

Assessment of a supplementary teaching material in Second year Japanese class of Yangon University of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

Studying a foreign language is not just learning a language. Focusing on cultural, daily living norms and social in the country may improve learners' interest and willingness to learn. Therefore, at Yangon University of Foreign Languages, a Japanese language class on "Day-to-Day Japanese living situations" was started in 2007. This subject was intended for second-year undergraduate students and were taught by a teacher-centered method.

There are two major difficulties for the students. First, the textbooks used in the class do not perfectly match with the student's level. Second, students did not raise their opinion and were less actively participating for the discussion during the class. Therefore, we created supplementary teaching materials that seemed appropriate for student's group work also verified the effects. As a result, more than 90% of the students were able to criticize more about life between Japan and Myanmar, hence proven the effectiveness.

Keywords: Japanese, teaching-material, Japanese life style, student-centered teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Some researches have explored that speaking two or more languages is a great asset to the thinking and reasoning process of human brain. The brains of bilingual people operate differently than single language speakers, and these differences offer several mental benefits. Half-of the world population is bilingual. One hundred and twenty eight million people are Japanese language speakers whereas half a million use Japanese as a second language (Ethnologue Languages of the world 2010). Learning a language is not an isolated process. Every language is unique in its socio-culture and anthropological background. Hence, for Japanese language (especially as a foreign language) learners and teachers, it is important not only to explain the linguistic knowledge and skills, but also to focus on Japanese social and cultural background. Good tactic and approaches of teaching and learning are crucial; such as humanistic techniques (Japan Foundation 1995), the application of multimedia, animation (Chang 2017), social media aid and participatory learning style are tried to stimulate students' initiative to learn Japanese social culture, to excavate and expand beyond the contents of language course, and to strengthen the effect of teaching-learning.

In Yangon University of Foreign Language (YUFL), Bachelor course for Japanese language includes four-skill training; listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As mentioned above, studying a language does not merely mean learning the linguistic knowledge and skills. Putting attention on cultural, social norms and daily life in the Target Language country could stimulate the enthusiasm and dynamism of the language student. Learning Japanese is useful not only for learning grammar and for pronunciation, but also for deeply understanding the country and Japanese people, such as culture, customs and etiquette.

Listening, speaking, and grammar are aimed at strengthening the language skills of students, and by making use of these abilities, students can learn more about Japanese daily living habits.

For acquiring those abilities, the content on "day-to-day Japanese living situations" is added on in the second year syllabus of Japanese Language. Of the total 700 minutes of lessons per week, 100 minutes (in 2 sessions) is intended for this topic. At the beginning of 2007-08,

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only Myanmar teachers taught by teacher-centered direct translation method, but from 2015, Japanese Partners (assistant teachers dispatched from the Japan Foundation) are supporting and reinforcing the program.

<Table 1> Timetable for the second year students (weeks)

Module No	Module Name	Subjects	Sessions per week	Duration (minutes) per week
JAP2101A	Listening and Speaking Skills		5	250
JAP2102A	Reading and Writing Skills	Kanji writing	2	100
		Grammar text Book	2	100
		Day-to-day living situation *	2	100
JAP2103A	Grammar lessons		3	150
MYAN	Myanmar		4	200
ENG2001A	English		4	200
Phil 2010	Philosophy		4	200
	Total		26	1300

*Teaching-aid is trialed.

Research questions

This study has been suggested research questions as followed.

1. Regarding “Housing life” and “Traffic in Japan”, what kind of facts do you understand?
2. What do you compare between “Housing life and traffic in Japan” and that in Myanmar? What are these differences?
3. What are the attention-grabbing facts you have learnt “Housing life and Traffic in Japan”?
4. Would you like to find out more in “Housing life and Traffic in Japan”? Which area do you want to learn more?
5. (Post-assessment session): Do you think having such supplementary material can deepen the student’s interest in Japan?

Materials and Methods

We conducted a cross-sectional qualitative survey among all of the 112 Second year undergraduate Japanese language students (60 in Class A and 62 in B). The students were clustered into small groups (n=5 to 6) and evaluated by questionnaires on “Housing life and Traffic in Japan” before and after completing the lecturing session using teaching aid.

We conducted the questionnaire survey step-by-step as follow.

- Pre-session assessment using 4 open-type questions
- Two teaching sessions using teaching aid followed by

Housing life in Japan Duration: One teaching session 50 minutes

Transportation and commuting Duration: One teaching session 50 minutes

The content of the supplementary material is as follow:

1. Icebreaking and warming up
 2. Introduce some images/portraits and let the students guess about the upcoming session
 3. Brainstorming on the images as a group work
 4. Before reading the Japanese situation, let the students brainstorm on 3 questions about Myanmar
 5. Based on the prior knowledge of the students, let them speculate the situation in Japan before actual reading of the passage and choosing TRUE or FALSE.
 6. The Content
 7. It is based on the life experience about a Myanmar scholar, named Ma Ma, in Japan.
 8. The Exercise (Scrutinizing the student understanding)
 - a. TRUE (✓) or FALSE (✗)
 - b. Completing the unfinished sentence
 - c. Choosing/numbering the appropriate images/pictures with the text
- Assessment with five open-type post-session questions

Literature reviews

A qualitative survey was conducted in 20 Japanese Language teachers from 20 Universities and 97 students from 3 Universities in China to study the understanding of students on Japanese language especially in “Daily living norms in Japan” (Tan 2006). That survey comprised of one-on-one interview and observatory assessment during the lecture period. The result indicated the obsolescence of information and inadequacy of teaching-materials/aids in teaching “Daily living norms in Japan” subject. In addition, it concluded by suggesting more support for teaching resource, strategic teaching with teaching material and improvement in curriculum.

The research done by (Shimizu 2002) explored attempts and strategies to avert the tendency of the language students towards rote learning nature, which include various teaching-materials (aids) including audio-visual. Japanese language students at The University of Barcelona, The University of Limerick and Kanazawa University stated that the teaching of Japanese could be improved according to the survey (Torrijos 2016). No similar research had been conducted so far in Yangon and Mandalay University of Foreign Languages.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

At the beginning of the class, we introduced the content "Japanese living situations", but the problem was that the contents were old and there were many differences from current modern Japanese living conditions. Therefore, from 2017 it was revised to “Introduction to Japanese Circumstances for International students (A Study of the theory about Japanese society)”. However, with regard to this textbook, students commented, "there are so many Kanji characters that are difficult to read because of the large amount of content”. In order to clarify

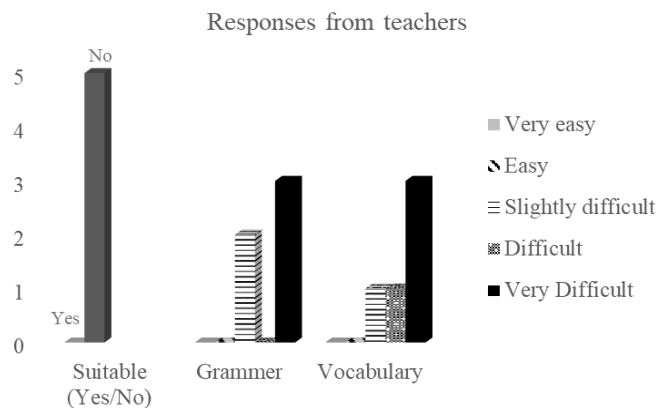
the problems with textbooks, we initiated a questionnaire survey to five Japanese teachers who had been in charge of teaching Japanese living situations.

Target: Teachers who are in charge of "Japanese living situations" in the second year; four teachers (three Japanese, two Myanmar) from YUFL and one (Myanmar) from MUFL.

Their opinions on the textbook "Introduction to Japanese Circumstances for International students (A Study of the theory about Japanese society)" were assessed with three closed-type questions and one open question.

- i. The textbook is suitable for the Second year undergraduate level. Yes No
- ii. Grammar Very easy Easy Slightly difficult Difficult Very difficult
- iii. Vocabulary Very easy Easy Slightly difficult Difficult Very difficult
- iv. Any other suggestion/comment on the text book please. _____(This question is in open-ended)

<Figure 1>RESPONSES FROM JAPANESE LANGUAGE THEACHERS



In response to open question "Any other suggestion/comment on the text book please", the teachers stated

- the requirements to give orientation to teachers before introducing this textbook
- Images are small and graphics are hard to understand
- The textbook itself is crowded with information
- The target audience is slightly different
- The kanji in the commentary was difficult for the second year students

Topics are very diverse ranging from eating habits and traffic situations to social things such as politics, constitutions and religions. Even teachers need to decide what to focus.

From the above findings, we concluded that, the texts currently used are of course only general information, and it may be difficult for the learners of Myanmar to imagine because the situation is too different between two countries. Therefore, the supplementary teaching materials will be useful if particularly targeted at Myanmar learners to make it easier to compare living conditions in Myanmar and Japan. We tried to build up case-story around a Myanmar student residing in Japan.

In addition, the ability to criticize or compare the similarities or differences between the culture of the target language and its own country culture is the main purpose of the lessons on

"Japanese living situations", which is assumed to be better than the textbook learning only. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the newly created supplementary material.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Question-1 Regarding “Housing life” and “Traffic in Japan”, what kind of facts do you understand?

< Table 2> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “HOUSING LIFE IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
-Layout of room	-Layout of room
-Units of Measurement	-Units of Measurement
-Garbage	-Garbage
-Housing type	-Name of rooms
-Closet	-How to live in apartment
-Greeting	-No noise culture
-Cleanliness	-Etiquette at home
-Toilet	-Struggle for foreign student in Japan
-Entrance culture	-Expensive living
-Sliding doors	-Study late night
-Bathroom	-Independence

Before introducing the teaching-aid, the students learnt mainly on physical existence such as room layout, closet, Japanese mat (Tatami), toilet, bathroom, units of measurement etc. But after introducing the teaching-aid, their learning has expanded more on socio-culture and life-style aspect such as struggle for foreign students in Japan, how to live in apartment, expensive living, part-time job etc.

< Table 3> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “TRAFFIC IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
-Both Japan and Myanmar are commuting by land, air and waterways	-Many more choices in terms of train types, cards and payments in Japan.
-Commuting channels in Japan are more developed and very safe	-Etiquette and manner of Japanese people in taking vehicles/trains
-Card system for commuting	-Strong and weak points
-Trouble in passenger peak hours	-It will be convenient for a Myanmar student even for the first time comer
-Japanese government is preparing to resolve the ongoing traffic congestion	-Portraits of trains, ticket station, entrance etc. enable to imagine the general situation of Railway stations in Japan

Before introducing the teaching-aid, the students learnt mainly on physical nature of transportation such as modernized trains and machinery such as ticket-vending machines, and other automated technology.

After learning the teaching-aid (including the images of railway stations and trains), the students noticed the convenience in service offered by Japanese Rail Group (JR) and pointed out that the first-time newcomer could handily use the vending machine and automated gates. They also contrasted that the Japanese people strictly follow the etiquette and manner in taking the trains/vehicles, and hence the people here should follow the same manner and etiquette.

Question 2: What do you compare between “Housing life and traffic in Japan” and that in Myanmar? What are these differences?

< Table 4> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “HOUSING LIFE IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
-Shoes	-Shoes
-Bathroom	-Bathroom
-Garbage	-Garbage
-Entrance culture	-Entrance culture
-Sliding doors	-Sliding doors
-Units of measurement	-Units of measurement
-Layout of room	-Layout of room
-Toilet	-Toilet
	-Expensive living
	-Japanese lifestyle
	-Punctuality
	-Room structure
	-Part-time job

In response to question 2, after the use of teaching aid, the students got additional comprehension on dissimilarity in cost of living, Japanese lifestyle, Habit of Punctuality, Room structure and Part-time job. Noticeable fact is that, the students start to criticize on the incomparably higher cost of living in Japan (compared to Myanmar) which has pushed the students (in Japan) to solve by self-reliance and self-discipline. This is a key difference in student life between Japanese and Myanmar students.

< Table 5> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “TRAFFIC IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
- Bullet train in Japan vs. passenger bus in Myanmar	- Bullet train in Japan vs. passenger bus in Myanmar
-Punctuality of the train in Japan	-Various disciplines and unwritten rules in the train
-High bicycle use and bike-park	-Bullet train could help Myanmar to resolve traffic jams
-Varieties of trains in Japan	-Weak infrastructure (electricity etc.) in Myanmar will be a major hindrance
-Passenger-bus lane separated from private lanes	-Scantiness of small notes and coins in Myanmar could be solved by reloadable card payment as in Japan
-Care should be taken for priority such as elderly and pregnant	-“Who” to be prioritized in Myanmar? The monk? Nuns?
-Dissimilarity in Left-hand traffic (LHT) and right-hand traffic (RHT)	-We might need female-only train in Myanmar
	-Want to compare management of traffic jams between Myanmar vs Japan
	-Time wasted due to unpunctuality in Myanmar transportation

The students are astonished and they showed admiration about the modern commuting facilities (physical) as well as the punctuality and competency of Japan Railway System. They contrasted the waste of time due to current congested traffic in Yangon roads. They also considered the practicality of Bullet train system in Myanmar in current infrastructure (unpractical especially because of the electricity), solving the traffic jams, reloadable card payment for commuting, and again “Who” to be prioritized in Myanmar commuting system?

After learning the teaching-aid, the students provided more advanced opinion that every citizen in Myanmar should be under strict discipline to practice the culture of punctuality.

Question 3: What are the attention-grabbing facts you have learnt “Housing life and Traffic in Japan”?

< Table 6> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “HOUSING LIFE IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
-High living standard	-About the physical nature of the House
-Japanese lifestyle and traditional precept	What are the differences between modern and old Japanese houses?
	How to make a house resistant to earthquakes?
	Layout of rooms, Shape of the house
	Bathroom, Toilet

	<p>-About the socio-cultural perspectives</p> <p>Confidence and self-assurance (of Japanese youth)</p> <p>Beneficial for us (Myanmar students) who would like to go and study abroad</p> <p>Cost of Living/House rent/Financial security (to go and study in Japan), Obligation for part time job while doing academic</p>
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After the teaching session with textbook only, the students stated that it is interesting to learn Japanese life-style, tradition and high living standard. Then after familiarizing the teaching-aid, the students mentioned that it is more stimulating to learn the active and hard-working nature of Japanese students, their custom of taking responsibility and amenability.

< Table 7> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “TRAFFIC IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Japan is trying to solve progressively increasing traffic jam -Crisis management in Japan -Priority principles of Japan -Taxis are very safe -Traffic is terrible in Myanmar and public transport (train) should be promoted -Technology advancement in Japan -Polite customer service of railway station staff -Bike park at the railway station -Some trains are female-only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Comparison between Myanmar Vs japan in resolving traffic congestion -how to solve wasted time in the traffics -crisis management in earthquake -restoration after the Tsunami -Politeness and manners in the train -Announcement by rail services -Modernization process in Japan -Deeper understanding of Bullet train

Before reading the teaching-aid, the students were impressed and admired about how Japan is actively seeking the solution for their intensifying traffic jams. Afterwards, they wondered the practical ways of resolving the traffic problem and would like to compare between Japan and Myanmar.

They are interested in crisis management before and then after reading teaching-aid they emphasized on more practical approach to deal with time wasting in the traffic and crisis management in Tsunami. The students were able to recall the frequent natural disasters in Japan that they had already learned and relate them to traffic.

Question 4: Would you like to find out more in “Housing life and Traffic in Japan”? Which area do you want to learn more?

< Table 8> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “HOUSING LIFE IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
-High living standard -Japanese lifestyle and traditional precept	-About the physical nature of the House What are the differences between modern and old Japanese houses? How to make a house resistant to earthquakes? Layout of rooms, Shape of the house Bathroom, Toilet -About the socio-cultural perspectives Traditional life-style House Rent Household chores Cost of Living

Responses after teaching with the textbook are similar to the question 3. They are fascinated by modernized living style and cultural tradition of Japan.

After the teaching session with textbook only, the students stated that it is interesting to learn Japanese life-style, tradition and high living standard. Then, familiarizing with the teaching-aid, the students stated would like to learn the socio-cultural perspectives (Traditional life-style, house rent, household chores etc.) of Japan rather than the physical existence (house, room, building etc.).

< Table 9> STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ABOUT THE TOPICS “TRAFFIC IN JAPAN” BEFORE AND AFTER THE USE OF TEACHING-AIDS

Before	After
- Comparing the commuting cost in train vs. buses -Road Safety Rules -Priority seating -Safety in commuting	- Modernization and convenience and inconvenience -Road Safety Rules -Priority seating -Some trains are female-only -Unmanned autonomous vehicles -Any electric buses in Japan? -Payment methods in commuting

Generally, before using the teaching-aids in both topics (Japanese housing and traffic), the students focused on comparing and contrasting the physical aspects such as between costs of bus vs. train. However, after introducing teaching-aid, they explored on social and logical perspective such as modernization and convenience. Again, they mentioned that they would like

to learn more about priority seating and female-only trains through teaching-aid, even though the explanations are already included in the textbook.

Question 5. (Post-assessment session): Do you think having such supplementary material can deepen the student's interest in Japan?

Responses after introducing the teaching-aid

- An open question asking the opinion about the teaching-aid
- The situation between Myanmar and Japan was compared and attentiveness increased
- The story form of the secondary material was friendly
- Clear expression and easy to understand the point
- Easy to image with lots of color photos
- More practice and questions have deepened understanding
- Easier to read than textbooks
- Group activities were interesting to exchange opinions with classmates
- As a group work, we were able to consult and share knowledge with each other

The above is the opinion about the housing and the traffic situation came out from students. First of all, it can be said that it was the purpose of this study, let the students learn by thinking, analyzing the situation of the home country Myanmar, and to contrast with the situation of Japan.

In addition, students expressed positive opinions not only about the contents of the supplementary materials, but also about the group work. Learning by group discussing and brain-storming rather than teacher-centered lecturing.

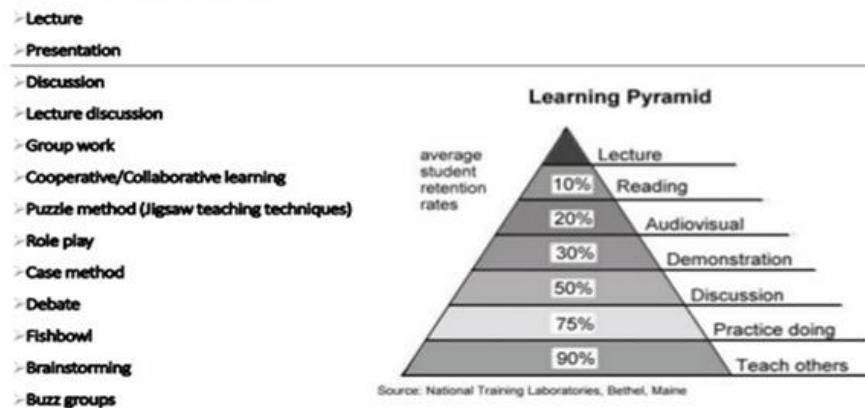
IV. CONCLUSION

Conventional teacher-centered lecturing with textbook cannot significantly motivate the students because it does not fit to the language level of the students; again, it is not generalizable for the students, as they could not closely conceive and conjure up day-to-day living situations of Japan. One interesting finding is that, before acquainting with the teaching-aid, the students focus mainly on the physical or bodily properties of Japan and based upon the syllabus content, they simply compare/contrast between Japan and Myanmar.

After introducing the teaching-aid, they could consider economic and social contextual backgrounds of two different countries. They can ruminate and reflect day-to-day living situations and lifestyle in Myanmar from different angles and perspectives. The students showed enthusiasm to learn and quest more about Japanese lifestyle and dissimilarity with own culture. This also suggested that different approaches should be trialed to boost the motivation and interest of the students rather than conventional lecture-style teaching.

<Figure 2> LIST OF LEARNING METHODS AND STUDENT'S RETENTION RATE

List of Methods



In fact, this has been demonstrated from the learning pyramid above (National Training 1994). In Figure 2, among the different ways of education strategies, monotonous method such as lecturing will achieve very low student retention rates (<10%) whilst adding audiovisual tools could increase the retention rate up to 20%. More active or cooperative/collaborative learning such as group discussion, demonstration, role-play, debating will significantly intensify the student retention rates up to 75%.

Therefore, in the future, it will be crucial to conduct exams that can check how much the students' thinking skills have improved but not examining the amount of knowledge and information the student can memorize by rote learning. The test should be evaluated through a group power-point presentation or group discussion or debate (The Japan Foundation 2016).

The recommendation from this survey finding is to conduct assessment on intellectual and logical ability of student rather than conducting simple tests to measure amount of students' knowledge on information.

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