

Report on Issues and Challenges in the Online Implementation of the JLfest SUGOROKU Language eBoard-Game Design Competition for Secondary Schools

Edward Lee Chee Peng
The Japanese Language Society of Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The JLfest SUGOROKU Language eBoard-Game Design Competition, an annual event under the Japanese Language Festival, aims to motivate learners, promote good sportsmanship, and integrate IT skills into Japanese language education. Since its transition to a fully online format in 2021, the competition has required participants to design digital board games using **Scratch**, incorporating language learning objectives, quizzes, and original storylines. Games are evaluated by panels on language/content, technical coding, and playability.

Participation analysis from 2021–2024 shows a decline under the open-entry model, leading organisers to adopt a targeted invitation system and introduce structured pre-festival training. In 2024, a free three-day online Scratch workshop for 76 students from nine schools provided foundational coding skills and resulted in higher-quality submissions, with participants and teachers reporting positive experiences.

In 2025, the workshop expanded to 95 students from Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. While Thai and Indonesian teams withdrew before the competition, Filipino teams significantly elevated the standard through creative game mechanics and richer question sets, prompting Malaysian teams to improve their storylines and educational value. Judges from four countries contributed diverse and insightful evaluations.

Key challenges remain: ensuring accuracy in student-created content without restricting creativity, overcoming Scratch's limitations for multi-device interactivity without incurring high costs, and aligning differing academic calendars and work cultures across participating countries. These findings indicate that structured training, selective participation, and international collaboration can improve quality and engagement, though continued technical and logistical innovations are necessary to sustain and grow the competition.