ	(de) で	デ	(do) ど	ド
は	(ba) ば	バ	(bi) び	ビ	(bu) ぶ	ブ	(be) べ	ベ	(bo) ぼ	ボ
は	(pa) ぱ	パ	(pi) ぴ	ピ	(pu) ぷ	プ	(pe) ぺ	ペ	(po) ぽ	ポ

Source: own creation

Secondly, to lengthen the sound of the basic vowel sounds (あ,い,う,え,お), including Katakana, they simply double their writing form:

**Table 7.** *Vocal variations sound*

	Hiragana	Sound	Katakana	
あ	ああ	aa	アー	ア
い	いい	ii	イー	イ
う	うう	uu	ウー	ウ
え	ええ, えい	ee	エー	エ
お	おお, おう	oo	オー	オ

*Source:* own creation

These Hiragana letters together allow the sound to be lengthened to give a different use or meaning in a word. It is the same sound twice as long. Secondly, this doubling occurs on consonant syllable sounds too. For instance, as an example, vowel sound for か -column looks and would sound like follows:

**Table 8.** *Consonant variation sounds sample.*

Hiragana	Sound	Katakana
かあ	kaa	カー
きい	kii	キー
くう	kuu	クー
けえ, けい	kee	ケー
こお, こう	koo	コー

*Source:* own creation

In addition, there are some other long sounds called ‘glades,’ which include a half height use of や, ゆ, よ/ ヤ, ュ, ヨ syllables after any other consonant syllable as it is illustrated in the following table:

**Table 9.** *Glade sounds within the Japanese Language.*

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>Writing</i>
(kya)	きゃ キヤ	(kyu)	きゅ キユ	(kyo)	きょ キョ
(sha)	しゃ シヤ	(shu)	しゅ シュ	(sho)	しょ ショ
(cha)	ちゃ チャ	(chu)	ちゅ チュ	(cho)	ちょ チョ
(nya)	にゃ ニヤ	(nyu)	にゅ ニユ	(nyo)	にょ ニョ
(hya)	ひゃ ヒヤ	(hyu)	ひゅ ヒユ	(hyo)	ひょ ヒョ
(mya)	みゃ ミヤ	(myu)	みゅ ミユ	(myo)	みょ ミョ
(rya)	りゃ リヤ	(ryu)	りゅ リユ	(ryo)	りょ リョ
(gya)	ぎゃ ギヤ	(gyu)	ぎゅ ギユ	(gyo)	ぎょ ギョ
(ja)	じゃ ジャ	(ju)	じゅ ジュ	(jo)	じょ ジョ
(bya)	びゃ ビヤ	(byu)	びゅ ビユ	(byo)	びょ ビョ
(pya)	ぴゃ ピヤ	(pyu)	ぴゅ ピユ	(pyo)	ぴょ ピョ

*Source:* own creation

Thus, there are 33 more written and voiced variations of the writing system to lengthen the use of the language. For example, the words below are written with different ‘glade’ sounds to increase the Japanese language vocabulary:

**Table 10.** *Words with glade sound*

<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
ぎゅうにゅう	Milk
ジュス	Juice
しゃしん	Photograph

*Source:* own creation

Finally, there is a ‘double consonant sound,’ which shows that a particular consonant has a short pause before it is pronounced. The doubling is represented by a distinctive character: っ (or

ツ in Katakana cases) in a half height to indicate the sound. Here are some examples to differentiate

this ツ pause use from the ツ syllable:

**Table 11.** *Small tsu (ツ) double consonant sound examples.*

Small ツ	Pronunciation	Meaning
が <u>ツ</u> こう (学校)	Gakkou	School
き <u>ツ</u> ふ (切符)	Kippu	Ticket (public transport)
サ <u>ツ</u> カー	Sakkaa	Football

*Source:* own creation

**Table 12.** *Syllable tsu (ツ) use examples.*

Normal ツ	Pronunciation	Meaning
うけ <u>ツ</u> け (受付)	Uketsuke	Reception
「お」ま <u>ツ</u> り (「お」祭り)	[o]matsuri	Festival
スポーツ せんしゅ (選手)	Supootsu senshu	Athlete

*Source:* own creation

As it is observable, all these syllabaries and sound variation tables are enough to start learning new vocabulary to finally write or read the first Japanese language sentences. Learning vocabulary (Nouns, adjectives, verbs, and etcetera) will not be a problem for beginner students, once Japanese language students know and are familiarized with Hiragana and Katakana syllabaries. Therefore, they would be able to learn *Kanji* by now.

Kanji is the most complex writing in Japanese language due to, in many cases, one of those could have multitude of pronunciations depending on which words the kanji is being used for. For example: 日曜日 (にちようび), which means “Sunday”. Even, this simple kanji 日 has diverse ways of being read:

**Table 13.** *Ways of reading a kanji example*

日	Reading	Meanings
1.	にち	1. Day
2.	じつ	2. Sun
3.	ひ	3. Days' counter
4.	か	

These are just some examples. There would be even more if students were advanced.

*Source:* own creation

This language utilizes its three different writing system (two syllabaries: *katakana* y *hiragana*, and the *Kanji* system for concepts), in which the last one can magnify the problem by the fact that a single *Kanji* could be pronounced in five different ways depending upon what is being described and depending upon what kanji appears in combination with hiragana in order to create a word. There exist thousands of ideographs inside Japanese language with their respective meanings. This could be complex to learn at first, but when students are studying with a good balance of subjects, rhythm, and patience, it would be easier to achieve their goals.

Based on Hanzi Chinese writing, Japan has developed its own writing system called Kanji. These Kanjis represent practical ideographic characters used for conceptual words, this normally includes adjectives, nouns, verbs, and Japanese proper names. Now, in addition to the previous information, it is important to comprehend more about this language by going and exploring deeply in its Kanji complexity, for example:

- “Easy Kanji”: 木: き (common reading) which represents a tree or wood.
- “Difficult Kanji” (Including the 木 below): 葉 (Leaf)

By using the same kanji of the tree/wood below others gives a complete unfamiliar -but related- word meaning. It is a necessary process to assume and learn when you are a Japanese

language beginner' student. It is common to see a single easy kanji accompanied by others to form a completely new concept, which in this case means “leaf” of a tree. One Kanji like 木 implies a few strokes, but the new one “葉” implies more strokes learned by heart. Now, imagine that you must learn hundreds or even thousands (if you are an advanced student) of Kanji just to reach the first level's certifications (N5 and N4).

### 2.1.2 Japanese nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions

Before talking about the main topic, it is important for students know that in Japanese exist some kind of “advantages”. To mention one: it is rare to see plural in the vocabulary because it can be counted as both, plural and singular. Vocabulary seen in *Minna no Nihongo* by Takanashi and Nakanishi (2012):

**Table 14.** *Plural/Singular Vocabulary.*

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
卵 (たまご)	(the) Egg/eggs	(el) huevo/(los) huevos
友達 (ともだち)	(the) Friend/Friends	(el/la) amigo(a)/(los/las) amigos(as)
学生 (がくせい)	(the) Student/Students	(el/la) estudiante/(los/las) estudiantes
車 (くるま)	(the) Car/Cars	(el) auto/(los) autos

Source: own creation

**2.1.2.1 Japanese Nouns.** According to Kamermans (2010), nouns are words used to name “something”; places, objects, living beings, etc. Also, he mentions an important phrase that is fun and helpful at the same time: ...“if you can say it's something else, it's a noun” (p.33). Some English language examples about what he is referring are mentioned below:

1. “The table is large”
2. “Texas is a big city”
3. “Happiness came after the war”

4. “Hunger lasted a long time in ...”

What the author wants to say with his upper phrase is that some of the underlined words are known as “adjectives” too, but, in another written form (with a suffix added). Thus, for obvious reasons those words tend to change their use:

**Table 15.** *English vocabulary: Adjectives to Nouns examples.*

Adjective	Noun
Happy	Happiness
Hungry	Hunger

Source: own creation

According to Oxford Japanese dictionary by Bunt (2003), it is occurring the same thing with Japanese adjectives:

**Table 16.** *Japanese vocabulary: Adjectives to Nouns examples*

Adjective	Meaning	Noun	Meaning
おおきい (大きい)	<i>Big</i>	おおきさ	<i>Size</i>
おもい (重い)	<i>Heavy</i>	おもさ	<i>Weight</i>
ひろい (広い)	<i>Wide</i>	ひろさ	<i>Width/Scale</i>
かなしい (悲しい)	<i>Sad</i>	かなしさ	<i>Sadness</i>
あまい (甘い)	<i>Sweet</i>	あまみ	<i>Sweetness</i>
くるしい (苦しい)	<i>Painful</i>	くるしみ	<i>Pain</i>

Source: own creation

This kind of change, to make a comparison, is also occurring with some words where English language beginner students tend to get confused. These words would seem like if those were verbs, but they are not, those “words,” which have -ing ending, are nouns. For example, the following sentences communicate different things:

**Table 17.** *English verbs which turn to nouns adding -ing ending examples.*

Verb	Noun
I <i>am swimming</i> twice a week for health.	I love <i>swimming</i> twice a week for health.

Source: own creation

To be more practical, for Japanese language, consulting the Oxford Japanese dictionary by Bunt (2003) happens a comparable situation:

**Table 18.** Japanese verbs which turn to nouns adding the *い* vowel.

Verb	Meaning	Noun	Meaning
かえる	To return	かえり	Return/Homecoming
このむ	To like/To prefer	このみ	Preference
おわる	To finish	おわり	Conclusion/Finish

Source: own creation

Then, in a few words, a noun is a word which names people, places, or things; including names of abstract qualities and emotions. These comparisons were necessary to understand deeper the gender phenomenon. In this case, Japanese nouns, as it was mentioned before, do not have gender like feminine, masculine or neutron, instead it is figured out by context:

**Table 19.** Vocabulary: gender comparison with another language.

Japanese	English	Spanish
テレサちゃん は <u>スポーツ</u> <u>せんしゅ</u> です。	Miss Teresa is an <u>athlete</u> .	La señorita Teresa es una <u>atleta</u> .

Source: own creation

**2.1.2.2 Japanese Verbs.** According to Bunt (2003) a verb is a word used for expressing or describing an action, a process, or a state of affair. Resembling to English language verbs, Japanese verbs do not change their forms based on person, gender, or number, those only tend to change their forms just to demonstrate formality in a speech (plain or polite), to express negative or affirmative, tense (past or non-past) and some other grammatical variations (*stem* forms) with the root still in there. Plain form is also known as informal form used to talk with friends, family, or people you know enough (people whom you have a lot of confidence). In this case, the beginner student needs to be careful about who is talking with. That is why formal or polite forms exist, this form expresses formality and respect to others.

Informal Japanese usually uses their short verb form (*dictionary, nai, and etcetera*). Otherwise, polite form uses the longer structure, adding at the end the *-ます* or any other variation. Independently of that it is important to know the essential verb *です* (*desu*).

**2.1.2.2.1 Copular verb *です*.** Sato (2014) mentions that *です* is used for expressing the “to be” or “to be equal” to show the identity or the state of things and people. This verb is the most used for Japanese language beginner students when started learning it. *です* is essential to create the first sentences. Usually accompanied by a noun. These are the four polite *です* forms:

**Table 20.** *Desu (です) ending conjugation.*

<i>Affirmative non-past</i>	<i>Negative non-past</i>
です	でした
<i>Affirmative past</i>	<i>Negative past</i>
じゃありません	じゃありませんでした

*Source:* own creation

- さかな です (is a fish/are fishes)
- さかな でした (is not a fish/are not fishes)
- さかな じゃありません (was a fish/were fishes)
- さかな じゃありませんでした (was not a fish/were not fishes)

**2.1.2.2.2 Masu (ます) form.** It is the polite version of the dictionary form. These following verb forms are what a Japanese language beginner student needs to learn at first because it is the best way of learning a verb. For example: あそびます (Will play/ to play/ to visit).

Furthermore, something called *stem* form occurs with this ending form. Usually the last syllable of this verb form changes to express the tense. It is important to remember that future tense is not exactly reflected in written or spoken competence because it is inferred with the present form. Accordingly, this change can reflect the non-past affirmative form or essential form, the negative form, the past form, and the past negative form of the verbs:

**Table 21.** *ます* tenses.

<i>Affirmative form</i>	<i>Negative form</i>
いきます (To go)	いきません (do not go)
<i>Past form</i>	<i>Past negative form</i>
いきました (went)	いきませんでした (did not go)

*Source:* own creation

### 2.1.2.2.3 Other Forms of the verbs.

1. **Te (て) form:** This form ends in て or っ form (another *stem*). To accomplish this form, it is necessary to follow some rules. Starting with a verb in its ます form, that ending will be missed out and replaced with the て. To make this change, it is important to know the three distinct groups of verbs (1, 2, and 3), being careful with those verbs exceptions which could belong to another group. To help students there is a table to guide them with these changes. It will be applied like a formula, or simply memorizing the endings. E.g.:

Table 22. *Te (て) verb form*

Verb <i>ます</i> to <i>て</i> form	
Group 1 かきます > かいて *いきます > 行って いそぎます > いそいで  のみます > のんで よびます > よんで  とります > とって あいます > あって まちます > まって けします > けして	Group 2 たべます > たべて ねます > ねて  *みます > みて *います > いて *おきます > おきて *かります > かりて
	Group 3 します > して きます > きて

Source: own creation

2. **Dictionary (じしよ) form:** It is called dictionary form (another *stem*) because it is the verb form used in dictionaries, and it is the informal equivalent of the *ます* form. The dictionary form usually ends in the vowel “u”. For example:

あそぶ – Will, To play (*usually used for games*)/ Will, To visit.

3. **Nai (ない) form:** It is the informal non-past negative form (of dictionary form). In this form all the verbs end with *ない*. This *ない* form verbs are also changing their syllable ending for the “a” vowel and then add the *nai*. An example with the upper verb:

あそばない – Will, do, does not play/visit.

4. **Ta (た) form:** This is the informal past affirmative form and it ends in た or だ. It is easy to use if you know the applied rules for て form (just by replacing the て or で).

あそんだ — Played, visited.

5. **Nakatta (なかった) form:** This is the informal past negative form. It takes the ない form as a guide (removing the い) with a different ending; なかった.

あそばなかった — did not play/ did not visit.

**Table 23.** *Informal conjugation of the verbs.*

Example s	(ます) form	(じしょ) form	(ない) form	(た) form	(なかった) form	Meaning
Group 1	かえり <u>ます</u>	かえる	かえらない	かえた	かえらなかつた	To return, to go back [home], to come back.
Group 2	おし <u>え</u> ます	おしえる	おしえない	おしえた	おしえなかつた	To teach, to educate, to instruct, to give [directions]
					かりなかつた	To borrow
Group 3	か <u>り</u> ます	かりる	かりない	かりた		
	し <u>ま</u> す	する	しない	した	しなかつた	To do
	き <u>ま</u> す	くる	こない	きた	こなかつた	To come

Source: own creation

- 2.1.2.2.3 **Irregular verbs.** There are irregular verbs in Japanese but, for beginner students, this are the three most common irregular verbs:

**Table 24.** *Common irregular verbs.*

Verb in じしょ form	Verb in ます form	Verb in ない form
くる (come)	きます	こない
する (do)	します	しない
ある (exist)	あります	ない

Source: own creation

Regularly, to express the plain/informal form of the *です*, as an irregular verb, it will be applied as it is expressed in table below:

**Table 25.** *Desu (です) informal conjugation.*

<i>Affirmative non-past</i>	<i>Negative non-past</i>
だ	じゃない
<i>Affirmative past</i>	<i>Negative past</i>
だった	じゃなかった

Source: own creation

**2.1.2.3 Japanese adjectives.** According to Bunt (2003), an adjective is a word that can come before or after a noun, adding extra information such as: pretty, big, small. Therefore, an adjective is a word that describes and offers more information or detail about a noun. In Japanese language adjectives are divided into two types of adjectives: the “*い*” (*i*) group and the “*な*” (*na*) group. *I*-adjectives always end with *i*, and *NA*-adjectives always end with *na*.

**2.1.2.3.1 *い*-adjectives.** These adjectives are called ‘*い* adjectives’ because their dictionary form ends with the hiragana “*i*” syllable. When an adjective *い* is written at the end of a sentence, it can be followed by *です* to be politer. Also, it can include the particles *よ* and *ね* at the end to give a new sense or feeling. Otherwise, these types of adjectives do not change their form if it is followed by *です* verb:

**Table 26.** *Formal and informal sentences examples*

<i>Polite</i>	いぬは <u>ちいさい</u> です	The dog is small
	いぬは <u>ちいさい</u> ですね	The dog is small, isn't it?
<i>Plain</i>	いぬは <u>ちいさい</u>	The dog is small
	いぬは <u>ちいさい</u> ね	The dog is small, isn't it?

Source: own creation

い adjectives only change their endings to indicate a negative, past, or past negative meaning. In this case, the part of the word before the い does not change:

**Table 27.** い adjectives conjugation.

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past- Negative</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
つめたい	つめたくない (not cold)	つめたかった (was cold)	つめたくなかった (was not cold)	Cold
ふるい	ふるくない (not old)	ふるかった (was old)	ふるくなかった (was not old)	Old
たかい	たかくない (not expensive)	たかかった (was expensive)	たかくなかった (was not expensive)	Expensive
よい	よくない (not good)	よかった (was good)	よくなかった (was not good)	Good

Source: own creation

(よい adjective has an alternative form: いい, with “good” as its meaning, and all its forms are derived from よい).

**2.1.2.3.2 な Na-adjectives.** These type of adjectives are called “な adjectives” because they need this additional な at the end, and it works as a particle that tends to disappear because this na syllable is not found inside dictionaries. That can confuse the learner, for that reason students might be careful when learning these words. Thus, these adjectives can be found with the な in brackets but now always: にぎやか [な] (crowded).

If *Na* adjectives are at the end of the sentence, they do not need the な, but what they do need to add is the です (*polite*) or だ (*plain*) at the end: かさは べんり です (The umbrella is practical). Some な adjectives end in い but those are not い adjectives, such as: きれい and ゆうめい. な adjectives do not change its written form but the です or だ is conjugated:

**Table 28.** な adjectives conjugations

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past-Negative</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
べんり[な]	べんり <u>じゃ(では)</u> <u>ありません</u> (not practical)	べんり <u>でした</u> (was practical)	べんり <u>では</u> <u>ありませんでした</u> (was not practical)	Practical
しつか[な]	しつか <u>じゃ(では)</u> <u>ありません</u> (not quiet)	しつか <u>でした</u> (was quiet)	しつか <u>では</u> <u>ありませんでした</u> (was not quiet)	Quiet
ハンサム[な]	ハンサム <u>じゃ</u> <u>(では)ありません</u> (not handsome)	ハンサム <u>でした</u> (was handsome)	ハンサム <u>では</u> <u>ありませんでした</u> (was not handsome)	Handsome
きれい[な]	きれい <u>じゃ(では)</u> <u>ありません</u> (not pretty/clean)	きれい <u>でした</u> (was pretty/clean)	きれい <u>では</u> <u>ありませんでした</u> (was not pretty/clean)	Pretty/Clean
ゆうめい[な]	ゆうめい <u>じゃ (では)</u> <u>ありません</u> (not famous)	ゆうめい <u>でした</u> (was famous)	ゆうめい <u>では</u> <u>ありませんでした</u> (was not famous)	Famous

Source: own creation

**2.1.2.4 Japanese adverbs.** Once students have already learned Japanese sentence structure, they can add more descriptions by using words like “quickly” and “always.” There are adverbs of

manner, degree, frequency, level of certainty, and amount. Additionally, (い) adjectives can be treated as adverbs by replacing い with く, and (な) adjectives by adding に instead of な. Adverbs can modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Japanese adverbs can be placed anywhere if they appear before verbs. Adverbs that modify adjectives and other adverbs usually appear immediately before the word they are modifying.

**2.1.2.5 Japanese Conjunctions.** Conjunctions or linking words is one of the most essential part of the speech. Conjunctions correlate similar thoughts, condition, cause, opposition, and choices. These kind of words connect or conjoin phrases or sentences together. Japanese conjunctions are usually called particles or postpositions used at the end of a dependent clause(s) to establish the correlated clauses.

These post positions are being arduous for Spanish native speakers to use them for many factors. First, Japanese grammar uses particles in accusative and nominative cases. The reason is that Japanese language has no noun inflexions like Spanish or English language. The task of learning postpositions is easier than learning inflexions. The particles that students learn when they are beginners are the following:

**Table 29.** *Postpositions/Particles in Japanese language.*

<i>Postposition/Particles</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>English language equivalent</i>
は	Marks the topic/subject	The
が	Marks the subject	The, a/an
を	Indicates the direct object	
	Site	From
へ	Indicates direction	Towards, to (usually used for 3 specific verbs)
で	Site	In, on, etc.
	Instrument or vehicle	With, in/on/etc.

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	Cause factor	Because of
に	Specific place	In, on, at, etc.
	Indirect object	To, for.
	Lapse (of time)	Every, On.
	Direction	Towards, to
の	Possessive/Property, Connection/link,	's, of (subject), adj.
	Apposition	possessives
から	Origin	From
	Reason	Because
まで	Aim/Goal	Until
と	Conjunction	And
	Companionship	With
	Comparison	Than/With
も	Inclusion	Also/too/as well, Neither.
	Shock	Even/not even, also
	Determined denial	Nothing, nobody, no

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*Source:* own creation

It is known that there is a particle that is used only for 3 specific verbs (入), those verbs are: いきます (to go), きます (to come), かえります (to return, to come back, to go back), but not all Japanese language learners know or remember this big clue.

Locating any postpositions in a sentence is a complicated task for many students because it is easy to get confused when using them. In a sentence there can be more than one option to write in a blank space if you do not know how to collocate postpositions grammatically correct. To get a better overview it is necessary to demonstrate it with real sentences that students can use in their classes or daily life, e.g.:

1. Easy case to locate a postposition: ふじさん ( ) のぼります。

The clue here is the verb のぼります, which means ‘to climb’. So, by now, particle へ is discarded. According to the table 29, it is known that particle に is used for specific places, which in this case is ふじさん (Fuji mount).

Answer: ふじさん (に) のぼります。(To climb the Fuji mount.)

2. Another example to locate particle: きのうともだち ( ) おさけ ( ) のみしました。

Before answering it is necessary to know the vocabulary written: きのう (today), ともだち (amigo/amigos), おさけ (sake), のみしました (to drink), and remember the particles use rules. After that, students must remember that book’s exercises were made with predetermined answers, so it gives a clue, which in this case is “what the sentence requires is to say that ‘I am the protagonist’”, so particle は and が are discarded in the first space. If ‘I am the person who is telling the sentence it is necessary to look for another option. Then と (with) is the strongest option by now because of the verb at the end and the direct object that is the “sake”; and if it includes a direct object, the sentence includes the postposition を: so, the complete sentence will be:

Answer: きのうともだち (と) おさけ (を) のみしました。-I drunk sake with my Friends.

Collocating postpositions looked a little bit complicated until now, but these were not the difficult examples. A difficult case for beginners to locate a postposition:

1. このしるいくすり（は）1にちに3かいしょくじ（の）まえに、 のんでください。

At the end, locating particles will be not difficult if students learn and understand the reason to be for each one. And, as some advice, it will be easier if the language learners already know the vocabulary (word and meaning) to apply any postposition. Minna no nihongo by Takanashi & Nakanishi (2012) shows diverse exercises that facilitates this learning process, where it is necessary to fill the blanks being guided by the vocabulary.

## **2.2 Vocabulary learning strategies**

In this part of the research are mentioned the preferred strategies used by students to learn vocabulary in class within similar applied researches retrieved from internet, as well as the process and effort that they must do to learn words and meanings, going through metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies.

### ***2.2.1 Students' vocabulary learning strategies within foreign context***

Most foreign language learners tend to develop their own strategies to learn and increase their vocabulary, but sometimes those strategies complicate the learning process even more. Now, by mentioning and discussing different studies and results from diverse sources and authors, it will be easier to create one concrete analysis to know if students' strategies are working out in their daily life.

The first author, Robledo (2015), in her applied research to elementary school students at Xalapa, Veracruz, demonstrates that vocabulary learners' used strategies (according to the selected researcher's strategies) were: mind maps, pictionary, and word lists study. During the process, she observed that students will be improving their foreign language vocabulary just if they were aware of the benefits of it. At the end, she understood that mind maps and pictionary were more significant than word lists during the applied time. The researcher realized that students had

improved their vocabulary retention, but others had not, so at that time, she considered implementing new strategies in the future.

In the Astica (2016)'s applied research in junior and senior high schools, at Salatiga city in Central Java province, Indonesia, found that those students' strategies were inspired on the determination strategy, which refers to the discovery of new words' meanings when vocabulary learners were finding unknown words during their study process, in other words, this means that students used the two forms to discover the meaning of a word: by using dictionary (looking for the contextual meaning to comprehend the whole idea), and using translation (in bilingual dictionaries to create background). Being the first one the preferred strategy for foreign vocabulary learners to memorize the unfamiliar word meaning.

Rachmawati (2018) shows her findings at the Merderka University Pasuruan (Indonesia), the most common strategies used for students. The results showed that discovering the meaning by using dictionaries (to look for meanings from one language to another), guessing the words meaning through context, and analyzing pictures and gestures (to understand the whole idea or what is happening there) were the most used ones. In this research the researcher mentioned that students were not doing something to consolidate the new word's meaning already learned. This means that students were forgetting the learned vocabulary as time passed out.

Heng (2011), in research at Phnom Penh, Cambodia, found that the most used strategies by Cambodian students were: using the new learned words in speaking and writing exercises to consolidate the recent knowledge, consulting dictionary for specific words, notebook notes and asking to others like teacher and friends, guessing words' meanings, using flashcards, translating what they did not understand, and memorization.

Bei (2011) states a similar point of view about learning vocabulary in his applied research to university efficient students in a south of China city. The researcher noticed that the participants had good learning habits and a positive attitude to carry out the learning methods to increase their foreign language vocabulary. These following strategies were those they had been used: listening and reading (learning words in sentences as a whole idea being helped by a dictionary to understand the context in a better way), reading books and studying the spelling of some found words.

Hashemi & Hadavia (2014) in their research, at Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences (Iran), conclude that students' strategies in this following preference order were: the use of dictionaries to learn vocabulary to memorize meanings little by little, social strategies (interactions with others who know and use the foreign language), selective attention (specific words), study preference (what they are interested in), guessing meanings of words, note taking in classes, and autonomy (study by themselves with their own sources). This research shows different strategies used during the research applied time but does not show the more effective ones. The good part of these results is that it established the most common strategies when the foreign vocabulary learning process is carried out.

Wakamoto & Kitao (2013) reveal in their research made from the information collected at Kansai Women's college (Kashiwara, Japan) that the most frequently strategy used by students was the mechanical repetitions, which involves writing down repeatedly; using a dictionary; notebook notes study. They both conclude that rote strategies and bedrock strategies are most common strategies used for students to learn new vocabulary during their study process; the second one includes reviewing periodically trying to say or write sentences with the unfamiliar word or quizzing themselves with flashcards.

On the other hand, Nie & Zhou (2017) have another kind of findings because they applied their research with “excellent vocabulary learners” to reveal the strategies used at the Foreign Language School of Hubei University in China. These researchers observed that those students were applying metacognitive (*selective attention*), cognitive (*repetition*) and social meditation (self-stimulation) strategies. Then, instead of using deductions and guessing strategies, those students used strategies like writing repeatedly, remembering word lists, and remembering words by reading as cognitive techniques. In the Metacognitive strategies case, the excellent vocabulary learners only were paying attention to the appearing words frequency. The third strategy, social meditation, involves habits, this strategy depends on how much students are working out to achieve their goals. Their conclusion about the research was that vocabulary learners could have success studying if they apply cognitive and metacognitive strategies in their life, unlike those students who learn by rote and tend to end up with a poor vocabulary.

Finally, the following research made by Huan (2019), collected from Japanese language learners in diverse Japanese major studies (from elementary proficiency level students to advanced students), which is focused on students’ *Kanji* learning strategies, found that contexts-based strategy, morphological analysis, association methods, memorization, and metacognitive strategies have been used by students during their study process. The researchers mention that these mentioned strategies are the most effective strategies according to his results, but to reinforce knowledge ‘metacognitive strategies’ are more useful for themselves. Otherwise, memorization seems to be the most preferred one.

Undoubtedly, some researchers obtained related results in their research, even though students’ ages were different. The main point of these comparisons was to obtain a global idea about students’ performance when they are studying foreign language vocabulary.

As a general conclusion, it is observable that the great majority of students' strategies used were those which facilitated the memorization of the words: repetition of the words (including the meaning), the use of dictionaries to understand whole ideas, the interest (motivation/purpose) about the vocabulary learning process, and the most important one 'metacognitive strategies': strategies created by students themselves, which fits and facilitates better in their study process.

### ***2.2.2 Vocabulary learning strategies and words' meanings learning process***

As is known until now, vocabulary is an important branch within any language in the world, having a significant impact when the second or third language learning process is being carried out. Otherwise, there are plenty of activities used for foreign language students to learn a huge amount of vocabulary to enhance and accelerate their language skills to finally feel confident when the moment of language use occurs. Vocabulary learning strategies enable learners to create their own learning environment according to their needs and level proficiency, all these due to most of them think that language classes' time is not enough for practicing or reviewing vocabulary. To apply vocabulary learning strategies requires conscious and constant work from students, but if they are genuinely motivated, they can achieve it.

Memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and discovery/consolidation strategies are part of a famous taxonomy known as VLS (Schmitt, 1997, cited in Craven, 2014) being the most used and recommended strategies to learn vocabulary successfully. Schmitt created his taxonomy inspired on Oxford's (1990) 58 general language strategies, reducing it to only five types of strategies, being the most recent and comprehensive one. Thus, to sum up all, according to the Schmitt taxonomy: memorization strategies relate the current information (vocabulary in this case) to the existing knowledge, metacognitive strategies involve different learning process such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating the best ways to

study, and social strategies are focused on interaction with others to enhance the foreign language knowledge.

There are also too much more effective individual strategies like: contextualization, guessing, dictionary use, vocabulary note-taking, repetition, word feature analysis, vocabulary lists, autonomy, word cards, association, quizzing, and practicing (speaking or writing), but students are always being influenced by the primary rote-learning strategies.

### ***2.2.3 Metacognitive strategies***

According to Bai's (2018) work, all these strategies are included within three types of general strategies. These kinds of strategies are focused on selective attention, directed attention, self-management, and self-evaluation as autonomy strategies, which foreign language vocabulary learners oversee, regulate, and self-direct their own learning process.

The most common strategy is selective attention. This is the typical and expected strategy used by learners when they are learning a new language because they start looking for the unknown frequent words they see during their study time; in this case, they will be repeating this word until they have learned it. On the other hand, autonomy is the lowest strategy used by students for their vocabulary study because they are not used to doing it voluntarily. This means that learners do not do something else by themselves to improve their vocabulary learning process, activities such as: buy or find free vocabulary books, make word cards to study in their free time, and read newspaper magazines, journals, or any other source. As it is the lowest strategy used, it is considered the most effective one.

### ***2.2.4 Cognitive strategies***

Repetition, dictionary use, translation, grouping, note taking, imagery, auditory representation, key words, transfer, and guessing are the strategies included within this general

strategy. Cognitive strategies are about language learners' mental processes to learn, sort, remember and use the new vocabulary. Dole, Nokes and Drits (2011) describe a cognitive strategy as a mental routine or procedure for accomplishing a cognitive goal like solving a problem, studying for a test or understanding what is being read.

There are three common strategies used by students in class. First, the dictionary use is the most used strategy for students when they are studying the second or third language because it is easy to consult one unknown word, learn and relate the meaning, or simply look for definitions in bilingual dictionaries, to increase the words' amount knowledge; but unfortunately, it has some limitations insomuch as students tend to use it during the class interrupting the lesson momentarily, missing additional information provided by the teacher. Secondly, Guessing is another famous strategy used by students in their daily study life. This occurs when learners do not stop themselves to look up words' meanings within dictionaries, they just try to guess the unknown word's meaning by reading the whole text to understand the context and give a meaning to that unknown word instead, being helped by their background. Sometimes it works out, but some it does not. Therefore, this strategy could be a disadvantage. And the third common strategy used by foreign language students in their entire life is note-taking. This strategy is observable in classes, when students are seen taking notes during the lesson of the day, writing down the words, phrases or expressions mentioned by the teacher. At the end of the day, or at the end of the course before exams, students could look back at their notes and learn them.

Rather than using only these three last strategies, it is important to find a balance between all the strategies included in cognitive strategies category to facilitate the vocabulary learning process. To do this, students need to work harder to know themselves and the way they learn better.

It would be complex, but students need to find what strategy is fitting with their study rhythm. At the end, it will be a process to be done out of the classroom which involves an extra load of effort.

### **2.2.5 Social/affective strategies**

Social strategy is the interaction with other people who are learning the same language as you, and affective strategy is focused on the emotions or thoughts control to continue learning. These types of strategies used by foreign language students, and it allows the study improvement in their daily life because it helps to reduce the great difficulties they face. In other words, this strategy is like a reinforcement of the background by sharing knowledge, and like teaching the language to others.

On the other hand, there are some strategies included in this category such as the ‘Memory strategies’. It is another kind of strategy not mentioned before but it exists here and is unconsciously used by students. This one contains two categories: rehearsal and encoding strategies. The first one includes strategies like: the word list and the repetition strategies, and the second one refers to association, imagery, visual, auditory, etc., that tends to create an affective learning process. Besides, by mentioning another strategy, ‘activation strategies’, some authors state that those activities help to learn new vocabulary throughout context to facilitate the understanding. (Bastanfar & Hashemi, 2010, in Goundar 2015).

Finally, almost all the mentioned strategies have been evolving over time, and with this comes the emergence of the *eVoc* strategies which are related to technological tools and sources used in platforms on internet or any other media. According to Dalton & Grisham (2011, cited in Ballesteros, 2019, p. 022- 24) the included tools are: visual displays, vocabulary field trip (selected websites with words exposures like writing, reading or practice with another foreign language learner), vocabulary games (puzzles, etc.), word reference tools (online dictionaries or any other

app), vocabulary reference support (digital official dictionaries, etc.), digital translators, reading digital texts with specific subjects, listening to digital texts (conversations, audio books, etcetera).

### **2.3 Language learners' preferred vocabulary learning methods**

There are some methods used to carry out a better learning process but memorization method and significant/meaningful learning method are the two favorite ones according to vocabulary learners. In this case, it will be discussed the effectiveness by making an advantage and disadvantage contrast about each mentioned method.

#### ***2.3.1 Memorization method as a common learning tool***

Memorization learning methods play a significant role within the language learning processes due to students' childhood or background, where, since then, they have been used to apply this kind of method to learn new things during their primal educational life. For that reason it is the most noticeable and common method used by foreign language learners since always.

Repetition strategy is a popular memorization strategy that helps to retain novel words, sometimes by doing association with the unknown words with something else to consolidate the unfamiliar word in mind. This process could be made by mental pictures, mental phrases or situations putting the word in context, repeating the unfamiliar word aloud, making word lists, or trying to use the new vocabulary with others. Memorization, including more visual materials than another strategy, in many cases is more useful because it facilitates the association and remembering of words.

Hoque (2018) points out the importance and benefits of the memorization method saying that this process is useful to work out language learners' brain, so they can easily pay attention and being focused intensely on tasks than others (in this case, students who use memorization method, have lots of consolidated knowledge to work with). Creativity development is one of the author's

highlighted benefits because he says that the information memorized helps students to expand their minds and becoming more creative, taking advantage with their problem-solving ability, resulting in an increase of their IQ level. Finally, he mentions that memorization facilitates the learning process because it helps to develop memory schemas to construct knowledge. Some of these following strategies are mentioned by Hoque (2018) to enhance and carry out the memorization method process (p. 5-7):

1. The first one is mnemonic strategy. It is made by remembering information throughout seeking meaning patterns. This means learners usually look for that information that is primordial to learn by memorization.

2. Chunking words or activities. This process is made by grouping items, words, or any other information into categories to facilitate students to remember processes.

3. Students teaching others to consolidate their knowledge by themselves. This helps to organize the information in mind before explaining to others, to finally create an own conclusion.

4. Mental imagery is a useful strategy to associate the latest information.

5. Technology use. In this case, language learners put in action the information already learned by using it within their daily life (texting, writing emails or messages to another person).

6. Connecting to emotions is extremely useful because this strategy helps learners to connect closer with the added information they are memorizing, facilitating the retention and consolidation. As an example: if a student likes and enjoys what he or she is learning it will facilitate the process.

7. Visual and spatial techniques: It refers to fun, memorable, and creative activities which make learning an easier and more relaxed activity for students such as: referent images,

songs, feelings, and body use as tools to support the added information retention. Thus, improving the long-term memory by memorable, fun, creative and meaningful activities.

8. Memorable visual images strategy is about visualizing the memorized information being helped by the feeling, smelling, or hearing senses to represent an image in mind. This strategy involves associations with another thing to remember the main essential information easily.

Now, according to Atkinson & Shiffrin's (1968, in Yu, 2011) three-scale model of memory includes: sensory memory (memory helped by senses), short-term memory (fast and adaptive but with a small storage capacity) and long-term memory (almost unlimited storage capacity but relatively slow), all three chunked to facilitate the memorization method understanding; these three models containing repetition, retrieval, and elaboration and coding strategies, which are useful because it is a kind of cyclic process to digest and learn the new information. (p.8)

At the end, forgetting will always play a role within this learning method, for that reason it is necessary to repeat the memorization process to consolidate knowledge; vocabulary in this case. Learning vocabulary through memorization methods can be efficient but sometimes it is not the best option to take. Of course it is useful and used by everybody in their daily life because learners feel comfortable with it.

### **2.3.1.1 Advantages & disadvantages of memorization method.**

Advantages:

1. Skills enhancing: writing, reading, speaking, and listening improvement due to vocabulary, grammar, and etcetera, already memorized and learned.
2. Increase the foreign language vocabulary. Thus, expanding the opportunity to understand updated content (texts, exams, etc.)

Disadvantages:

1. Learners can easily forget the vocabulary learned if they do not brush up on their learned words.
2. Memorization method does not focus on retention of knowledge.
3. It tends to become bored. These memorization activities can be tedious and tiring to do, but students are still requiring them because it is the fastest way to memorize vocabulary.

As Hoque (2018) mentions, it is necessary to create a balance between memorization and some other methods and strategies to learn foreign language vocabulary in more effective ways. Memorization could satisfy certain language learners' needs, but it is a process that requires too much effort, even more when learners must memorize the words meaning translations too.

Besides, using the memorization method to learn new vocabulary like Japanese characters is extremely useful, *kanjis* for instance, where Japanese Language learners must draw different strokes within one single character, and, to memorize that kanji, students tend to repeat and repeat until they learn it and improve the unfamiliar word retention. In Japanese language case, memorization method is an excellent tool to start retaining vocabulary in mind, but to consolidate the unfamiliar words learned it is necessary to add some extra strategies to support the learning process.

### ***2.3.2 Significant/Meaningful learning method***

Understanding is a great word within the meaningful learning method. This means that understanding is more important than just memorizing things without back upping the recent vocabulary seen. Thus, this significant learning method becomes opposite to memorization, or is just showing a big contrast between both.

Ausbel (1963, in Ciechanowska, 2018) announce his assimilation learning theory talking about cognitive and constructivist learning, in which he mentions that learners build mental representations of concepts to understand what they are learning to finally consolidate the added information. Ausbel is the creator of the meaningful learning theory. Although there exist lots of confusion with his theory and the learning by heart process, but he highlights the difference between both and says that learning by heart uses memorization and its repetition strategy as a tool; where learners are not interpreting anything. However, meaningful learning involves linking the latest information learned, thus, it is used to reinforce by adding current ideas, concepts, theory, etc., to an already existing cognitive structure. Then, learners must restructure and organize their ideas with the added information to create the best concept that could make sense for them.

As in many theories, a meaningful learning method is still requiring more active learning techniques to support the learning process; activities which imply cognitive effort (cognitive strategies); to maintain the ideas active, constructible, and durable. To start achieving this process, students must be conscious about what they already know (knowledge frameworks or experiences) to finally introduce added information within their minds.

Considering that there is not previous knowledge, learners must be creative, find their motivation and have the desire to learn to construct a new knowledge area by using metacognitive strategies. After this process, it will be necessary to follow the meaningful learning method to enhance this new knowledge. Unfortunately, a large part of students do not use meaningful learning methods because they are not used to using them due to they have been using memorization techniques to pass statistical exams since childhood, thus, it is difficult for them to change their study methods at first but not impossible.

Finally, to achieve a great a meaningful learning in Japanese language vocabulary, it will be necessary to learn *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries to start establishing the foundations of the language. Then, learn to read and write. After this first step, it will be easier for students to learn new vocabulary written in those syllabaries, to finally go to the most difficult part that is learning *kanjis*. To read kanji it is necessary to know the two syllabaries to add new information to previous knowledge. For example, if a Japanese language learner knows how to write and pronounce the katakana of the ‘fish’ word (noun), it will be easier to learn the next difficult part (Kanji).

**Table 30.** Kanji and its hiragana pronunciation

<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Hiragana</i>	<i>Kanji</i>
Sakana	さかな	魚

*Source:* own creation

## 2.4 Factors that affect vocabulary learning

There are several aspects to analyze that might be involved (beneficial or not beneficial for language learners) in the vocabulary learning process, such as motivation, attitude, aptitude as parts of the students’ individual differences. If there is something affecting the learning process, it will be crucial to work on those aspects.

### 2.4.1 Students’ individual differences

Learning a new language could be difficult, and tedious in some cases, for that reason, students need to be brave to work autonomously to find the different fields there are forgetting to strengthen, for example: motivations, aptitudes, and attitudes that they could have or develop when the learning process is occurring. To achieve this, it will be an extra task that language learners must detect and work with to obtain their goals.

**2.4.1.1 Motivation.** First, motivation determines how much effort is put into the language learning process and it is reflected on how much the learners are into the foreign language, as well as the way they are passing through this process (if they enjoy what they are doing for instance).

Saranraj & Shahila (2016) state that motivation, as a psychological process, helps to achieve a certain goal, playing a vital role in second language learning. Motivation refers to students' cooperative manners than competitive manners about lessons, activities, and tasks carried out. Feldman (2004, in Saranraj & Shahila, 2016) says that motivation includes factors that energize the humans' behaviors or any other living being (p. 8). Gardner (1985, in Saranraj & Shahila, 2016) says that motivation implies an incentive that motivates learners such as purpose, a goal or an objective to finally accomplish what they need to achieve.

Saranraj & Shahila (2016) conclude on some types of motivation: *Intrinsic (Natural) Motivation, Extrinsic (External) Motivation, Integrative Motivation, Instrumental motivation.*

1. Intrinsic (Natural) motivation is associated with the learners' feelings, considering if they feel engaged about a particular task to be part of it.

2. Extrinsic (External) motivation considers external incentives like money, food, etc., to guide the learners' behavior to achieve their goals.

3. Integrative motivation occurs when students integrate themselves within the culture they are interested in, to be more connected with their goals.

4. Instrumental motivation works for those learners who want to attain their own satisfaction. This could be to get a job, pass an exam, or increase their proficiency level.

Therefore, according to Saranraj & Shahila (2016), motivation provides amounts of energy to achieve goals, disciplines learners, facilitates the learning process, and increases students' interest to study.

**2.4.1.2 Attitude.** Oroujlou & Vahedi (2011) state that attitude is a crucial factor when second language learning is carried out, considering individual preferences, beliefs, values or attitudes about an object or situation. Besides, they mention that having neutral or good attitudes about

learning foreign languages will allow learners to have an openness and willingness to perceive and respond in the learning process. Then, attitude is a set of beliefs about something unknown.

Therefore, attitude is about how learners think or react to something that they do not know or understand at first. This could be demonstrable when language learners start to learn a new language, but they have the control about how to act or think about the situation. Having a neutral or good attitude about something new can facilitate the learning process, opposite to from having a negative attitude, which could mean that the student is refusing to learn or accept the unknown. It is important to work on the demonstrated attitude to others, situations to avoid difficulties.

**2.4.1.3 Aptitude.** Carrol (1981, in González, 2011) comments that aptitude is about the capability of learning a task depending on some of students' characteristics applications. In addition, Sturgeon (2017) states that aptitude refers to the ability or abilities to think, to reason, and to process information. Finally, Dornyei (2005, in Sturgeon 2017) refers to aptitude as the intelligence to face different situations such as study, but commonly used as performance in a specific area. Thereupon, the authors say that aptitude considers the students' abilities or capacities to carry out specific tasks.

For example, González (2011) shows the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) to demonstrate which the aptitude components are: *Phonetic coding ability* (identify sounds to make associations to finally retain them), *grammatical sensitivity* (the ability to recognize grammatical functions in sentence structures), *rote learning memory* (ability to learn associations between concepts, words etc. and meanings rapidly and efficiently to finally retain them), and *inductive language learning ability* (the ability to induce or suppose). This test contains questions that measure language abilities such as matching words, hiding words, pair association, etc.

Now, it is noticeable that aptitude is also influenced by students' attitude to achieve their goals. Then, by combining the attitudes and the aptitudes, it will be existing a balance to success within the foreign language learning process.

## **2.5 State of the art**

This part pretends to uphold this thesis with similar or related studies and their findings within the (Japanese) language learning process, focusing on Japanese language learning, Japanese vocabulary learning and Japanese language communication closeness, to comprehend the complexity of the phenomena and what the study of Japanese vocabulary study implicates for students.

The first author, Grainger (2005), sustains the reality of studying Japanese language, mentioning that, as an orthographic language, Japanese is complex due to its writing and reading systems. He shares different results made by previous researchers of how students learn the language. For example, the first group, made by White (in Grainger, 2005), were oriented to use writing strategies: repetition, writing out, and translation; the second, made by Okada (in Grainger, 2005), shows what students cannot use to study Japanese: rhyming memorization, code switching, and learning through comparison with the native language. Grainger himself applied a survey in 2005 with beginner students to know their Japanese language learning strategies, the results were about repetitive memorization and translation. Finally, with another study made by Usuki (in Grainger, 2005) demonstrates how arduous it is studying kanji because students appealed to writing down repeatedly, which implicates feeling of frustration and poor self-esteem at the end. But it can vary according to the proficiency level, facing up to less or more challenges, benefiting or affecting the language performance. The conclusion of the author was that students should

develop mental judgments to comprehend the language, so they will use adequate strategies according to their respective levels.

Focusing on Kanji, Huan (2019) introduces his research by describing the complexity of the logographic writing system which consists of meaning, sound, strokes order, orthography feature, morphological structure, collocations, and the different strategies or processes that learners must or may carry out: rote-memorization, morphological analysis, context-based strategies, association methods or mnemonics, metacognitive strategies, and helplessness. The author's research attempted to find the kanji learning strategies among 2L learners. According to the results, attitude increases effectiveness when using strategies to learn kanji, but it can vary depending on the proficiency level.

However, with closeness to this thesis, the third author, Prieto (2020), seeks a teaching strategy proposal to develop communicative competence for basic level students at university in Lima. She starts talking about the socio-economic global impact of Japan and the growing students' interest and potential of Peruvian to learn the language, unfortunately, this is not progressing and enhancing due to Japanese language hardness perceptions, making difficult the proficiency achievement of the language, and producing a high degree of desertion of the Japanese course. As a result, the researcher finds an absence of strategies to develop this enhancement. Within the research findings, the author identifies four emergent categories or necessities to achieve this communicative competence: deficiency in administration of the academic time in the teaching process, teachers/students do not accomplish sociolinguistic competence learning, students with motivational and metacognitive deficiencies, and teachers' inappropriate use of ICT in teaching-learning process. Consecutively, Prieto (2020) proposes different strategies applied in two phases: courses for teachers and students and application of strategies during the class time (planned

activities following the established syllabus by the institution). In cases of failure, the teacher will recognize the students' knowledge, introduce related vocabulary, motivate students, and make a space for relaxing. Also, the author suggests that teachers should guide students to be more responsible about their knowledge, followed by application of tests and rubrics to assess them before next class. As part of the teacher's role, it is necessary to make feedback; promote significative, participative, and experiential knowledge in real contexts; promote self-study, research, and analyze; prepare activities according to students' characteristics; ideal environment to boost motivation; and promote empathy and teamwork. The author's results of the teaching strategy proposed, already applied by herself, showed validity and applicability in different academic institutions, accomplishing improvements in each area that affects students' learning.

## **Chapter III. Research methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter presents the research paradigm; which this research is based on; the methodology, the data collection method, the information about participants and context of the study, the instrument to collect data, and the procedures to collect and analyze the data to get an objective conclusion.

### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

According to Keaton and Bodie (2011) social constructivism is based on something the researcher is involved in to comprehend the complexity of a whole and to comprehend as many perspectives and points of view as possible when research is carried out. Social constructivism is used to attain a general savvy of the specific situation or phenomenon that surrounds the researcher's life; therefore, this paradigm focuses on reality more than suppositions; thus, this research is going to be done under the rules of this paradigm.

### **3.2 Methodology**

Rosriguez and Valldeoriola (2007) say that Qualitative Research (QR) is an in-depth understanding of educational and social phenomena. QR focuses on comprehending and interpreting social interaction (the reality), obtaining data through open-closed and informal communication, in which the researcher relies on the view of the participants. In general, qualitative research oversees the study of human phenomena, which can include individuals, societies, and cultures, to get people's opinions or perceptions. Thus, this study is going to be done under this perspective.

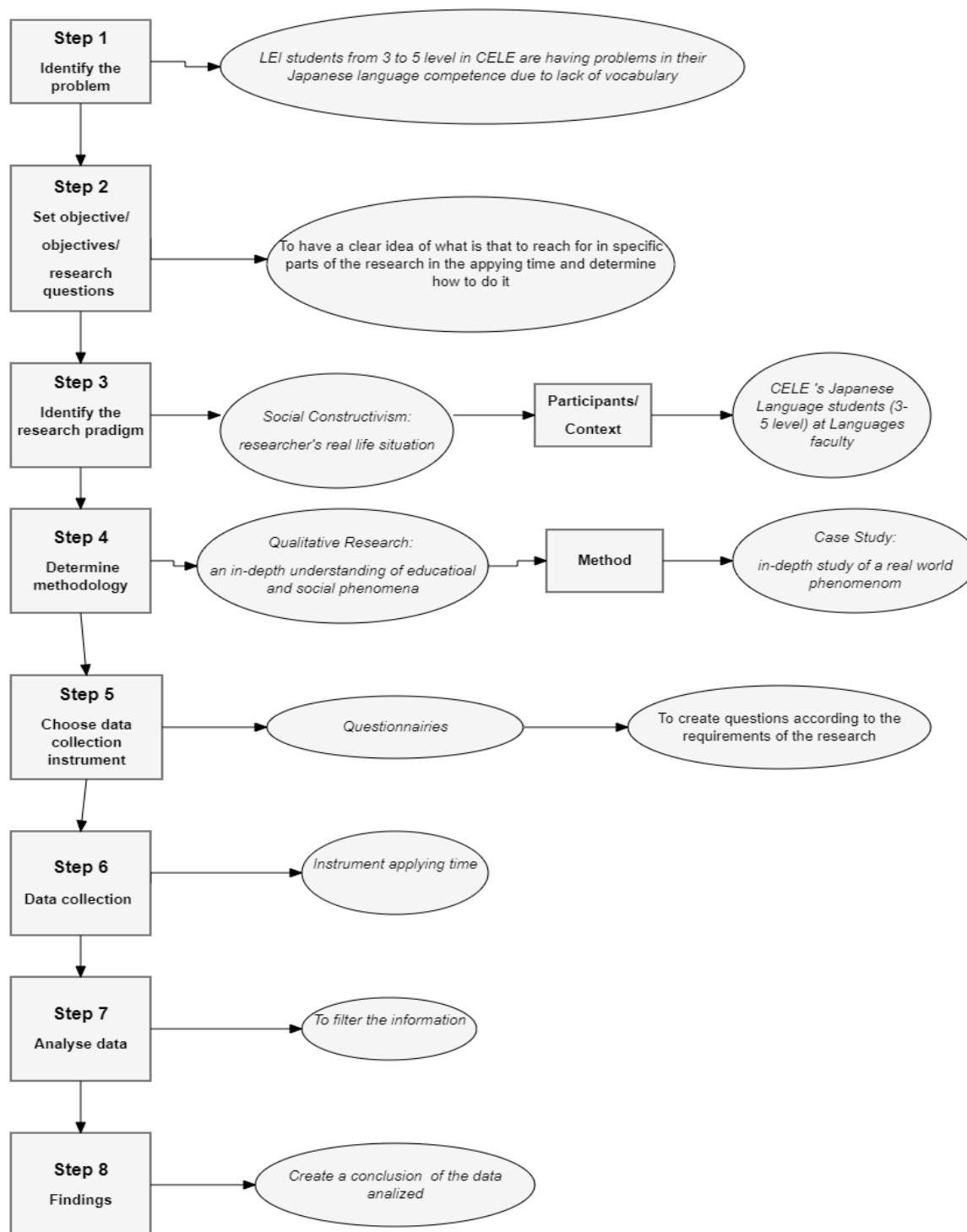
The researcher does not limit herself or himself in describing "what" is happening around the specific contexts, but rather the researcher looks for the "whys" something is happening to

finally analyze critically what the researcher perceived. It is not a numerical form. It is a study of a whole, not variables. Besides, in qualitative research, according to Rodriguez & Valdeoriola (2009), it is necessary that the researcher plunge himself or herself within the context where the project will be carried out during a certain time to live and feel the “subjects’ world” (p. 49). This means nothing else than being part of the study object to get a better understanding of the phenomenon. Bisquerra (2004) states that qualitative research understands reality holistically, observing context in its natural form, paying special attention to the different perspectives and angles, demanding the use of interactive, open, and flexible techniques that allow a better understanding of reality and all those things involved.

A Case Study is an in-depth study of a real-world research problem. It is useful when there is not enough information about the phenomenon, so it provides extra and detailed facts about what is already known. This study provides detailed data that enriches the research with its descriptions of specific situations.

### 3.2.1 Research Design Scheme

**Figure 1.** Research design stepped (own creation for this research).



Source: own creation

### **3.3 Participants**

For this research, the participants, specifically, must be studying the Japanese language from 4 to 6 levels. Their ages vary between 20 and 34 years old. These participants of those levels were selected because they are closer to communicating simple or basic things by using the Japanese language. Participants are in a range of language knowledge where they already have a basis to communicate their ideas and feelings or comprehend easy topics. So, the participants in those levels have the experience in learning Japanese vocabulary.

The first group, the 4<sup>th</sup> level, is composed by ten people between 20 to 26 years old. The 5<sup>th</sup> level is composed by three people of 21 and 26 years old. Finally, 6<sup>th</sup> level, the advanced ones, is composed by five people between 22 to 24 years old.

### **3.4 Context of the Study**

The research takes place in Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras (CELE)'s Japanese language virtual classes due to covid-19 for health precautions. CELE office organizes accessible language courses for all BUAP community like high school or college students, teachers, and some other employees, but it is commonly planned and taken by college students. Physically, the center's setting is at the Languages Faculty, which is part of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, one of the most recognized public universities in the city. Thus, this place is going to provide the required information for the research.

### **3.5 Instruments**

According to Burns (2010), research instruments are measurement tools to obtain data of research subjects' topics of interest.

### 3.5.1 Questioners

As this study uses questionnaires to get the data, Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007) mention that questioners are very convenient to collect valuable and comparable data. However, to get valid and meaningful results, questioners require clear and precise questions to be answered by respondents.

Also, these authors mention all that questioners have to take into account before be created: *whether the questionnaire will be self-completed* (to be laid out, with no too much complexity and simple instructions), *the literacy level of respondents* (if student's level is low it is better to apply questioners face to face to clarify information), *the expected response rate* (to anticipate an outstanding response by motivated respondents), *the resource available* (to carry out a postal questionnaire), and *topic and population of interest* (p. 19).

**2.1.2.2 Questioner features.** According to Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007), there are some essential features that questioners must have, such as title, the identifier, and the instructions (p.19):

1. The first one, "Tittle", is simple to explain because all research questioners require a title to give a sneak peek of the academic study, which may be appealing and inviting respondents to answer.
2. The second feature, "The Identifier," considers participants and the ways of identifying them to facilitate the filter at the end. These questioners can be confidential to protect subjects' identity (names and addresses should not appear on the research instrument itself).
3. The last feature, "The Instruction", shows that the researcher must include clear instructions for the respondents because it is crucial that they could understand what to do in a priority order way to facilitate if respondents must tick boxes or circle numbers.

Finally, as a final key to constructing questioners, Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007) highlight that the style and content of questioners are assembled by research questions, aims, and objectives as guides.

### ***3.5.2 Questioner: open-ended questions***

Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007) mention that in these types of questions, the respondents are allowed to interpret the question in their way. Thus, what the authors want to say is that respondents could say anything they think or have to say about the written question to get more extensive and prosperous responses in detail. Also, they mention that analyzing responses at the end of the application could involve some difficulties due to the questions' size (p.20), and to avoid this problem, it is crucial to establish and localize all the keywords related to the objectives and research questions.

As question-wording advice, Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007) suggest that questions do not have to be too long or that these must not contain several questions in one sentence because this can confuse respondents. Besides, these questioners do not have to contain *ambiguous words or questions*, as well as asking *leading questions*, trying to assume unknown things.

### ***3.5.3 Open-ended questions in this research***

First, it is essential to remember that this research is guided by a *Case Study* as a qualitative method, which also requires different points of view about students' improvement. Therefore, it facilitates the acquisition of extra and detailed facts of a specific situation.

Thus, this instrument perfectly fits with this research because it is important to get personal students' opinions, perceptions, beliefs, etc., to compare and analyze responses to finally assemble a rich conclusion about the students' Japanese language competence.

For this research, and taking Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2007) findings, it is necessary to apply a questioner to collect their thoughts about this study of Japanese vocabulary.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

The research instrument was delivered by e-mail to all the participants, so they had enough freedom to answer each question, trying to be careful at the same time. It was applied orderly manner starting with level 4, and so on. Some of these participants were from different majors; therefore, they were allowed to answer the research questioner in Spanish.

At first, it was necessary to get permission from the professors who teach the Japanese language class at various levels. Then, ask students if they wanted to participate in the filling of the questioner. After that, those students who agreed, the document was sent to them so they could answer it freely from their homes; that way, they had the opportunity to think openly about what they were going to answer. If participants had doubts, they had the opportunity to ask me directly by message. Finally, the students sent back all the questionnaires already answered.

### **3.7 Validity Criteria**

This instrument was selected because it got deeper and specific information about the topic that this research requires, so it was not necessary to triangulate the information with any other method or instrument.

Only the researcher will have access to the collected information, to later be filtered, processed, and analyzed. No participant is going to be affected within this research, and their identity will be completely confidential and unknown to the people who may read this research.

The collected data was not modified; all the gathered information was transcribed by the researcher word by word to respect the genuine opinion of the participants.

## **Chapter IV. Data Analysis**

### **4.0 Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter contains the findings obtained, which are presented through their processes, analysis and interpretation of the collected data, the results of each instrument's item, a discussion about the most salient result, and a conclusion. The findings are presented in the following headings.

### **4.1 Data Analysis Produce**

To get the data, it was necessary to send the questioner to participants in Japanese Language courses (CELE) by e-mail and Google forms so they could respond and send it back later, gathering a total of 18 participants: ten of level 4, three of level 5, and five of level 6, thus starting with the information filter.

First, all the questioner's items were collocated in a column of an Excel table with all the participants' answers alongside, each one separately. By doing this process initially, it was easier to read and compare each participant's thoughts or point of view. The next step was to find out the similarities or patterns from each participant's answer in each question by doing careful reading and highlighting some frequent used words or phrases to get a pattern between all the items' responses as a general opinion. As the third thing to do, the coding of each item was found as an essential resource to process the gathered data with ease, letting know if the responses and the patterns are relevant and related to the code. Therefore, answers are expected to respond or be connected to the code.

Finally, the last category of the table was the Possible Theory, in which some authors were cited to support the responses, the pattern, and the analysis of them. There are some authors out that have the same opinion or that have found and proved related information and results as this

research's gathered data, so they can corroborate and support the pattern and analysis made within each item's response.

## 4.2 Results

**Question 1: Do you think vocabulary is important to improve language competence? If so, why?**

**Table 31.** Responses' similarities in Q1

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Yes. Learning. Communication.	Yes. Learning. Communication.	Yes. Learning. Communication.

Source: own creation

All participants, in each level, agreed that vocabulary is important to improve language competence because words facilitate the learning process and the way they communicate or use the language. According to Nadiya (2019), vocabulary is one of the keys to people's efficient communication. Having poor vocabulary has been proven to have serious repercussions for an individual's progress and development in life, at work, and socially. Following the same idea, Alghamdi & Elyas (2020) stated that vocabulary is one of the most important components in learning a language. Vocabulary acquisition is crucial, and in some senses, a vital component in successful foreign language acquisition. Finally, Thoung (2019) says that without vocabulary, there will be no development or progress made for all the other skills such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing.

Undoubtedly, as some authors say, vocabulary is considered one critical element of language competence development and individual progress, and its lack could be a severe sign of future failure.

*Question 2: What do you think about the fact that vocabulary may be the main clue to improve your language competence?*

**Table 32.** *Responses' similarities in Q2*

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Communication complement. Important.	Communication tool. Fundamental.	True. Communication tool. Important. Allows understanding.

*Source:* own creation

This comparison table shows the importance that students give to vocabulary learning and how it gradually increases in the next level of the language. Vocabulary as the main clue in language learning begins to gain validity when students notice the need to use more words in their classes or all context, for example, students in levels 5 and 6 consider that the more vocabulary you know is reflected with efficiency when using the language. To support this idea, Ílter (2019) maintains that having a broad vocabulary not only helps us understand, but it also has a vital role in terms of long-term academic success in overall education. Supporting the previous author, Yaacob et al. (2019) state that vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners, because limited vocabulary impedes successful communication. Nadiya (2019) establish that vocabulary is a set of familiar words within a person's language. A vocabulary, usually developed with age, serves as a valuable and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge.

Undoubtedly, the authors corroborate what students think about vocabulary being the main clue to enhance language competence. However, it takes relevance as soon as students face hurdles when language communication occurs.

**Question 3: Did you face any of the following situations when studying Japanese vocabulary?**

- a. I do not know where to start studying
- b. I forgot everything the following day
- c. I do not want to participate in class because of my lack of vocabulary
- d. I do not understand the meaning of the words
- e. I get bored when studying vocabulary

**Table 33.** *Responses' similarities in Q3*

<b><i>Level 4 Similarities</i></b>	<b><i>Level 5 Similarities</i></b>	<b><i>Level 6 Similarities</i></b>
Vocabulary lacking.	Vocabulary lacking.	Not understanding of
Not understanding of meaning.	Study plan lacking.	meanings.
To forget everything.		

*Source:* own creation

Naturally, difficulties are more when the language level is lower, but most of the students agree that they do not want to participate in class because of their lack of vocabulary and the fact that they do not understand the meaning of the words they face in reading or listening material. Therefore, problems persist when students are about to perform or use the language in any context. Ílter (2019) argues that if a student cannot understand at least 95% of the words, comprehension will be hampered. Furthermore, on the other hand, Nakata et al. (2021) concluded that vocabulary knowledge lacking can present significant challenges to students learning content subjects in L2.

Authors are also mentioning what students reflected in their weak points, proving that students' performance could be limited due to their vocabulary lacking.

**Question 4: Do you consider that studying Japanese vocabulary is difficult? Why?**

**Table 34.** Responses similarities in Q4

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Yes.	No.	Yes.
Kanji reading. Learning meanings.	Repetition disadvantages when learning meanings.	Kanji reading.

*Source:* own creation

Most of the students consider that studying Japanese is complex, and it may vary in the three groups but, in general, the main difficulty occurs when students must learn an enormous number of meanings and associate them with the written form, which also can make studying difficult if students face kanjis.

Secondly, Kanjis can be difficult in writing or reading texts because of their number and order of strokes, and the way to read them, which are different according to the previous or following syllables, for example, 木 (き: ki: tree) and 木曜日 (もくようび: mokuyōbi: Thursday). As this basic kanji example, there exist plenty of reading cases that students must deal with and learn. To support this sample, Okuyama (2007) describes Japanese vocabulary learning as follows: learning unfamiliar words by itself is a complex process, and it requires learners to access the semantic representation of the novel word while simultaneously making sound-spelling correspondence. Naturally, the process becomes even more demanding if the L2 script is entirely different from L1.

Thus, Okuyama describes this process of learning as a challenging task because there are many factors to consider when learning an unfamiliar word. In general terms, there are some different things to assimilate at the same time when learning Japanese language vocabulary occurs: reading, writing, sound-spelling, semantic representations, and meanings.

To get an in-depth outlook about the writing skill, it was necessary to know specific students' opinions about it in the question given below.

**Question 5: Do you consider that Japanese writing makes difficult the vocabulary learning process? If so, why?**

**Table 35.** Responses' similarities in Q5

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Yes. Kanjis.	A bit. Kanji.	No. Kanji meaning.

Source: own creation

In this case, again, the difficulty disappears according to the level of the language class. Students agree that kana writing (hiragana & katakana) is not difficult when you already know the 46 syllables each. Nevertheless, it changes when students learn kanji. To learn one of these complex semantic words, it is necessary to associate it with its kana writing, the sound-spelling form, and the kanji's strokes to write them, to get the goal of learning finally. To support this argument, Okuyana (2007) remarks that students must learn two different syllabic writing systems and approximately 2,000 Chinese characters (kanji), most of which have multiple meanings and readings. The complexity of the Japanese writing system poses a significant challenge to learners of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL), especially at the beginning level.

**Question 6: What kind of strategy do you consider is the best for you to study new Japanese vocabulary?**

**Table 36.** Responses' similarities in Q6

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Reading. Repetition. Memorizing.	Watching anime. (app) Games. To relate with daily life.	Reading. Repetition.

Source: own creation

According to the pattern, students consider that reading and repetition are the best strategies for them to study new Japanese language vocabulary. This means that students prefer to find their words in texts or any other written format such as subtitles, etc., to increase and enhance their competence, and, eventually, repeat the word several times until they think it is enough. Helping to prove these results, Ílter (2019) points out that the better a student is at understanding what he or she is reading, the more likely that student is to continue reading, thus increasing his or her exposure to a new and enriched vocabulary. On the other hand, Fayzullaeva (2021) mentioned that you will remember it if you repeat an infinite amount of information often enough. Repeat the information you want to remember. Use them, put them into practice. Use novel words in conversations. In addition, Chirkova & Chernovets (2021) stipulate that meaningful memorization stimulates the thinking process of students, it also develops their memory retention, and contributes to the accumulation of the necessary images, ideas, and reflections.

Authors agree with respondents, but they say that reading, repetition, or memorization must be used with some other strategy to reinforce the vocabulary knowledge recently learned; therefore, it is important to relate meanings with ideas that already exist in our mind or by applying the new vocabulary within the production skills: writing and speaking. In this case, students must do all in their possibilities to find which language learning strategy suits them to facilitate the vocabulary learning process.

**Question 7: From the following activities, which ones do you find useful and adequate when studying Japanese vocabulary?**

- a. Watching anime
- b. Playing app games
- c. Making flashcards or card notes to study everywhere as a practical way
- d. By writing words in the notebook many times
- e. Using special program

**Table 37. Responses' similarities in Q7**

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Flashcards & card notes.	Flashcards & card notes.	Flashcards & card notes. Repeating written words.

*Source:* own creation

The participants concluded that flashcards & card notes are the most useful and adequate activities to learn new vocabulary because it is practical to learn anywhere and anytime they want to. To prove his findings, Hung (2015) included the following: "to deliberate techniques, such as learning from vocabulary notebooks, word lists, and word cards, are useful approaches for achieving the acquisition of the second language (L2) vocabulary effectively and efficiently" and "the use of flashcards significantly helped the students' vocabulary growth, compared to traditional vocabulary instruction without such aids." To support this last citation, Yaacob et al. (2019) said that pictures connect students' prior knowledge with a new story, and in the process, help them learn novel words better.

Cards with images or words are the most common ways to study vocabulary due to their usage facility. When students create their flashcards or card notes, they can contribute to improving their knowledge because those cards contain their proper level of words and rhythm.

**Question 8: How do you study Japanese language vocabulary?**

**Table 38.** Responses' similarities in Q8.

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Reading.	App games.	Writing repeatedly.
Flashcards.	Relating meaning.	Flashcards.
Repeating.		Relating meaning.
Memorizing.		

*Source:* own creation

The previous questions may seem the same as this one; however, here it was essential to know if participants are applying their considerations and opinions answered previously in their study time. In this case, participants did not reaffirm what they mentioned before but also added some activities such as flashcards and relating meanings with something they already know or put the word in context. To reaffirm this, Godwing-Jones (2018) states that materials of their choosing with a proper level of difficulty allow an easy understanding and a pleasurable reading experience.

Thoung (2019) comments that second languages learners should be guided to learn vocabulary by grouping words in different types of semantic fields (lexical sets) such as similar meaning, opposites, derivatives, idioms or multi-words, verbs, and so on because learners should realize that the meaning they first learned for a word may not be the one that it has in a new context, they need encouragement in guessing the meaning through the context.

These authors confirm that students' activities are chosen according to their needs and ways to learn vocabulary, as well as activities that could help them to relate words to make them meaningful and easy to remember. At the end, students are free to select the activities they want to apply for their learning process.

**Question 9: Which Japanese language vocabulary do you focus on the most, and why? (Verbs, adjectives, nouns)**

**Table 39.** *Responses' similarities in Q9*

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Verbs.	Verbs.	Verbs.
Nouns.	Nouns.	
Basics of communication.	Basic communication.	

*Source:* own creation

Respondents said that they are focused the most on verbs because those words are constantly changing their forms according to grammar, but the basis will be the verb in its infinitive form; therefore, by knowing the verb in its simple form, students will use it with ease. Also, nouns were selected as the second most important. Students argue that nouns and verbs are more frequent because those components must express their basic needs and ideas. To reiterate this information, Nadiya et al. (2019) stipulate that building your vocabulary is one of the easiest ways to improve your communication, as you will have several synonyms in your repertoire to pull from every time you need to say precisely what you mean. Then, Thuong (2019) states that while without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. To reach the goal of expressing ideas and forming utterances, people need to use words. Meanwhile, Nadiya (2019) mentions that vocabulary enriches and enhances communication by the more words students know. Besides, Thuong (2019) states that vocabulary is the most vital component in language communication, leaving grammar in second place.

This means that with enough vocabulary, students can use language as they want, tell where they are going, what they are doing, what they feel, what they can see and touch, or whatever they are capable of thinking and expressing it.

**Question 10: When learning new words, what do you do to keep them adequately in your mind?**

**Table 40.** *Responses' similarities in Q10*

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Writing.	Repeating.	Repeating.
Repeating.	Relating with context.	Relating with something.
Relate meaning.		

*Source:* own creation

Up to now, participants have already mentioned how they usually study vocabulary. This time, they were answering about what they do to keep words in their mind. All levels said that they are oriented to write or say words repeatedly, but also there are some differences in each: in level 4, students relate meaning with an image to comprehend the meaning of the word. In level 5, participants make something more complex: they try to relate the unfamiliar word with context; thus, this relation allows them to visualize while creating or remembering a situation to understand a word. Then, respondents in level 6 mentioned that they relate their new vocabulary with mental images to create a mental or written example with its use or simply trying to understand a word through context.

Godwin-Jones (2018) mentions that studies have shown, for example, that words have psychological properties—subjective characteristics such as the level of concreteness or imageability—which affect retention. Then, Ílter (2019) noted that using context to infer word meanings could compensate for learners' lack of vocabulary knowledge.

By making mental images, putting words or whole sentences in context, students tend to learn and retain vocabulary effortlessly.

**Question 11: Do you practice your learned words? Where and with whom?**

**Table 41.** Responses' similarities in Q11

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Yes.	Sometimes.	Yes.
In class.	In class.	In class with the teacher.
At home (with someone).		At home alone.

*Source:* own creation

In this question, it was essential to know if respondents could practice their learned words with someone to reinforce vocabulary knowledge. In the three levels, students can participate and practice in class, but also in their home by themselves. Nevertheless, not all respondents can practice at home with Japanese native people or a person that has a higher level to improve; therefore, students' study with the material they have. In this case, Godwing-Jones (2018) concludes that word knowledge emerges dynamically and contingently through context and user interactions. Contextualized encounters are likely to enhance the chances of retention, as words and expressions are used in meaningful, and more memorable ways.

Thereby, the author confirms that students must practice the vocabulary learned as much as they can because it will be reflected in their performance.

**Question 12: Which activities were useful for you to improve your vocabulary learning?**

**Table 42.** Responses' similarities in Q12

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Reading.	Games.	Writing.
Listening.	Repetition.	Repeating.
Relate meaning.	Listening to music.	Associating words.

*Source:* own creation

After all the study processes, respondents mentioned which activities were useful for them to improve their vocabulary learning. Thus, each level concluded differently because they were adding more activities to enrich their knowledge.

First, level 4 said that reading books or lyrics as well as listening to music or listening to the language by watching anime helped to increase and keep in mind the learned words. Also, they mentioned that relating meaning with images or context was a useful complement to study. Then, participants in level 5 said that games like memory-game or app games, repeating words in their notebooks, and listening to music were beneficial for them to learn vocabulary. Finally, level 6 mentioned that they associate words with their translations, images, and context to use them correctly. Repeating the written word by itself or in sentences to understand and assimilate their use and meaning.

Kohnke et al. (2019) demonstrated that when learners see word knowledge in multimedia forms, it stimulates and uses both channels. It establishes connections between knowledge forms and their storage in memory, thereby facilitating learners' memory retention and expediting their knowledge retrieval. Authors conclude that relating or associating words are helpful activities to learn words adequately because it becomes meaningful knowledge.

**Question 13: Would you consider that individual differences (motivation, attitude, or aptitude) are important when learning vocabulary?**

**Table 43. Responses similarities in Q13**

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Yes. Ease. Persistence	Yes. Ease. Persistence. Motivation.	Yes. Persistence. Motivation. Commitment.

*Source:* own creation

What students in levels 4, 5, and 6 answered in common was that these individual differences provide them persistence to study, which allows them to study words patiently.

Moreover, levels 4 and 5 mentioned that these individual differences present study ease, facilitating the vocabulary learning process. On the other hand, respondents in levels 5 and 6 said that these differences provide even more motivation and commitment to learning vocabulary and communication enhancement. To uphold these results, Yaacob et al. (2019) affirm that motivation is the force that pushes the learners towards developing and improving their knowledge and skills of the second language.

In contrast, Thuong (2019) asserts that learners may lack the motivation to learn two words that have a similar meaning or denote similar information, which leads to difficulty in learning synonyms. Additionally, Ílter (2019) mentions that students who read at a frustration level—those considered to be struggling readers—have a limited ability to learn novel words, limited knowledge of learning strategies, and an inadequate strategy use regarding reading to enhance their understanding of texts.

Thence, authors estimate that lack or presence of individual differences can make a massive change in students when the vocabulary learning process is carried out. That way, it is crucial that students have a genuine interest in the selected language to find out if they have good attitudes and aptitudes to continue the study of the foreign language.

**Question 14: After studying vocabulary, how did you notice that your language competence improved?**

**Table 44.** *Responses' similarities in Q14*

<i>Level 4 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 5 Similarities</i>	<i>Level 6 Similarities</i>
Understanding.	Understand.	Understanding ease.
	Language-communication.	Confidence.
	Confidence.	Participation.
		Communication ease.

*Source:* own creation

Students have passed through many hours of study, but each level reflected different results about how they noticed that their language competence improved at the end.

First, participants in level 4 said they were capable of understanding words in audios, conversations, movies, anime, texts, as well as their writing and speaking skills increased a little more. Then, the participants in level 5 mentioned that they understand more complex ideas in texts, conversations, music, and situations without problems. Furthermore, these students had a notorious change in their confidence when they answered book's exercises in class. Finally, participants in level 6 revealed significant enhancements reflected in their understanding ease and confidence when using the language. For example, they were participating more in class using their learned vocabulary in new structures, and themes were understood effortlessly. Audios, movies, songs were no more complex to comprehend. Thus, all the students' learning processes allowed them to obtain communication ease in their Japanese language environment.

Supporting these results, Thoung (2019) concluded that knowing a word is also about the ability to produce it, to use it in a grammatical pattern along with the word it usually collocates with, and to use it in a suitable situation using the word to stand for the meaning it represents. Also, he says that having a rich lexical resource and acquiring knowledge about word meaning bring learners a source of power and make them become better readers, writers, and speakers; which helps open a broader path to success in school and their future work. Finally, Yaacob et al. (2019) advocate that students who master enough vocabulary may have a great chance to improve their writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills.

Authors agree that having a large amount of vocabulary can be reflected in communication skills to get a language competence enhancement as results in this study are demonstrated.

### 4.3 Discussion

It was impressive how students were upgrading their Japanese vocabulary knowledge according to their own experiences. Starting with the importance that learners give to vocabulary learning to improve third language competence, in which they considered that unfamiliar words are crucial because it facilitates communication and understanding within language. Thus, vocabulary gains validity when students are aware of the need of using more words; then, interest gradually increases, and it is vital because it will be reflected in students' long-term academic success. To support this, Hung (2015) concluded that Japanese vocabulary proficiency is related to Japanese language proficiency; therefore, the learning and evaluation of the Japanese vocabulary are vital in Japanese learning.

Participants can face challenging situations when the study process occurs, such as participation and knowledge of meanings absences. If language learners have vocabulary lacking, they could present significant challenges within Japanese language content subjects, which would result in a limited performance. On the other hand, the students considered that the main difficulty in Japanese language vocabulary study is the enormous amount of meanings they must learn and associate with their written forms. Nevertheless, these written forms can involve Kanjis with it, which adds weight to the previous difficulty due to those semantic meanings, depending on how it is used or attached.

Notably, the students did not write strategies considered the best to study Japanese vocabulary or vocabulary in general. However, they mentioned some activities such as reading and repetition, which can be a combination of cognitive and memory language learning strategies. Thus, they said that they would prefer to find words in written formats to increase competence and repeat words until they think it is enough. Repetition is considered within memorization, but

students must make it meaningful to stimulate their thinking process; hence, language learners must use strategies to reinforce vocabulary learning.

As a plus, it was suggested to students some activities, so they had to choose those which they find useful and adequate to study Japanese language vocabulary. They considered that flashcards and card notes are those practical tools to learn anywhere and anytime. Now, as a crucial factor, the participants mentioned how they study vocabulary to know if they are applying their considerations and opinions already mentioned. Positively, they mentioned flashcards and card notes, but also, they added some others such as relating meanings and putting words in context, which means that they would be using their own chosen activities according to level difficulty, allowing understanding and a pleasurable experience at the end. In this manner, what kind of vocabulary are participants focused on? First, verbs, and then nouns. Participants said that those words are more frequent and those are required to express basic needs and ideas, but verbs are in the first place because these words are constantly changing according to grammar.

Also, the respondents mentioned peculiar activities they use to keep learned words in their minds. The most popular answer revealed that writing or saying words repeatedly is the most preferred one, followed by relating the meaning of the word with images or putting it in context. One other essential task for language learners occurs when the students can put into practice the learned words. In this case, respondents commented that being in class is the best opportunity for them to participate and practice, as well as practicing at home by themselves. Unfortunately, not all students can test their knowledge with someone with a higher level, so they must study and practice as much as possible to get favorable results. After the study process, participants shared the activities that were useful for them to learn Japanese language vocabulary: relating words with images or context, listening to music, repeating a word itself or in sentences to understand and

assimilate the usage and the meaning; thought activities to establish connections between knowledge and the storage in memory. In this case, Akiyama (2019) also concluded that imagining the meaning of a word can be a determinant clue to the learnability of vocabulary because, as a result, visualizing concepts increases meaningful learning.

Students expressed their opinion about the importance of individual differences (motivation, attitude, aptitude) when learning vocabulary. In this case, all of them said that these unique characteristics provide persistence to study because learning a word is a process in which students must be patient to achieve this goal. In addition, students must have a genuine interest in the language to find if they have good attitudes or aptitudes to continue studying the foreign language. Thus, these differences provided them eases to learn Japanese language vocabulary. To support these findings, Gardner (1996, as cited in MacIntyre, 2002) stated that a student could be considered motivated if he or she is engaged with the foreign language if there are integrative attitudes, and a goal as a purpose to make this effort of learning a language.

After respondents' vocabulary study process, it was primordial to know how they noticed that Japanese language competence improved. Each level reflected different results such as the capability of understanding words, audios, visual resources, readings, as well as writing and speaking minor upgrading in level 4; understanding of complex texts, conversations, music, and situations without problems in level 5; and more participation in classes, effortless in the understanding of topics, and audios where no more complex to comprehend in level 6. In general, the three levels gained ease of communication in their environment, which guarantees success in school and future work.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

It is relevant, even crucial, to know how much importance language learners are giving to vocabulary study. Thus, this research allowed to do these immersions within CELE's Japanese language course in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> levels, starting with the application of the questionnaires, the answer filters, and the results. In the end, by analyzing the findings, it was proven that these language learners consider that vocabulary is a critical tool to improve Japanese language competence. Therefore, Japanese language students must focus more on vocabulary study to achieve their goals a little faster.

## **Chapter V. Research question answers and conclusions**

### **5.0 Introduction to the chapter**

This final stage contains the answers to the research questions made in the first chapter, the limitations of the study, the directions for further research as a revelation of the real purpose of this project, and the final conclusions of this whole research.

### **5.1 Research questions' answers**

According to the obtained results, the students found difficult the process to learn and retain vocabulary because it involves a truly complex cognitive process where they need to develop a semantic task helped by their background or knowledge already settled in mind. The process of learning Japanese words require learning how to write the word (number and order of strokes in Kanji cases), the reading and sound-spelling process, the meaning of the word in student's native language, a semantic image of the meaning, and a contextualized short phrase to reinforce the word. All this process implicates a repetitive cycle helped by memorization method and meaningful learning method combined.

Related to the upper method, there exists activities that students are using the most to enhance their vocabulary learning process such as reading and repetition, cognitive and memory language learning strategies, but preferring written formats like flashcards or card notes to read, repeat, and set up words in mind until they consider they already learned them. At last, the participants settle that reading books, listening to music, watching programs or anime, memory games, apps, increase their Japanese language competence because vocabulary was enough to make metacognitive processes to comprehend the language.

Finally, participants mentioned their most noticeable improvements compared to the vocabulary learning process onset. The more remarkable one was the acquisition of understanding

ease, then the confidence to participate in class and communicate their ideas to others. For example, this ease understanding of words in movies, songs, conversations, texts, situations, according to the participants' level, was helpful to make simpler to comprehend and realize about the complete message or deduce the whole idea by context.

## **5.2 Study limitations**

Limitations are those troubles faced during the research creation process, theoretical or contextual problems that could have stopped the study for a short or long time. These limitations are presented separately in theoretical and contextual limitations below.

### ***5.2.1 Theoretical limitations***

There is one important limitation on this field: the lack of information about Japanese vocabulary learning or similar studies related to this research. Physically, it was impossible to collect references due to the pandemic period, and with the use of internet was easier, but it was not as satisfactory as I would have liked, even when the research was made in Spanish and English language. After all, it was worrying because there were not enough solid or validated articles or researches, and there are some counted informal articles or blogs written by other learners or teachers talking about learning Japanese vocabulary and its importance in a general way, it was a good reference or point of view to take into account, but it was not possible to cite in this research.

### ***5.2.2 Contextual limitations***

The research was done and applied during pandemic Covid-19 with the on-line classes, and during this lapse of time there were a small number of students. Besides, as it is small research, it only corresponds to the study context at the LEI settings, and it cannot be generalized.

### **5.3 Directions for further research**

In other terms, this study could be used by Japanese language teachers or self-taught students to help and direct the language learning in a specific learning period, and, in that way, to prevent desertion before it occurs.

This research represents a scope of opportunity for Mexican students to discover, enhance or strengthen their learning abilities, namely, if students explore the vocabulary learning field, they will have the chance to discover their own way of study: rhythm, routines, strategies, and activities that are comfortable and suitable for themselves. The students will have the chance to know more about themselves, their learning scope, and limits. Moreover, by analyzing the collected data and the results of this research, the effectiveness of vocabulary learning was verified when students want to fortify their language skills: listening, reading writing, and speaking. For example, the ease to catch, understand and use Japanese vocabulary in audios, videos, movies, in a text, in class, etc., the learners showed a notorious improvement in their performance because they knew and recognized a certain number of words. This boosts motivation and increases the learners' aptitudes and attitudes for future language challenges.

Additionally, this research can be used as a reference to compare or fortify future studies that involve the inverse language learning process (vocabulary), for example, Japanese students learning Spanish language could use this research to support their studies.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

This research was designed as a guide for students to make them realize that Japanese language is not as difficult as it seems, providing the opportunity to open new horizons to discover their own study process and to get an incredible autonomous learning, which will be useful for any future foreign language self-study.

At first, this research's creation process was based on a social constructivism study which involves researching something researchers are living with and case study to immerse themselves in a particular phenomenon in the real world. As a starting point, I was part of this community, a student in Japanese language CELE's courses, trying to comprehend the best way to learn this completely different language as it was getting more complex. The results showed the reality of the language, phenomena that I was discovering while I was studying the language. The respondents of the research and I concluded that Japanese grammar is not complex, that it would be taken like learning patrons, but the real challenge field would be learning vocabulary due to all those cognitive and metacognitive processes needed to learn a vast number of words, meanings, and idiographic symbols.

Moreover, it is concluded that the importance of learning vocabulary within every language is vital to obtain a great language performance. In this case, Japanese language vocabulary is not enough focused, professionally, or academically, in any Spanish or English research. For example, compared to my study, I observed that other researchers try to find the complexity of the Japanese language, but they never were specific about a particular phenomenon such as vocabulary learning, or likely, and I am inferring that the professionals or the teachers imply that students already know what to do when they learn this unknown language. Indeed, students must discover solutions to not back down, but this could take time to find or, in some cases, it could never happen.

At the end, it is incredibly grateful that this research accomplished, even surpassing, all expectations and theories about the major complexity of the Japanese language. Of course, grammar is one of the principal elements in every language but talking about Japanese, it is different because its grammar is not so worrying. Vocabulary is a topic that teachers should pay more attention in class or, if they have not enough time in classroom, they could talk about taking

more importance to the words in each lesson (and may be test it later), because it is the clue to success and enhance their Japanese language competence.

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**APPENDIX: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Japanese level in CELE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Please carefully answer the questions below, you are allowed to answer as extend as you like. In question 3 you can choose more than one option, and in question 7 you only have to choose one option.

1. Do you think vocabulary is important to improve language competence? If so, why?
  
2. What do you think about the fact that vocabulary may be the main clue to improve your language competence?
  
3. Did you face any of the following situations when studying Japanese language vocabulary?
  - a) I do not know where to start studying
  - b) I forgot everything the following day
  - c) I do not want to participate in class because of my lack of vocabulary
  - d) I do not understand the meaning of the words
  - e) I get bored when studying vocabulary
  
4. Do you consider that studying Japanese vocabulary is difficult? Why?
  
5. Do you consider that Japanese writing makes difficult the vocabulary learning process? If so, why?
  
6. What kind of strategy do you consider is the best for you to study new Japanese vocabulary?

7. From the following activities, which ones do you find useful and adequate when studying Japanese vocabulary?
  - a) Watching anime
  - b) Playing app games
  - c) Making flashcards or card notes to study everywhere as a practical way
  - d) By writing words in the notebook many times
  - e) Using special program
  
8. How do you study Japanese language vocabulary?
  
9. Which Japanese language vocabulary do you focus on the most, and why? (Verbs, adjectives, adverbs, nouns)
  
10. When learning new words, what do you do to keep them adequately in your mind?
  
11. Do you practice your learned words? Where and with whom?
  
12. Which activities were useful for you to improve your vocabulary learning?
  
13. Would you consider that individual differences (motivation, attitude, or aptitude) are important when learning vocabulary? If so, why?
  
14. After studying vocabulary, how did you notice that your language competence improved?