



2026 Special Training Program for Japanese-Language Teachers Report



By Priya Ananth

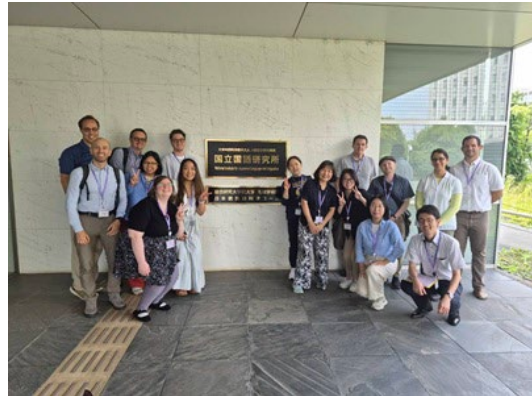
Middle Tennessee State University

Murfreesboro, TN

I received the incredible opportunity of participating in the 2026 U.S. Japanese Language Teacher Training Program that was conducted at the Japan Foundation Urawa Center in Saitama, Japan from June 5-29. This was a unique program designed for non-native Japanese-speaking teachers working at the K-16 levels in schools and universities. The selection of participants was based on a nationwide competitive application process. With the program's overall goals being "to improve Japanese language proficiency, enhance expertise in Japanese language education, and deepen the understanding of Japanese language and culture" (Program Guide, p. 2), we were introduced to a wealth of the latest insights into a variety of interesting topics and were given the opportunity to reflect and consider how to apply them in our own school and university Japanese courses back home. Although the program was short, it was the most fulfilling three-week program, packed with rich content and engaging activities.

The program's academic curriculum was custom-made based on our application responses. Classes were held separately for K-12 and university/college groups; I was in the latter group. Lectures by Urawa Center instructors and guest professors covered topics such as generative AI in language education, lesson planning using the tadoku (extensive reading) method, new online resources for Japanese language classrooms, and Japanese gender roles in songs to name a few. These lectures were informative and engaging, giving us both broad and deep insights. Furthermore, experiential learning included demonstrations and excursions, such as a wadaiko (Japanese drum) demonstration, furoshiki (wrapping cloth) workshop, visits to Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyuujo (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics), a sake brewery tour, and a Kanazawa study trip. The curriculum was well organized and executed, offering participants opportunities to engage with cutting-edge, relevant themes in teaching and research at the university level.

Another aspect of the program that was as meaningful as the curriculum was the connections with our fellow participants in both groups. This program offered participants a safe place to exchange ideas, perspectives, and views on our teaching environments, and enabled us to learn from each other. We often reflected on our roles as educators and were pleasantly surprised to find more similarities than differences in the state of Japanese language education at our respective workplaces. Our interactions not only led to meaningful conversations and professional networking but also brought us all closer as friends. The bonds of friendship created at the Karaoke sessions, the Kanazawa excursion, and the weekend outings were all irreplaceable memories for me.



“The program’s philosophy emphasizes collaboration, autonomy, and continuous learning. It also promotes self-understanding, understanding others, and gaining knowledge in our specialized field” (Program Guide, p. 1). After completing the training, I better understood the intent of this philosophy. I plan to enthusiastically continue teaching Japanese at my university, using the skills, knowledge, and professional network I gained from this program.



In closing, I would like to thank everyone who supported our group over the three weeks: the JFLA instructors and staff, the JF Urawa Center instructors, and the guest professors and staff. A BIG thank you to the Urawa cafeteria staff for taking such good care of my vegetarian dietary needs every day. I will always cherish the nickname of “veggie-san” they fondly gave me. Thank you all for making this a truly memorable experience for me.