First Year Japanese Language Learners' Attitude Towards the Use of "Memory Free Recall Method" in Learning Kanji

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Abstract

This study investigated learners' attitude towards the use of "Memory Free Recall Method" in learning kanji and evaluated whether their negative attitudes become lesser or not because it is believed that learning Kanji is difficult to memorize and easy to forget for the learners. This method is conducted to First Year Students during Kanji lesson in the First Semester and their attitude towards this method is surveyed in the second Semester. It is clear that this method is suitable to use in the classroom as students perceived this method as an effective way to motivate their learning desire as they can memorize kanji easily and this method is also regarded as a useful way to improve their academic purposes. Their motivation to learn kanji is improved according to the result of the survey. It is hoped that if the method becomes familiar with learners by practicing many times in every kanji lesson the negative concept of being difficult to memorize kanji will disappear.

Key words: Memory Free Recall Method, memory, negative feelings, motivation to learn, satisfaction

Introduction

As Japanese is a very homophonous language, not only "hiragana" and "katakana" but also kanji (adopted logographic Chinese character) is one of the most important parts of Japanese Language. Without learning kanji, learners cannot improve their language skill as they cannot read Japanese newspapers and magazines. There are three countries using Kanji: China, Japan and Korea and according to some researchers, it is clearly stated that Japanese Language learners from China and Korea are easier to learn Kanji than those from other countries. These are relevant reasons for the importance and usefulness of kanji for Japanese language learners. Japanese Language learners have to learn there components of kanji: structure, pronunciation and meaning. For the Japanese Language learners from Myanmar where Kanji is not used have negative feelings (difficult to memorize and fail to recall) when learning kanji. According to the researcher Su Su Htwe (2006), Japanese Language learners from Mandalay University of Foreign Languages have such difficulties when they learn kanji. Negative feeling is a kind of barrier to learn language. Only practicing learning strategies which can reduce negative feelings since the beginning stage of language learning is the most effective way to improve learners' language skill.

Participants of this research, First Year learners of Japanese as a Second language from Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, have learned Kanji since 2018, December (First Semester)and they have already introduced with this constructive approach of "Memory Free Recall Method" when learning Kanji. The survey of their attitude on the use of this method was conducted when they were in Second Semester.

Aim

The aim of this research is to investigate learners' attitude on the use of "Memory Free Recall Method" during kanji lessons.

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Research Questions

(1) How do learners perceive on "Memory Free Recall Method" used in the classroom?

(2) Is "Memory Free Recall Method" a way to reduce learners' negative feelings on kanji learning?

Data and Method

Participants for this survey

Participants are 49 (male and female) undergraduate First Year learners of Japanese as a Second Language. The survey was conducted when they are in Second Semester having primary level of language skill and already learned about 250 words of kanji. They were the beginners of Japanese Language learners since 2018, December.

Practicing for survey

Kanji learning is a part of Reading and Writing Skill and about 100 minutes per week is available to learn for First Year learners. First Year, First Semester is started from the beginning of December to the middle of March. At the beginning of the Semester, students had to learn less difficult systems: hiragana and katakana and kanji learning is started from January and it took only 1200 minutes. When they were learning kanji, "Free recall Method" is used with the following procedure:

Activity	Time/Period
Free writing to recall kanji as much as possible	10 minutes
Discuss about the structure, pronunciation and meaning of the written kanji with classmates	15 minutes

Duration of survey

This method had been practiced with the learners during 2018-2019 Academic year, First Semester (December-March), during the period of kanji lessons. For the Second Semester (June -September), at the beginning of June, during the period of kanji learning , this method was used to practice and students were surveyed with questionnaires to investigate their attitude on the use of this method during kanji lesson and to identify their negative feelings on learning kanji whether they became lessen or not.

Method

I used the "Memory Free Recall Method" (students have to write kanji words they have learned within 10 minutes)was used at least twice a week since the beginning of teaching kanji. Although this method was effective to large class with many students within a short time, it was needed to investigate students' attitude and effectiveness of this method on kanji learning. This study investigated the learners' attitude on using the "Memory Free Recall Method" that was used in the classroom and aimed to have a constructive effect to teaching kanji.

Literature Review

Kanoo's (2008) study showed that the most difficult part of the L2(learners from countries where kanji is not used) are the increased number of kanji and negative feelings to memorize the structure, pronunciation and meaning. Learners from Myanmar also have such perceptions of difficulties when they are learning kanji.

According to Su Su Htwe's (2006) study, the data revealed that Japanese learners from Myanmar ,First year students, have difficulty to memorize the increased number of kanji. First Year Japanese Language Learners from MUFL also have such difficulty.

NishibeYuka's (2009) study suggested that if their achievement is vividly increased although they didn't give sufficient efforts to the learning. Then learners' motivation to learn becomes improved. If their achievement is not vividly increased although they give a lot of effort to the learning, learners' motivation to learn decreased. First Year Japanese learners from MUFL also have perception of difficulty to memorize the increased number of kanji although they give a lot of time and effort to rote learning of kanji. Negative feelings leads to demotivation of learning, so a method of learning that can reduce these negative feelings should be practiced in teaching kanji.

It is clear that "Memory Free Recall Method" is one of the strategies that can improve learners' motivation to memorize without disturbing the learning process of kanji.

"Memory Free Recall Method" is a retrieving strategy by writing freely as many words as a student can write within limited period of time. According to Kanoo (2008) "Memory Free Recall Method" is a way to retrieve kanji words that have already learned as many as a learner can within limited time.

One of the significant strong point of "Memory Free Recall Method" is that learners' kanji knowledge is improved as they can write more kanji words after some time and they can discuss the written kanji words with their classmates and that leads to memorize and retrieve an increased number of kanji.

According to the study of Hamakawa (2010), students' desire to learn kanji can be motivated by creating a learning situation in which learners can learn with their classmates enthusiastically. So, after writing kanji words by "Memory Free Recall Method", learners have a period of time to discuss the structure, pronunciation and meaning of the written kanji and observe the number of kanji words with their classmates.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Data Analysis for research question 1

Sr.	Question	strongly agree– stronglydisagree					Total	Average agreement	Remark
		1	2	3	4	5			
1.	We are satisfied with the use of "Free Recall Method" during kanji lesson.	34	8	7	-	-	49	1.45	

According to table (1), 42 learners chose 'strongly agree' and 'agree' out of 49 learners and no learner chose 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. It is clear that the average agreement is 1.45 and numbers of learners who choose strongly agree is the most among 49 learners. The data revealed that learners were satisfied with the use of "Free Recall Method" during kanji lesson.

Table 2: Identifying Research Question 1

Number of Participants	Selected perception type
29	(1) Learners feels positive feelings with the method as it helps to memorize kanji words in long term memory
	(2) Kanji words cannot disappear in memory easily as learners have to rewrite

Number of Participants	Selected perception type
	kanji repetitively (3) It helps memorization of kanji (kanji words that had been already learned) in long term memory instead of short term memorization
9	(1) By practicing this method, kanji words that have been already learned can be recalled and learners may notice the non-recallable kanji words (2) It is clear for learners to notice how many kanji words are in long term memory and how many of kanji words (already learned but are not in long term memory) they have to practice (3) It is a practicing way of kanji lesson, it reminds learners' weakness and it can help to improve the accessment kanji skill
5	(1) It makes a positive classroom environment and encourage learners' motivation to memorize kanji (2) It gives an encouragement to learn kanji as learners have to write kanji the next day (3) The motivation to learn more kanji words appear by comparing with the number of kanji words written by other learners
2	(1) Although a learner have not learned kanji at home, it is a chance to learn in the classroom and it is effective to academic achievement (2) Practicing kanji in classroom and can reduce stress for assessments in exams
8	(1) It is enjoyable to write kanji although it is stressful when learners had no practice at home (2) It is an encouragement to get practice of kanji words (kanji structure) (3) Writing kanji words skill is improved as learners have to write more than one time
4	(1) Sometimes learners write the same kanji word repetitively and there may miss to write some kanji words as writing time is limited (2) Sometimes it is boring to write, some other games should be substituted (3) Although it is an effective strategy, there should some standard rules (e.g, this method should be used once a week, easy kanji words such as one, two, three are repetitively written)

According to the data from table 2, Result 2 : Identifying Research Question 1, identifying positive attitudes on the practice of "Free Recall Method" in kanji lesson, there are 29 participants who had positive perspective with the aspect of memory. It is clear that the method is a way to memorize kanji words by stating the comments: learners feels positive feelings with the method as it helps to memorize kanji words in long term memory, kanji words cannot disappear in memory easily as learners have to rewrite kanji repetitively and it helps memorization of kanji (kanji words that had been already learned) in long term memory instead of short term memorization. Moreover, there are 9 participants who believed that the method can access the memorization of kanji: by practicing this method, kanji words that have

been already learned can be recalled and learners may notice the non-recallable kanji words, it is clear for learners to notice how many kanji words are in long term memory and how many of kanji words (already learned but are not in long term memory) they have to practice and it is a practicing way of kanji lesson, it reminds learners' weakness and it can help to improve the assessment of kanji skill. It is clear that there are 5 participants who were concerned with learners' motivation to memorize kanji according to the comments such as it makes a positive classroom environment and encourages learners' motivation to memorize kanji and the motivation to learn more kanji words appear by comparing with the number of kanji words written by other learners. Apart from 2 participants who were concerned with the achievement for academic purposes, there are 8 participants who were difficult to identify. It is interesting that there are 4 participants who seem to have negative attitude according to the comments: learners sometimes write the same kanji word repetitively and they may miss to write some kanji words during the limited time and there should be some standard rules although it is an effective strategy.

Identifying Research Question 2

Research Method for Identifying Research Question 2

For research method and data for identifying research question 2, a questionnaire " Free Recall Method can reduce learners' negative feelings" is stated with 5 ratings (strongly agree to strongly disagree) to identify whether "Memory Free Recall Method" is a way to reduce learners' negative feelings on kanji learning or not. Moreover, learners were asked to write a comment to confirm their choice and these comments were also investigated in detail. To get data for this survey, the number of learners who stated negative feelings and those who stated positive feelings are identified among 49 learners.

Table 3: Result 1 for Identifying Research Question 2

Sr.	Question	Strongly agree – Strongly disagree					Total	Adverage agreement	Remark
		1	2	3	4	5			
1.	"Free Recall Method can reduce negative feelings on learning kanji.	26	17	4	2	-	49	1.63	

It can be assumed that "Memory Free Recall Method" can reduce negative feelings on learning kanji according to the data from table 3 stating that 43 learners agreed with the statement while only 2 learners out of 49 disagree the statement. According to data calculation, the average agreement is 1.63.

Table 4 : Result 2 for Identifying Research Question 2

Aspect of attitude	
Aspects that seems to show positive feelings (43 learners)	(1) Although kanji learning is boring at first, it is enjoyable to learn kanji later as learners can memorize kanji words with the practice of repetitive writing (2) Kanji learning seems to be easy as learners can memorize kanji words in long term memory (3) It can reduce negative feeling of being unable to memorize kanji because kanji words practicing (4) It seems to be easy to write because of freely writing system

	although it seems difficult to write at first (5) Kanji learning seems to be an easy activity as kanji words are memorized in long term memory (5) Negative feelings on kanji learning were reduced as practicing "Free Recall Method" to write kanji in classroom although it seems to be difficult at first (7) Negative Feeling on learning kanji seems to be reduced as learners can memorize kanji words and enjoy learning
Aspects that seems to be negative (6 learners)	(1) It is difficult to memorize as the number of kanji words are increased day by day (2) Sometimes it is unable to memorize kanji words and learners feel depressed (3) Learner may feel that he/she has not memorized kanji word yet (4) It is just a practicing strategy, it is not sure to change negative feeling on kanji learning (5) More practicing time is needed and it is difficult with the increased number of kanji words (6) I am in the middle of negative attitude and positive one, negative people seems to be negative, positive people seems to be positive

According to table 3, the result of identifying learners' attitude on the statement "Memory Free Recall Method" can reduce negative feelings on learning kanji",43 learners out of 49 agreed the statement while 6 learners did not state agreement. It can be identified that, according to table 4, the comments stated by learners who agree with the statement assumed as positive attitude while that of learners who did not show agreement as negative attitude for the statement.

Analyzing positive comments, kanji learning becomes more interesting as the practicing period becomes longer. It is enjoyable when kanji words can be memorized by repetitive writing practice. Kanji learning did not seem to be difficult one as learners can memorize kanji words. Negative feelings such as kanji words cannot be memorized becomes reduced as learners have to practice kanji words again and again.

On the other hand, analyzing the negative response by those who disagreed with the statement, it can be assumed that the method can reduce negative feelings on learning kanji.

Results

"Memory Free Recall Method" is a kind of time limited writing practice; it can be assumed that it gives excitement to learners as playing game. One possible drawback is that learners may write the same kanji word many times. Those repeatedly-written words may be memorized in long term memory and become unforgettable kanji words. Much practice can improve memorization of kanji words. Learners may be familiar with kanji words and the method can motivate the memorization of kanji words as learners have to practice this method many times. It is clear that most learners comment that kanji learning become more memorable, unforgettable and this method is a way to motivate memorization of kanji words according to the facts stated above.

It can be concluded that "Memory Free Recall Method" is a strategy that can reduce learners' negative feelings on kanji learning as 43 learners agreed the statement "Using "Memory Free Recall Method" can reduce learners' negative feelings on kanji learning. Fear of learning kanji can reduce to some extent as the method became familiar with learners by

practicing many times in every kanji lesson. On the other hand, there are few students who disagree the statement " Using Memory Free Recall Method can reduce learners' negative feelings". The comments "Sometimes it is unable to memorize kanji words and learners feel depressed" may be because of these reasons: the increased numbers of kanji words being learned and the negative feelings when learner may write fewer number of kanji words than his or her classmate. Teachers need to invent this method as a game to make learners less worries and become motivated in learning kanji words.

Discussion

To investigate the question "How do learners perceive on "Memory Free Recall Method" used in the classroom?", a questionnaire, "We are satisfied with the use of "Free Recall Method" during kanji lesson", by rating 5 degrees (strongly agree to strongly disagree), was used to collect data on learners' attitude. Learners were asked to write a comment (reason on their choice) to get a precise investigation on their attitudes on the use of this method in the classroom. According to the data of their comments, two types of attitudes (positive and negative) were divided and among positive attitude comments, it was continued to distinguish different perceptions of effectiveness on the use of this method in the classroom.

Conclusion

It can be stated that practicing "Memory Free Recall Method" is a way to motivate memorization skill for kanji words. It is also clear that this method can reduce negative feelings on learning kanji (kanji learning is difficult to memorize, difficult for learners and learners feel afraid to learn) to some extent. The method is less time consuming practicing method for the classroom. The result also revealed that the majority of learners liked the method and it can be concluded that the method should be used for kanji lessons. This study did not include the investigation of the memorization ability of learners who have positive attitude towards the method and that of learners who did not believe that the method can reduce their negative feelings on kanji learning. This study highlighted for further studies such as investigating learners' strategies for memorizing kanji and their motivation on memorizing different aspects (difficult and confused kanji, easy to figure out and memorize kanji and kanji of similar structure).

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