



**JAPANESE LANGUAGE COHESION MODULE FOR ENHANCING
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS**

By

MARGARET a/p ANTHONY

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

July 2024

FBMK 2024 20

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Chairman : Roslina Mamat, PhD
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Effective speaking is crucial in language acquisition, as it reinforces learned language through practical use in real-life situations. Despite this, research on verbal cohesion among Japanese language students at universities remain limited, with most studies concentrating on cohesion in writing. This has left challenges related to achieving cohesive and coherent speech insufficiently explored. This study seeks to bridge that gap by focusing on the under-researched area of verbal cohesion in Japanese language learners at universities. This research aimed to: 1) identify the need for cohesive modules for Japanese language learning among Japanese language learners at the USIM, 2) design and develop cohesive modules for Japanese language learning at the USIM using the Analyse, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation (ADDIE) Model, 3) identify the usability assessment level of the Japanese language Cohesion Module of the dimensions of usefulness, satisfaction, and ease of use, and 4) explore the perceptions of students towards the use of the Japanese language Cohesion Module's effectiveness. The research involved Japanese language learners from the Faculty of Major Language Studies at USIM in Negeri Sembilan. Grounded

in Behaviorist Theory, Gagne's Theory of Instruction, and Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory, this research adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component included pre-test and post-test assessments of speaking skills, while the qualitative component involved interviews and usability surveys. The needs analysis phase, which involved surveys, group discussions, and expert interviews, revealed critical gaps in students' speech cohesion, particularly in their use of cohesive devices, topic continuity, and sentence coherence. Experts observed that students exhibited a low level of verbal cohesion, often struggling with fragmented sentences and a lack of fluidity in maintaining conversations. Validation through expert checklists and reliability testing ensured its accuracy, while usability testing using standardized questionnaires and student interviews confirmed high scores in usefulness, satisfaction, and overall usability. Pre-test and post-test results demonstrated that the experimental group using the module achieved significantly higher speaking scores compared to the control group. During usability assessments, students reported improvements in speech cohesion, along with increased confidence and enthusiasm when speaking Japanese, attributing their progress to the module's structured approach and clarity. The Japanese Language Cohesion Module has significantly enhanced their speaking skills. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample of Japanese language students across multiple universities to validate the module's efficacy, ensuring it can be adapted to different student populations and academic contexts.

Keywords: Cohesion, Japanese Language, Module, Speaking Skills

SDG: GOAL 4: Quality Education

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MODUL KOHESI BAHASA JEPUN UNTUK MENINGKATKAN
KEMAHIRAN BERTUTUR DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR UNIVERSITI**

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Pertuturan yang berkesan adalah penting kerana ia membolehkan penggunaan dan pengukuhan bahasa yang dipelajari dalam situasi kehidupan sebenar. Sungguhpun begitu, kajian tentang kohesi di dalam pertuturan dan komunikasi lisan di kalangan pelajar bahasa Jepun di universiti masih terhad, dengan kebanyakan kajian tertunpu kepada kesepaduan dalam penulisan dan bukan didalam pertuturan. Ini menyebabkan cabaran yang berkaitan dengan mencapai pertuturan yang kohesif dan koheren tidak diterokai dengan secukupnya. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk merapatkan jurang itu dengan memfokuskan kepada bidang kesepaduan lisan yang kurang dikaji dalam kalangan pelajar bahasa Jepun di universiti. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk: 1) mengenal pasti keperluan modul kohesi untuk pembelajaran bahasa Jepun dalam kalangan pelajar bahasa Jepun di USIM, 2) mereka bentuk dan membangunkan modul kohesi untuk pembelajaran bahasa Jepun di USIM menggunakan Analisis, Reka Bentuk, Pembangunan, Pelaksanaan dan Penilaian (ADDIE) Model, 3) mengenal pasti tahap penilaian kebolegunaan Modul Kohesi bahasa Jepun bagi dimensi kebergunaan, kepuasan, dan kemudahan penggunaan, dan 4) meneroka persepsi pelajar terhadap

penggunaan keberkesanan Modul Kohesi bahasa Jepun. Penyelidikan ini melibatkan pelajar bahasa Jepun dari Fakulti Pengajian Bahasa Utama di USIM di Negeri Sembilan. Berdasarkan Teori Behavioris, Teori Gagne, dan Teori Kohesi Halliday dan Hasan, penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, menggabungkan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Komponen kuantitatif termasuk penilaian ujian pra dan ujian pasca kemahiran bertutur, manakala komponen kualitatif melibatkan temu bual dan tinjauan kebolehgunaan. Fasa analisis keperluan menggunakan tinjauan, perbincangan kumpulan, dan temu bual pakar untuk mengenal pasti kriteria penting untuk pembangunan modul. Hasil kajian mendapati pelajar kurang menggunakan elemen kohesif dalam pertuturan, sukar untuk mengekalkan kesinambungan topik, dan kerap menggunakan ayat tergantung dan tidak lengkap. Perkara ini merupakan tujuan utama dalam pembentukan kandungan modul dan strategi pengajaran. Semasa fasa reka bentuk dan pembangunan, instrumen seperti senarai semak pengesahan pakar dan ujian kebolehpercayaan telah digunakan untuk memastikan kesahan dan kebolehpercayaan modul. Ujian kebolehgunaan melibatkan soal selidik kebolehgunaan piawai dan temu bual pelajar, yang mengesahkan skor tinggi modul dari segi kebergunaan, kepuasan dan kebolehgunaan keseluruhan untuk pelajar bahasa Jepun di Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Tambahan pula, keputusan ujian pra dan ujian pasca menunjukkan bahawa pelajar dalam kumpulan eksperimen yang menggunakan modul menunjukkan skor pertuturan yang lebih tinggi secara signifikan berbanding kumpulan kawalan. Temu bual yang dijalankan semasa fasa penilaian kebolehgunaan modul mendapati modul tersebut dapat membantu mereka memahami isu dalam pertuturan. Secara kesimpulan, modul ini berkesan sebagai alat pembelajaran yang komprehensif dalam meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur pelajar. Disyorkan kajian dan penyelidikan masa depan melibatkan sampel pelajar bahasa

jepun yang lebih besar dan melibatkan pelajar daripada pelbagai universiti untuk meningkatkan pemahaman tentang kesan dan keberkesanan modul.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Jepun, Kemahiran bertutur, Kohesi, Modul

SDG: MATLAMAT 4: Pendidikan Berkualiti



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledging the Almighty for providing strength and faith, this journey's completion is attributed to divine grace. This research would not have been completed successfully without the grace of God. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to my main supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Roslina Mamat, alongside co-supervisors Dr. Ilyana and Dr. Ramiza for their unwavering support throughout the research process. Special appreciation is directed towards Dr. Ilyana for her invaluable feedback, fostering a more diligent and responsible approach to the research. Her countless critical comments that were made for my research has trained me to be more alert and responsible with what I produced for the research.

Acknowledgment is also to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arman Shah Abdullah, for unselfishly imparted his knowledge, given his valuable expert opinion listened, gave advice, and helped me to complete this research. Most importantly, to never give up on me whenever I began to stray off the path, when I began to question my ability to finish this research, when I struggled with my analysis phase, emotionally up until this moment.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my family, particularly to my beloved mother, Madam Soo Saimmah @ Maria Selvam Innasiamuthu, my brothers, Peter, Francis Xavier, Vincent Paul, Steven and my sisters, the late Elizabeth and Catherine, and not forgetting my husband Steven Anthonysamy, sisters- in- law, nephews and nieces had been cornerstone of encouragement and faith. Finally, I would like to express my utmost appreciation to my lovely princess Priscilla Ann for her enduring

love and motivation, underscoring the significant role of personal inspiration in achieving research goals.

My sincere appreciation also goes to all my colleagues, particularly, Dr. Nomi binti Abdullah, friends and others who have provided assistance at various occasions. Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my senior Prof. Madya. Dr. Rohaida Kamarudin for her help, support, guidance and prayers.



This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADDIE	Analyse, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
DDR	Design and Development Research
ESL	English as a Second Language
FPBU	Faculty of Major Language Studies
IPTA	Public Higher Education Institutions
IPTS	Private Higher Education Institutions
FL	Foreign Language
JFL	Japanese as a Foreign Language
JLCM	Japanese Language Cohesion Module
L1	First Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UM	University of Malaya
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
USIM	Islamic Science University of Malaysia
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Malaysia recognizes the crucial role of developing its human capital to thrive in the knowledge economy and the global workplace. To achieve this goal, it is essential to equip the workforce with proficiency in a Foreign Language (FL). Effective communication in an FL can significantly enhance the prospects of Malaysian job seekers in the global economy (The Ministry of Higher Education, 2007, p. 62).

The importance of mastering FLs is highlighted in the goals of local higher education institutions to prepare students for the challenges of the labour market and a highly multicultural and multilingual workplace. In Malaysia, according to the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP): Laying the Foundation Beyond 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007), students are encouraged to master at least one international language as a third language. For example, proficiency in Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese, French, and Spanish in a third language is critical to the development of human capital that drives the knowledge economy to position the country for international competitiveness and innovation (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). The government aims to produce graduates with the appropriate communication skills, language skills, and competencies to be part of a highly qualified and knowledgeable workforce and to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex, multicultural, and globalized society.

Furthermore, the second thrust of the NHESP (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007) focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. It required local colleges to undertake regular curriculum improvements based on a relevant and dynamic curriculum with the latest developments and to strengthen effective, innovative, and international teaching and learning methods for current and future needs in education to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. The ministry aimed to produce competitive graduates and ensure that these graduates benefit from high-quality learning experiences and can meet the challenges of the knowledge and innovation-based economy.

The NHESP review (Department of Education, 2014) highlighted that teaching and learning in higher education need to be more active and connected to real life while incorporating new approaches to teaching or learning that enable the development of critical and creative thinking. A practical curriculum needs to be developed that emphasizes not only disciplinary knowledge and facts but also skill and language requirements (Ministry of Education, 2014). Malaysian students can study another language or an FL in secondary or tertiary education. FLs were offered as an elective subject at universities. Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Thai, German, Spanish, and French were among the FL skills commonly offered in tertiary education (See & Ching, 2013).

Speaking, defined as the activity of producing oral speech to communicate with others (Zuhriyah, 2017), is a critical skill in language learning, particularly in mastering the Japanese language. Nevertheless, many students grapple with public speaking, often choosing silence over participation in class due to low self-esteem, lack of motivation,

and the fear of making mistakes (Ariyanti, 2016). These challenges are prevalent and can significantly hinder the language learning process.

To mitigate these issues and bolster students' speaking abilities, this research posits that in addition to content planning and rehearsal, as Kurum (2016) suggested, an explicit focus on enhancing cohesion in speech is paramount. Cohesion, the linguistic tool that ensures clarity and fluidity in communication, is indispensable for delivering a coherent and compelling speech.

In the context of Japanese language learning, mastering the use of cohesive devices such as conjunctions, discourse markers, and reference words is essential. These tools enable learners to connect their ideas seamlessly, create logical progressions in their speech, and maintain the attention of their audience. By integrating cohesive elements into their speech preparation and practice, students can transcend the barriers of low confidence and fear, ultimately achieving a level of fluency and eloquence in their spoken Japanese.

Through targeted exercises, practical applications, and continuous reinforcement of cohesive use in speech, this research aims to empower students to speak confidently in Japanese, transforming the classroom environment from silence and apprehension to active participation and robust communication. In doing so, we address the immediate challenges of speaking anxiety and contribute to the holistic development of students' language skills in Japanese.

1.2 Research Background

Language is an essential medium of communication that holds significant commercial value. It is the primary tool through which individuals express ideas, feelings, and concepts in social interactions. As May (2001) asserts, language is the medium through which people connect in society, yet it is also shaped by societal norms, which dictate how language is used and understood.

In communication, language use is influenced by cultural factors such as location, time, situational context, and the relationship between communicators. Effective communication relies on producing meaningful text, as emphasized in the findings of Halliday and Hasan (1985), where the exchange of meaning is central to communication.

In today's globalized world, learning and mastering foreign languages (FLs) is crucial. This necessity is driven by the increasing demand for FL proficiency in the international arena. Mastery of an FL is no longer optional but essential, as those who only know their mother tongue may struggle to keep up in various fields.

FL learning has been a focus in Malaysia since the 1960s, with the government offering FL courses at higher education institutions and schools (Roswati et al., 2007). The job market now requires graduates to have diverse skills, including FL proficiency (Ainol Madziah & Isarji, 2009). This aligns with the Malaysia Education Development Plan 2015-2025, which aims to equip Malaysians with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a globalized world through FL learning. An increasing number of

Malaysian students are learning Japanese as a third language at university, motivated by Japan's status as an industrial leader and the strong work ethic of its people. This has created a local demand for Malaysians proficient in Japanese, particularly for employment in Japanese companies and the tourism sector. Japanese, the official language of Japan, is spoken by approximately 130 million people worldwide. A 2018 survey by the Japan Foundation found that around 3.85 million people were studying Japanese at 18,604 institutions across 137 countries (Japan Times, 2019). Language proficiency is highlighted as one of the six primary attributes in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB). This attribute not only emphasizes proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English but also encourages the learning of a foreign language. The growing interest in learning Japanese among Malaysians can be attributed to Japan's economic, innovative, and technological achievements, making it one of the wealthiest countries globally. Moreover, proficiency in Japanese offers significant career, travel, and cultural benefits, including a deeper understanding of Japanese popular culture and entertainment.

Learning a foreign language, particularly one as complex as Japanese, is a challenging task that requires a multifaceted approach to ensure comprehensive proficiency. Speaking is a critical aspect of language mastery, enabling effective communication, meaningful conversations, and cultural exchanges. Achieving proficiency in speaking is especially important for Japanese language learners in a university context, where language skills are linked to academic, professional, and intercultural success. There has been growing recognition of the need for innovative language instruction approaches that emphasize not only vocabulary and grammar but also pragmatic language skills such as cohesion and coherence in conversations. Cohesion refers to

the connection of meaning across sentences, while coherence pertains to the logical flow of ideas within a conversation. Both are fundamental to clear and meaningful communication in any language.

Despite the importance of these aspects, the existing tools and modules for teaching Japanese speaking skills in Malaysian universities have primarily focused on grammar, vocabulary, and basic conversational phrases, with less emphasis on developing cohesive and coherent speech. Commonly used tools include textbooks like *Minna no Nihongo* and *Marugoto*.

The *Minna no Nihongo* textbook, widely used at beginner and intermediate levels, offers comprehensive lessons on grammar, vocabulary, and basic sentence structures. However, it focuses on providing learners with foundational language skills rather than on how to cohesively and coherently integrate these elements into extended speech. Exercises typically involve sentence-level practice, which is essential for foundational learning but may not sufficiently address the need for fluency and natural conversation. Similarly, the *Marugoto* series, structured around cultural topics and real-life situations, emphasizes communicative competence and cultural understanding. While *Marugoto* offers dialogue practice and encourages the use of Japanese in everyday contexts, it tends to focus on phrase memorization and repetition of set expressions, limiting students' ability to produce spontaneous and logically structured speech. The lack of targeted exercises on connecting ideas across sentences or maintaining coherence in longer conversations is a notable gap.

Additionally, various multimedia resources, such as language learning apps, online platforms, and audio-visual materials, supplement classroom learning. These tools often provide interactive and engaging ways to practice Japanese, such as through listening comprehension exercises, vocabulary drills, and pronunciation practice. However, they also tend to focus on isolated language components rather than on how these components can be effectively combined to form cohesive and coherent speech.

Moreover, many language programs within Malaysian universities emphasize rote learning and repetition, which, while effective for memorization, do not necessarily equip students with the skills needed for fluid and natural conversation. This approach often results in students being able to produce grammatically correct sentences in isolation but struggling to link these sentences into a coherent and cohesive whole during conversations.

Given this gap, Japanese language learners, both within and outside Japan, often struggle to achieve fluency, particularly in maintaining topic continuity and structuring their speech logically during conversations. Universities typically provide language courses, but there is a recognized need for specialized modules or resources that target these specific areas. Without these, learners may find it challenging to engage in fluent, natural conversations, limiting their participation in academic discussions, professional interactions, and daily life in Japan.

This research seeks to address this critical gap by developing a Japanese Language Cohesion Module (JLCM) tailored to the needs of learners in a national university setting. The module aims to enhance the speaking skills of Japanese language learners,

equipping them with the tools necessary for fluent, cohesive, and coherent conversations. By providing learners with specific strategies, practice activities, and culturally relevant content, this module intends to bridge the gap between traditional language instruction and the practical language needs of learners, empowering them to engage in smooth and meaningful interactions in Japanese.

The significance of this research extends beyond its immediate academic context. Enhanced language proficiency has far-reaching implications for students' academic and professional success, as well as their cultural integration and global engagement. Furthermore, developing a practical cohesion module for Japanese language learners can serve as a model for similar initiatives in other language education contexts.

1.3 Problem Statement

Speaking is an essential component of communication skills in 21st-century learning, and mastering this skill is crucial for social and academic success (Sharma, 2018). It is a critical language skill that must be developed to meet curriculum requirements and build student confidence in communication (Eissa, 2019; Sharma, 2018). However, mastering a foreign language (FL) involves more than just acquiring new linguistic forms. Many FL learners struggle to achieve adequate proficiency across various language courses, particularly in the audio-oral components such as speaking and listening (Ghazali, 2011). These components are especially challenging and require significant attention and focus.

Recent years have seen an increased focus on the difficulties students face in mastering grammar and applying these skills in communication. These challenges are particularly evident in the context of FL learning, where students often struggle with grammatical structures, vocabulary, pronunciation, and pragmatic knowledge (Nawaz et al., 2015). A critical issue is the lack of cohesion in both spoken and written language, which significantly disrupts two-way communication and hinders language proficiency. Cohesion, the ability to connect ideas, sentences, and paragraphs logically, is vital for clear and meaningful communication. A deficiency in cohesive skills leads to disjointed and unclear expressions, negatively affecting students' academic performance and confidence (Al-Hamlan & Baniabdelrahman, 2015).

Despite the recognized importance of speaking skills in Japanese language acquisition, learners at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM) face a significant gap in resources dedicated to developing cohesion and coherence in speaking. While traditional language courses provide foundational knowledge, they often fail to equip learners with the specific strategies and practice necessary for effective and natural conversation. This deficiency is particularly problematic in academic, professional, and everyday contexts, where effective communication is essential.

Research has shown that students' lack of confidence in speaking can significantly impact their speaking skills (Devana & Afifah, 2021). Moreover, when the learning environment lacks coherent elements, students may struggle with confidence, further hindering their speaking development (Nijat et al., 2019). Observations of second-semester Japanese language students at USIM revealed that they have limited knowledge, lack language proficiency, and face difficulties speaking in front of the

class or during in-class activities such as role-playing and presentations. This observation aligns with findings from other studies indicating that students often struggle with speaking skills due to a lack of cohesive devices and a fear of making mistakes in front of their peers (Sung, 2020).

In the context of Japanese language learning, mastering cohesive devices such as conjunctions, discourse markers, and reference words is essential for creating logical progressions in speech and maintaining audience attention. By integrating cohesive elements into their speech preparation and practice, students can overcome barriers such as low confidence and fear, ultimately achieving greater fluency in spoken Japanese.

Despite the increasing emphasis on Japanese language education in Malaysian schools and higher education institutions, learners continue to struggle with maintaining cohesion and clarity in verbal interactions. This challenge often results in fragmented and disjointed discourse, limiting their communication abilities and affecting their overall language-learning experience. Research specifically addressing Japanese language-speaking skills in Malaysia remains limited, further exacerbating the issue. While many studies have focused on enhancing English and Malay language proficiency in university settings, there is a noticeable scarcity of research on Japanese language-speaking skills among local university students. According to Sung (2020), this lack of focus on Japanese speaking skills contributes to ongoing difficulties faced by learners.

Several studies have identified similar challenges in language acquisition. For instance, Yamamoto (2018) indicates that Japanese language learners often struggle with verbal cohesion and coherence, leading to fragmented conversations. Nakajima and Sato (2019) also found that students face difficulties in maintaining fluent discourse due to gaps in their mastery of cohesive devices. Although local research on this issue is limited, international studies, such as those by Tanaka (2020) and Hiroshi (2021), emphasize the widespread challenge of speaking skills among Japanese language learners globally.

Recognizing this gap, international research on Japanese language acquisition and speaking skills provides valuable insights that can be applied to the Malaysian context. The module, designed as a self-learning resource, aims to empower learners to improve their speaking skills by understanding and utilizing cohesion and its elements, enabling them to achieve more coherent and fluent communication in Japanese.

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the background of the study and problem statement, this research aims to create and propose a Japanese Language Cohesion Module for students to improve their speaking skills by understanding cohesion and its elements in learning the Japanese language among students. The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) to identify the need to develop a Japanese language Cohesion Module for Japanese language students in public universities such as USIM.

- ii) to design and develop cohesive modules for beginner level of Japanese language learning at the USIM using the Analyse, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation (ADDIE) Model.
- iii) to assess the usability assessment level of the beginner level of Japanese Language Cohesion Module for the dimensions of usefulness, satisfaction, and ease of use.
- iv) to explore the perceptions of students towards the use of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research problems described earlier, several research questions were formed through phases as follows:

Phase One: Needs Analysis

1. What is the need for cohesive modules among beginner level of Japanese language learning at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM)?
 - i) What are the suitable learning activities to be used in cohesive modules for Japanese language learning at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM)?
 - ii) Why is Japanese language cohesion necessary to be implemented at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM)?

Phase Two: Design of Japanese Language Cohesion Modules

2. How is the Japanese Language Cohesion Module Learning at Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM) in terms of:

- i) Content of the model
- ii) Objectives of the model
- iii) Elements of the model
- iv) Form of assessment

Phase Three: Assessment of Usability

- 3. What is the assessment of the usability level of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module in terms of dimensions of usefulness, satisfaction, and ease of use?
- 4. What are the perceptions of students towards the use of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research was carried out to generate more relevant knowledge through a systematic module for cohesive elements to enhance a smooth speaking skills process for students. Therefore, this study generates and improves students' awareness and knowledge of cohesion and its elements, especially for USIM students. The activities in this module are explicitly developed to help students focus on self-centred learning and enhance their speaking skills, especially in conversations.

In the context of student learning, this study is important because the results could potentially help Level A1 Japanese Language students enhance their Japanese speaking skills through Halliday and Hasan (1976) cohesion framework and meaningful activities. Moreover, incorporating these activities in this module is expected to provide a space for students to master speaking skills in the Japanese language. Students need to master speaking skills in Level A1 because it helps them perform well, and the confidence level to speak increases once they progress to Level 2. The researcher believes this research is important to create a module that USIM students can use in their first semester of the Japanese Language class.

Developing a Japanese Language cohesion module for Japanese language students at USIM is of paramount significance as it directly addresses the objectives set forth in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025) blueprint. This initiative aligns with the government's vision to enhance the quality of education and promote language proficiency among Malaysian students. By catering to the specific needs of Japanese language learners and fostering seamless communication skills, this module plays a pivotal role in advancing the goals of the national education policy, contributing to the nation's overall educational development and competitiveness in the global arena.

The researcher believes this research is important in developing a module that can be used as a reference for other levels of Japanese Language students, particularly in terms of using cohesive elements in conversations. In addition, the module developed in this study can be used as material for learning by other Japanese language learners at a national university in Malaysia.

The relevance of this study resides in the fact that it applies Halliday and Hasan (1976) theory, which has historically been utilized in the field of writing skills research, to the field of speaking skills research. The importance of this theoretical framework lies in the fact that it directs the extent of the investigation and offers a comprehensive comprehension of the problems being examined. According to Othman (2017), theory is essential in understanding the fundamental characteristics of a different subject. In this study, the application of Halliday and Hasan (1976) framework is expanded by concentrating on speaking abilities. As a result, new insights into verbal communication are offered, and the knowledge of how coherent elements function in spoken language is enhanced. This method broadens the range of domains in which the theory may be used and contributes to a more thorough comprehension of how language is utilized in various settings.

Since it fills in some of the gaps in our knowledge, this study is important for academics and researchers who will come after them. In the realms of research and education, it significantly contributes vital insights. It emphasizes improving students' speaking abilities as well as their enthusiasm for speaking. Moreover, the results of this study can be disseminated to other people who are interested in the investigated subjects. For example, implementing a cohesiveness module is intended to increase the level of spoken participation among students. Further, the conceptual framework that was constructed here can serve as a guide for other researchers as they carry out their work.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to offer a comprehensive explanation of how certain theories are connected to the variables under investigation. These variables are associated with speaking skills following the implementation of the learning module. The theoretical framework of this study is founded on theories detailed in the literature, which elucidate the pedagogical principles developed to tackle problem-solving in this research.

A theoretical framework is essential for every research project, providing a foundation for understanding the relationships among the variables studied. Theories, defined as sets of statements that explain data related to various issues (Jones-Smith, 2016), offer a conceptual basis for research. Othman (2017) and Varpio et al. (2020) emphasize that theory can clarify relationships within a concept, guide decision-making in research, and help us interpret the phenomena around us.

In this study, several theoretical areas are referred to and used, namely Behaviorist Theory, Cognitive Theory, Gagne's Theory of Instruction, and Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory. Each of these theories contributes to a deeper understanding of how students construct knowledge and how this knowledge can be effectively communicated, which is crucial in developing the Japanese Language Cohesion Module aimed at improving speaking skills.

Behaviorist Theory posits that learning is a process of acquiring new behaviour through conditioning. This theory is especially relevant in the context of language learning, where repetition, practice, and reinforcement are key to mastering new linguistic skills. The Japanese Language Cohesion Module incorporates elements of Behaviorist Theory by emphasizing the repetitive practice of cohesive devices and structured speaking exercises. This approach helps students internalize language patterns and improves their ability to use these patterns fluently in spoken Japanese.

Cognitive Theory focuses on internal mental processes, suggesting that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge rather than merely absorbing information. This theory is particularly applicable to language acquisition and the development of speaking skills, as it highlights the importance of understanding how learners process and integrate new linguistic information. The module designed in this study aligns with Cognitive Theory by providing activities that challenge students to connect new language structures with their existing knowledge, thereby enhancing their cognitive engagement and fostering deeper learning.

Gagne's Theory of Instruction outlines a systematic approach to instructional design, emphasizing the importance of creating learning environments that support the gradual acquisition of skills. Gagne's theory identifies different types of learning outcomes and suggests instructional events that can facilitate these outcomes. In the context of this research, Gagne's theory guided the development of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module by ensuring that the instructional materials and activities were sequenced to support students' progression from simple to more complex language tasks, thereby enhancing their speaking abilities step by step.

Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976) is deeply connected to learning cohesion elements in language. This theory emphasizes the role of cohesion in text construction, which can be directly applied to enhancing speaking skills in the Japanese language. By understanding and applying various cohesive devices such as conjunctions, ellipsis, substitution, and lexical cohesion, students can improve the coherence and fluidity of their spoken Japanese. The framework suggests that structured activities designed around these cohesive principles can significantly aid students in developing clearer and more effective communication skills in Japanese. This approach underscores the linguistic foundation necessary for improving speaking proficiency, focusing on the internal structure of language to facilitate meaningful and coherent speech.

The integration of these theories provides a robust foundation for developing the Japanese Language Cohesion Module, with each theory offering unique insights into the learning process. Behaviorist Theory emphasizes the importance of practice and reinforcement, Cognitive Theory focuses on the active construction of knowledge, Gagne's Theory ensures a systematic instructional approach, and Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory highlights the importance of cohesion in effective communication. Collectively, these theories guide the module's design, aiming to enhance students' speaking abilities and overall proficiency in the Japanese language within a university context. The expected outcome is that students who engage with the module will experience significant improvements in their ability to produce cohesive, coherent, and fluent spoken Japanese. To provide a clearer picture of the relationship of the variables studied with the theory used, the study's theoretical framework is summarized and explained in Figure 1.1.

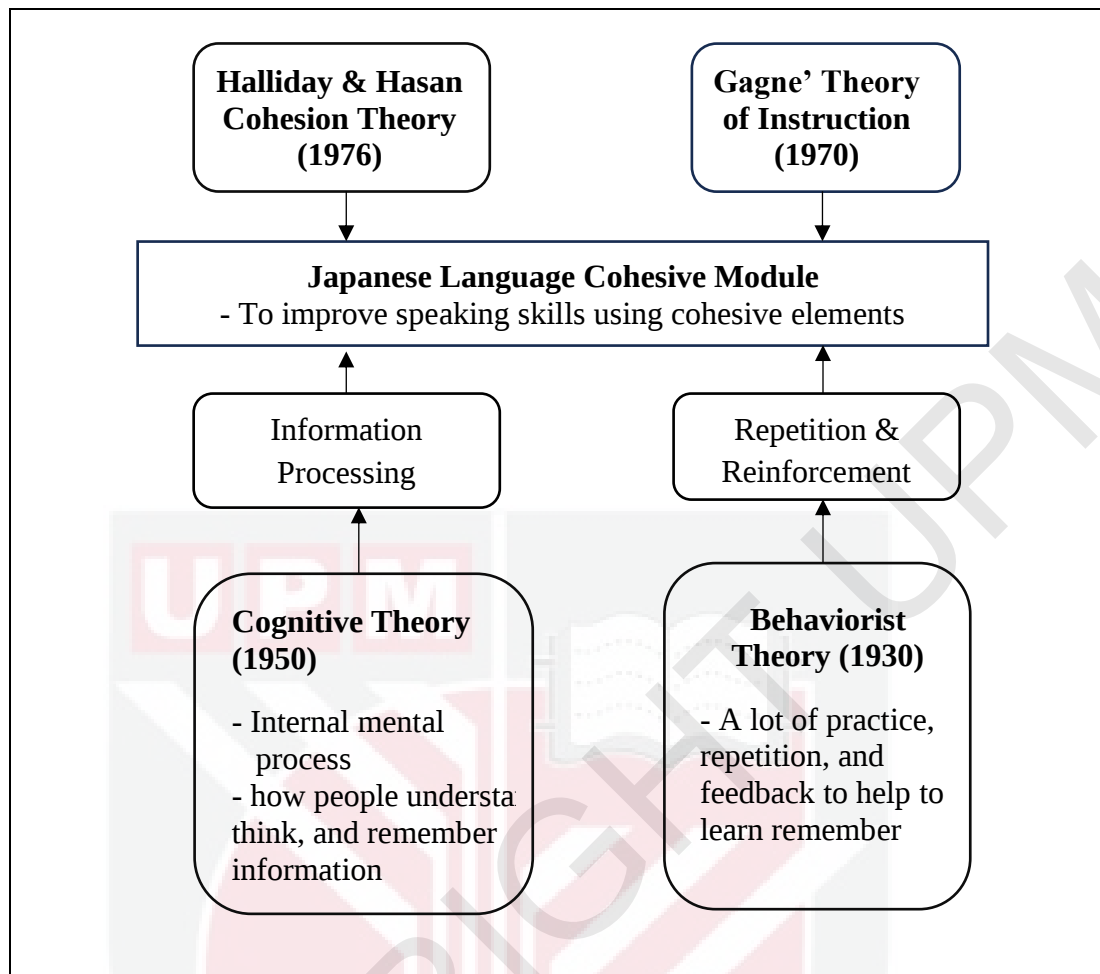


Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework of the Study

1.8 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a crucial element in guiding a research study. According to Ary et al. (2010), the study's conceptual framework provides a foundation for the research and the approach to be utilized. In other words, this research's conceptual framework acts as a reference and guideline for examining issues that are the focus of the study.

Othman (2017) argues that theory is needed in constructing a conceptual framework to assess the theory's practicality in the study, as theory helps to provide a clearer understanding of an issue. Therefore, according to Shahlan (2012), in developing a conceptual framework, researchers need to have knowledge, understand the research paradigm, be aware of current research developments, and comprehend every relationship between variables placed within the conceptual framework.

In this study, the conceptual framework is constructed based on a) the issues that need to be studied, b) the combination of theories to be implemented based on the literature review by past researchers, c) the methodology used, utilizing the Design and Development Research (DDR) method, and guided by the ADDIE Model to develop the Japanese Language Cohesion Module while considering the research gaps that need to be addressed in this study. The goal is d) to develop and test the usability of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module.

In Figure 1.2, the conceptual framework for this research is presented. The importance of developing speaking skills through cohesive elements from the beginning of Japanese language courses for student success is emphasized. To address this, the researcher plans to create and implement a Japanese Language Cohesion Module at a national university, aimed at enhancing the speaking skills of Level I Japanese language students.

This study utilizes the "learning by incorporating an activity" approach to develop Japanese language speaking skills based on the Japanese Language Cohesion Module. Learning activities are designed using the cohesive framework proposed by Halliday and Hassan (1976). The module includes five sets of activities to reinforce the lessons.

The experimental research involves analyzing the results of pre-tests and post-tests on content, fluency, coherency, and self-efficacy in speaking skills. The experimental group was exposed to the Japanese Language Cohesion Module by their Japanese language lecturers, while the control group was taught using traditional teaching strategies based solely on textbooks by their Japanese language lecturers. The Japanese Language Cohesion Module was conducted once a week for ten weeks, with each session lasting for 60 minutes. The performance of both groups was closely monitored throughout the entire ten weeks.

Preliminary studies were carried out to analyze the students' speaking skills, current classroom practices, and the lecturers' perceptions. The Japanese Language Cohesion Module was designed and developed based on the outcomes of the preliminary study. The module was created using the stages of the ADDIE model, which are further discussed in Chapter 3, while the intervention module is detailed in Chapter 4. A conceptual framework is summarized and explained in Figure 1.2.

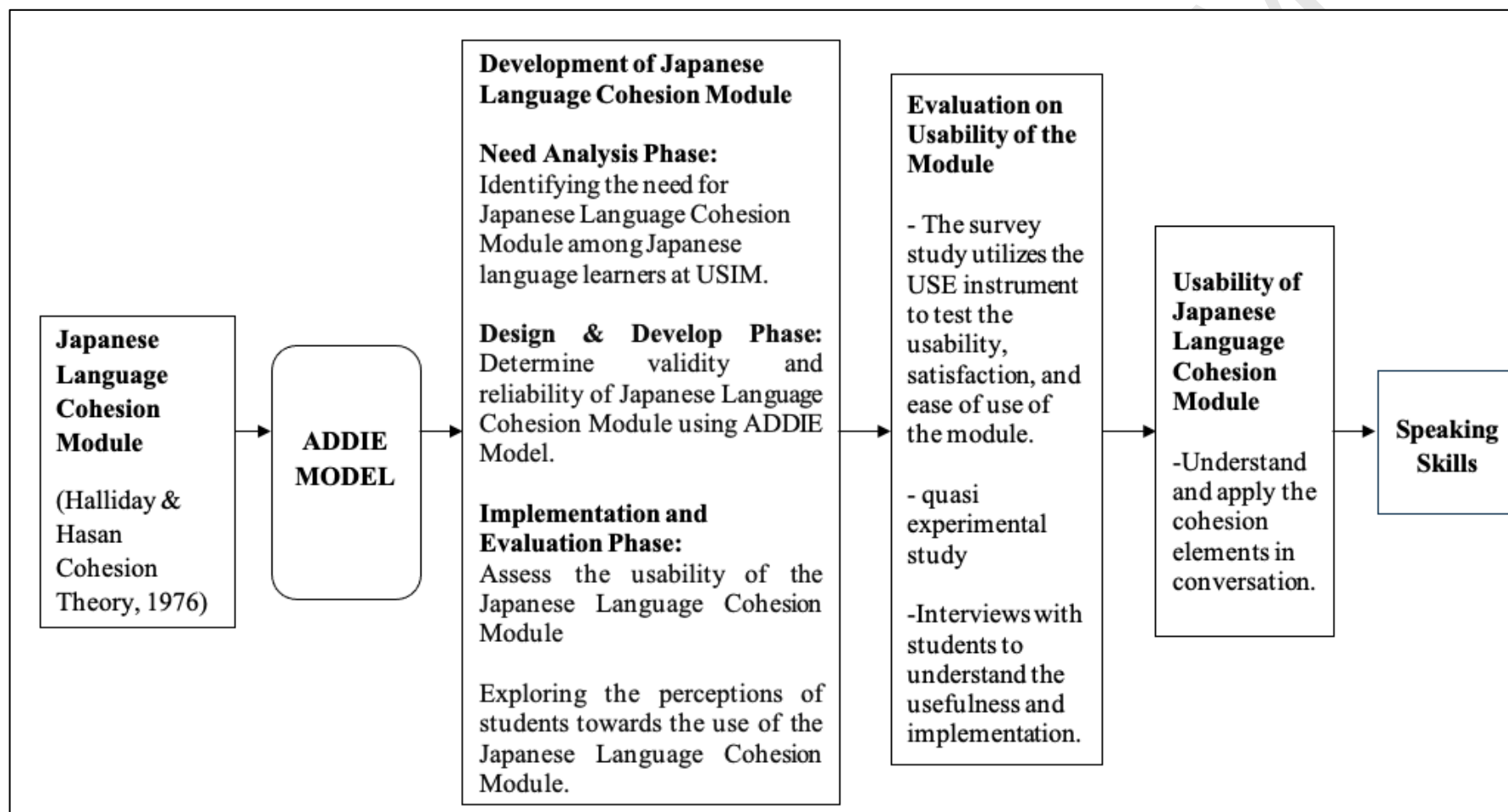


Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework for This Study

1.9 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focusses on the development and assessment of a Japanese Language Cohesion Module (JLCM) specifically designed for beginner level (A1) Japanese language learners. The A1 level, as outlined by the Marugoto curriculum, corresponds to learners who are starting to build basic communications skills in the language, making this module particularly relevant for their speaking skill development. The cohesive elements were integrated as the main tool to improve students' speaking skills. This study involved Japanese language learners (beginner) from USIM for 5 weeks. Therefore, the results only apply to the Japanese subject taught at the national university. The scope of the study will determine whether the research is manageable, convenient, researchable, effective, and measurable (Akanle et al., 2020).

1.10 Definition of The Key Term

Definitions are provided for the major inquiry of the variables utilized in this research. The conceptual and operational definitions used in this research are listed below. To better understand and avoid misinterpretation, it is considered necessary for the researcher to present a definition of binding terms applied in this research. The details are as follows:

Students' Module is one alternative to teaching and learning materials developed to achieve learning goals. Nowadays, developing teaching and learning material is essential for improving effective and efficient learning. It helps students to obtain information more systematically and practically. The module is one of the teaching

materials packed wholly and systematically; a set of planned learning experiences inside is designed to help students comprehend specific learning goals (Rendy & Fitzmaurice, 2005).

1.10.1 Foreign Language Learning

Learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills, whether formally or informally. It is a continuous process that encompasses comprehending and understanding key content, reviewing unclear facts, referring to additional reading materials, and summarizing them in the form of concise notes. According to Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich (1980) in 'Educational Psychology for Teachers,' learning is interpreted as an internal change that occurs in an individual by forming new connections or as a potential to generate new responses. This statement is supported and reinforced by Atkinson et al. (1987), where this internal change is permanent and occurs repeatedly. This change should occur over a long, firm, and enduring period (Abdul Rahim, 2001). Similarly, learning is typically defined as individual change resulting from experiences (Slavin, 1997; Mazur, 1990; Rocklin, 1987).

According to the Matthews (2007), in Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistic (3rd ed.), an FL is a language other than one's native language, usually learned formally and informally through social interaction. In this study, Japanese as an FL means a language learned in addition to the first and second languages by students. The student's first language is their native language, which could be Malay, Chinese, or Tamil, while the second language is English.

1.10.2 Cohesion

In the art of speaking in public, cohesion is an essential component that must be utilized. The fact that it can make things easier for the hearer to comprehend makes it necessary. Since they have been exposed to speaking for a significant amount of time, the students of the Japanese language unit are asked to construct a conversation. In addition, they participated in the activities that were associated with speaking. A good quality paragraph should also have cohesiveness, as Boardman (2001) stated. A paragraph is said to have coherence when all the supporting sentences "stick together" in supporting the sentence that serves as the main sentence. The cohesive devices that are used to connect sentences are referred to as cohesive devices. From this idea, cohesion can be defined as the links that hold sentences together and give them meaning. Other than that, cohesion is used to analyse discourse on how the connection between elements makes such unified and functions as a device to keep cohesiveness within a text. There are two kinds of cohesion: grammatical cohesion, referring to the structural content, and lexical cohesion, referring to the language content of the piece.

1.10.3 Grammatical Cohesion

Ampa and Basri (2019) described grammatical cohesion as grammatical items such as references, substitutions, ellipses, and conjunctions. These items are crucial in productive and receptive language skills as they help link each part of a sentence in a way that makes it understandable.

1.10.4 Lexical Cohesion

Bahaziq (2016) refers to lexical cohesion as the link between words and phrases. The cohesive structure of these words is critical in producing specific meanings. Meanwhile, lexical cohesion is made up of reiteration and collocation.

1.10.5 Speaking Skills

Lucarevschi (2016) described speaking as the process of establishing a relationship between a speaker and a listener. It also defines the physical norms, logical linguistics, and psychology used in certain communication scenarios. This implies that the primary goal of speaking is to communicate. Here, fluency and accuracy are two of the most crucial aspects of speaking. Accuracy is achieved when grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are used perfectly. On the other hand, fluency is described as the ability to continue speaking and is directly related to speech volume (Nur Ilianis, 2019).

For the purposes of this study, the focus on the ability of students to utilize coherent elements is primarily focused on improving their speaking skills. How students make efficient use of the cohesive aspects in their verbal communication is an essential component of integrating speaking skills and coherence. Students can achieve the ability to produce speech that is more fluent and logical through their understanding and use of cohesive devices such as conjunctions, pronouns, and transition phrases. Not only does this method increase the quality of their spoken English, but it also helps their capacity to explain their thoughts cohesively. As students become more proficient in using these devices, they have greater confidence while speaking and can participate

in more complicated and meaningful discussions. Their spoken Japanese becomes more understandable and interesting to listeners because of this integration, which results in a communication style that is more natural and engaging. As a result, mastering cohesive parts is essential in acquiring advanced speaking abilities in any language. Hence, it is essential to improve in a language with a complex structural structure like Japanese.

1.10.6 Module

According to Klein and Klein (2007), Modules in DDR represent a form of instructional study shaped like a product that undergoes a systematic process to empirically create a teaching product. Meanwhile, Russell (1974) stated that a module is a teaching package that is associated with a concept from a subject matter. A module serves as an alternative teaching method to facilitate students' mastery of learning. This study employs the ADDIE Module for developing the research. Sidek and Jamaludin (2005) define a module as a systematically and sequentially constructed form of teaching and learning unit to ease the teaching and learning processes.

The operational definition of a module in this study refers to a psycho-educational module used to guide students in understanding the socio-emotional issues they face, such as perfectionism, social anxiety, and extraordinary excitement among smart and talented students. This module is developed based on the ADDIE Model as a learning material for self-study by students and serves as a tool and resource containing various notes, explanations, and example sentences systematically planned in the teaching plan to achieve the set objectives based on solid theory. Note that the developed module

consists of 5 sets of activities with a 40 to 60 minutes time allocation for each activity set to be implemented.

1.10.7 Usability

From a conceptual standpoint, the usability research is conducted prior to the conclusion of the development study. According to Rubin and Chisnell (2008), usability studies evaluate the quality of a product or program by identifying areas of weakness and recommendations for improvement based on user input. On the other hand, Gagne et al. (2005) and Tessmer (1993) stated that usability testing is defined as the process of determining whether the overall objectives of the module development are being fulfilled. Users' comments and suggestions are taken into consideration when making modifications to the module. In this research, the purpose of the operational definition for the usability test is to evaluate the quality of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module from the point of view of the students as individual users. Note that the usability research conducted in this module comprises three different phases.

- i) The usability test, measured using the Usefulness, Satisfaction, and Ease of Use (USE) instrument built by Lund (2001), examines three aspects: usefulness, satisfaction, and ease of use of the developed Japanese Language Cohesion Module.
- ii) The data obtained is analysed using descriptive analysis to obtain findings in frequency, percentage, mean distribution, and standard deviation. Independent sample t-test analysis was used to analyse whether there was effectiveness or a significant difference in the mean score of student achievement for the control

group and the treatment group that used modules in Japanese language learning. Meanwhile, the paired t-test was used to measure the significant difference in the mean score of students' achievement between the pre-test and post-test for each group, namely the group that used conventional learning methods and the group that used modules in Japanese language learning.

- iii) Interview Study: To investigate the students' perspectives on the Japanese Language Cohesion Module's usability and implementation, an interview session was carried out with the students. During this intentional interview, four students participated as respondents to the study.

To enhance the findings about whether this module is acceptable for usage, the combination of usability tests that were conducted would be of great assistance.

1.11 Limitation of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged for a comprehensive understanding of its findings and implications. First, the research sample is restricted to students at the USIM, potentially limiting its generalizability to other institutions or broader populations of Japanese language learners.

Second, the study's focus on the Japanese language raises questions about the applicability of the findings to other FLs. Furthermore, the module is tailored mainly for Japanese Language A1 level students, limiting its relevance to those at higher proficiency levels. Nevertheless, cultural differences among students, which could impact the effectiveness of the Cohesion Module, were not considered. The study's

methodology, primarily relying on qualitative approaches like interviews and observations, may also limit the generalizability of the results.

Time constraints impose limitations on the module's effectiveness as it was implemented over a short period. The Japanese Language Cohesion Module was executed for ten weeks. According to Printer (2019), the duration of a program implies constraints on its scope and content. Short-term and long-term programs tend to yield different results. This research is limited to evaluating the effectiveness of the Japanese Language Cohesion Module, which was designed to improve speaking fluency and coherence among USIM students, excluding pronunciation and grammar (Mohamed Salama Eissa, 2019). Additionally, the resources and learning modules developed are focused only on covering basic speaking skills for Level 1 Japanese Language in Malaysia. These limitations impact the interpretation of the study's results and present opportunities for future research to expand on this work.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the background of the Japanese language learning scenario in Malaysian public schools and national universities, the problems in communication among Japanese language learners in national universities, the importance of cohesion and coherence elements, especially in communication, as well as the necessity of integrating discourse competence like cohesion and coherence elements through *Marugoto* textbook for the development of students in communication. The chapter has highlighted the research problems, justified the study's rationale, research objectives, and research questions, and defined the terms used. Lastly, the chapter also stresses the significance and scope of the present study. The next chapter offers more elaboration based on a review of the literature.

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