
Conference Reviews

JALT 2025 International Conference Review

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The 51st JALT International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning and Educational Materials Exhibition took place at National Youth Olympic Center, Yoyogi, Tokyo, Japan between Friday, October 31, 2025 and Sunday, November 2, 2025. This year's theme, "Learning, Teaching, Assessing, JALT 50 years - Challenges and Perspectives" highlighted the evolution and future directions of language education. I attended the conference on Saturday and Sunday, during which I had the opportunity to participate in numerous presentations, plenaries, and workshops. In this review, I will share some of the key highlights from the weekend's events and insights gained from the sessions.

I have been attending the JALT International Conference since 2022; however, this was the first occasion on which I was able to truly engage with the diverse range of presentations by attending multiple workshops, plenaries, and research sessions. As always, participants were provided with a detailed schedule which aided in navigating the various buildings and rooms at the venue. The conference was held in a spacious venue situated in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, which attracted a large and enthusiastic attendance.

The first presentation I attended was the plenary held on Saturday morning. The speaker was Naoko Taguchi, who discussed intercultural competence in language learning. She elaborated on various methods and metrics used to assess intercultural competence, highlighting the challenges in selecting an appropriate measure. One case study that I found insightful, examined the differences among Japanese, German, and American students in the context of a study-

abroad experience, where participants were required to work collaboratively in groups. The study revealed that German students tend to be active participants in group discussions, Japanese students often exhibit shyness, and American students generally prefer working independently. Taguchi's longitudinal study of intercultural competence concluded that such competence can develop naturally over time and can be actively promoted within campus settings, and that an English Medium of Instruction environment can provide meaningful opportunities for intercultural communication and negotiation.

Following that stimulating presentation, I took the opportunity to coordinate the CUE forum alongside officers Nadiia Zaitseva and Fred Bacala. Our panelists included Mehrasa Alizadeh and Julia Kimura, both experienced researchers in the field of linguistics, representing different facets of research. Julia emphasized how the "publish or perish culture" prevalent in academia impacts researchers, and she shared insights from her study on female participants. She discussed how both individual and institutional factors can influence the experiences of female researchers in Japan. On the individual level, factors such as age, ethnicity, family situation, life events, achievement factors, efficiency, and autonomy were highlighted. Conversely, institutional factors including policies and culture, collaborative opportunities or the lack thereof, IRB protocols involving student participants, and employment status such as being an adjunct also significantly impact research productivity. I found this discussion particularly valuable, as I am a young female academic and an emerging researcher, making these insights highly relevant to my own career development. Mehrasa Alizadeh offered a valuable perspective for early-career academics on how to start a research career. She traced her own starting point to her PhD research work on technology-enhanced language learning, which led her to study the use of virtual reality in her classroom and later to found the MAVR SIG. She also addressed the issue of predatory journals, highlighting their implications for research integrity, scholarly credibility, and publication practices.

Following the CUE forum, I attended Kinsella Vallies' workshop on collaborative research, because I am exploring such projects at my workplace. The session was highly valuable, especially the discussions with other teachers

about common challenges in collaborative research. I left with practical strategies for building sustainable routines and productivity habits: brief daily 15-minute writing sessions, rituals and reminders to prompt writing, and mechanisms for seeking and integrating critical feedback. Overall, the workshop gave me clear ideas for improving my habits to better advance my research goals.

The second plenary addressed the design of tasks for meaningful L2 teaching and assessment. Dr. Shoko Sasayama articulated the urgent need for foreign language proficiency among Japanese learners and outlined pedagogical responses within classroom practice. She emphasized the use of communicative, meaning-focused tasks, the principled implementation of task-based instruction, and structured practice in asking and answering questions as strategies to enhance learner motivation. Dr. Sasayama concluded by reaffirming that language education should be grounded in real-world needs and centered on communication.

On Sunday, I attended a plenary on building culturally inclusive schools. The speaker, Masato Kaneko of Yokohama City Minami Yoshida Elementary School, works with a student body largely composed of foreign nationals who require substantial Japanese language support. Delivered primarily in Japanese, the talk highlighted key strategies for accommodating multilingual learners and ensuring adequate classroom support. The discussion focused on a Yokohama high school context with a significant Chinese student population, underscoring the need for responsive, linguistically inclusive practices.

Following that stimulating plenary, I attended Yoshi Grote's talk on language learning, openness, and well-being, framed within positive psychology. Grote noted that many Japanese learners report generally positive social relationships, reflecting cultural norms of modesty, continuity, and restrained disapproval. An activity using images of varied emotional valence illustrated the well-documented negativity bias: participants predominantly identified negative emotions, suggesting that adverse stimuli are more salient to cognitive processing. The pedagogical implication was to deliberately "scan for the positive" and cultivate a "good-weather brain." The session concluded with classroom-ready positive emotion interventions, including brief "three good things" reflections each

lesson, structured gratitude journaling, and documenting an unexpected positive event (e.g., a photo) for in-class sharing. These practices aim to enhance learner well-being and, by extension, engagement in language learning.

I was appreciative that the conference was scheduled during a long weekend, allowing me to remain until the conclusion of the event on Sunday, November 2nd, to attend the closing ceremony. Participating in the conference greatly contributed to my professional development, as it provided valuable opportunities to connect with potential collaborators and colleagues in our shared teaching endeavors. I am grateful to KIT (my university) for supporting my attendance this year. This was my first time attending the closing ceremony of JALT International, and it was inspiring to hear from the conference organizers about the successes of this year's event, and their vision for the future, including the upcoming JALT 2026 conference, which will be held in Nagoya.

Author bio

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