

Hi, I'm Igor, I enjoy learning languages, their intricate structure and how to teach them more efficiently. I came to Japan to research new methods of teaching kanji and vocabulary to learners of the Japanese language as the country opens up to international cooperation more than ever.

This might sound awfully cliché, but coming back to Japan last October was truly a dream come true. Ever since returning from my first long-term stay in 2023, I had been longing to set foot here again, to pick up where I left off, and to dive even deeper into the culture and language that had captured my heart. But, as eager as I was to begin university, there was one important step I had to take first—completing my time at language school and taking my Japanese level to new heights in order to be ready for lengthy lectures and bulky linguistics papers.

Tokyo JASSO Language School has without a doubt prepared me for higher education in Japan; from academic vocabulary and presentation skills to effective summarization techniques. The workload can be demanding, and the learning curve undeniably steep, but I can confidently say that I have emerged with significantly stronger Japanese proficiency. Now, as graduation approaches, I realize that language school provided me with more than just quality classes. It was also a transformative human experience. A space where I met people from all corners of the world, all sharing the same burning passion for Japan. My teachers, too, left a deep impression on me—not only through their guidance but through their unique personalities, perspectives, and life stories. Furthermore, as someone who is deeply interested in Japanese language education, getting to learn about their life's work and hearing their opinions about current learning resources and study methods will be of great value for my future research. Back in the early days of my language journey, I regarded the JLPT N1 as the ultimate goal, the shining prize at the top of the mountain. Yet, as I drew closer to achieving it, I began to understand that achieving this objective was not a finish line but the start of a lifelong endeavor. Language is alive. It's constantly evolving, and deeply intertwined with the culture and people who speak it.

Another rewarding aspect of my time at the language school has been the opportunity to communicate with people from all walks of life—each carrying their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This melting pot of international friendships and cross-cultural exchanges provided me with a small but solid support network for the years to come, as it is simply impossible to get anywhere in life without a bit of help.

This time around, I chose to step away from the fast-paced life of an exchange student, the kind I had experienced two years ago, and instead focused on finding my place within a community. Even with a solid grasp of the language, integrating into Japanese society is no easy feat. It starts with the little things—getting to know my teachers and their background beyond simple small talk, becoming a familiar face at my local ramen shop, striking up conversations with strangers on the bus or at the market. These seemingly small interactions hold immense weight, especially for someone like me, who has struggled in the past to forge human connections.

With my partner living in Gunma Prefecture as an assistant English teacher, I have found myself experiencing Japan beyond the urban sprawl of Tokyo. Weekend visits to the countryside, surrounded by rolling mountains, have helped me appreciate a different side of

this country—a slower, more intimate rhythm of life. With such a busy schedule at the language school I have learned to make the most of my free time and have taken a few trips to corners of the country I had never seen before, like the snowy mountains of Miyagi prefecture or the rice terraces of Niigata.

Of course, not everything is picture-perfect on this side of the world. The privilege of living abroad comes with its fair share of unforeseen challenges. Financial independence, navigating the housing market as a foreigner, sudden waves of homesickness—there have been days when the beauty of this land felt just out of reach. But through perseverance and the unwavering passion that brought me here in the first place, I have learned to turn obstacles into lessons, setbacks into growth.

Now, as I enter my fifth month in Tokyo, I look back on everything I have accomplished so far, and a deep sense of gratitude washes over me. More than ever, I feel a burning motivation for what lies ahead. Every night, I go to sleep with a smile on my face, knowing that this journey is far from over. The MEXT scholarship has allowed me to fulfil my dream of pursuing higher education in Japan and engaging in research at the other side of the world.