



Utilising YouTube's Authentic Materials for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language to Young Learners

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate on the guided use of YouTube inside the classroom in the context of elementary education in Malang, Indonesia. As a versatile medium for providing authentic materials to learn a foreign language, YouTube has been widely utilized as an affordable alternative to facilitate authentic teaching and learning activities. Teachers can find abundant materials to use inside the classroom on YouTube, and learners can easily access the same material when they are home under their parents' surveillance. In this study, YouTube provides authentic audio-visual entertainment where young learners are exposed to Japanese songs to memorize the vocabulary. This study used a descriptive qualitative method where the collected data are primary—from young learners by observing them learning Japanese in an extracurricular program—and secondary—taken from several literature reviews related to the current study. Learning Japanese using YouTube videos shows positive results with the support of students who can understand the material. Apart from that, students also said that learning using video methods was more fun and not dull. In this way, YouTube videos can facilitate the learning process of students learning basic Japanese at the elementary school or early childhood level.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language to young learners is always a fascinating and significant process, especially in the current era of globalization, where understanding foreign cultures and languages becomes progressively valuable, with the assumption that young learners, significantly, can absorb the abundance faster than adults (Santrock, 2007). Learning a foreign language from a very young age has also been proven to yield various benefits, not only for the sake of smoother communication with people in their vicinity but also for improving focal cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and multicultural skills; not to mention that by being exposed in foreign languages at early ages, young learners are nurtured to be prepared for career opportunities later in the future (Amelia, 2016; GİMATDİNOVA ÇAĞAÇ, 2018). In other words, being proficient in foreign languages and cultures in the globalization era gradually becomes a key to endless opportunities that may arise in the future.

In Indonesia, the most popular foreign language to be taught in formal education as early as elementary level is English, parallel to the advancement of technology, business, tourism, and education globally (Rini, 2014). However, for various reasons—a few of them being historical, political, and religious (Saud & Abduh, n.d.)—other foreign languages have started to flourish in the Indonesian foreign language curriculum, e.g., Arabic, German, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, French, and Dutch (Rini, 2014). Although Japanese was first introduced and spread in tertiary education post-colonization, for the past decades, it is now being taught in elementary, middle, and high schools as elective courses alongside English, Indonesian, and local languages (Damayanti et al., 2023; Pratama & Pujo Purnomo, 2020).

The urgency to teach Japanese to Indonesian learners arises from the desire to find career opportunities where using Japanese as its primary communication is necessary (Damayanti et al., 2023). As the diplomatic

relationship between Indonesia and Japan post-war advanced with many initiatives from both sides, people started to understand the importance of being proficient in the language to prepare for careers involving close ties to Japan or other global companies. Additionally, the growing interest in learning this language came from the widespread distribution of Japanese pop culture in Indonesia, as observed from the 2013 “Cool Japan” campaign that introduced the wonders of Japanese culture to younger generations (Pratama & Purnomo, 2020). That being the case, it is only understandable that exposing young learners to Japanese can bear many benefits, including improving their language skills, enhancing their knowledge of Japanese culture, and introducing them to numerous global opportunities that will materialize in the future, especially those related to Japan.

Teaching Japanese to young learners can be conducted using diverse methods involving games, songs, stories, and even interactive activities, where choices depend on various elements, such as age, learning outcome, and proficiency level. With technological advancements, various learning media for learning a foreign language thrive, especially Japanese, with unique characteristics. Particular textbooks for teaching Japanese to young learners are readily available at various age and proficiency levels. Besides textbooks, learning applications such as Duolingo, Memrise, and Tae Kim’s Guide to Learning Japanese can also assist young learners interactively. YouTube and other social networking platforms, where many educational videos and Japanese songs are suitable for children, can also be accessed easily by teachers. Japanese language teachers often use educational games to make learning more engaging and reciprocal (Samad & Tidore, 2013). Of course, Japanese language teachers hold the most significant role in the suitable selection and combination of learning media to create an enjoyable and lively classroom environment for students to study (Damayanti et al., 2023).

Therefore, appropriate learning material for young language learners should convince them that they enjoy and engage in a positive environment, which will help increase their self-confidence and self-esteem (Garton & Copland, 2018).

In Indonesia, various learning media are utilized to create an engaging environment omnipresent in different proficiency and education levels. A study at the tertiary level by Philiyanti et al. (2019) conducts reading learning through a contextual approach to help university students discover the connection between information contained in the text and their background knowledge (text-to-self). Although it was conducted in a university setting, the participants still identified themselves as beginners at that time, and therefore, meaning-making to improve vocabulary skills is deemed essential to be learned first-hand.

A study by Rasiban et al. (2017) promotes digital media use in Japanese learning education where students were introduced to the Android application called “Katakana Memory Hint” produced by The Japan Foundation; in the study, this application was explicitly utilized to promote katakana memorization for beginner-level learners in a university setting, and it was evaluated to significantly effective in memorizing the writing and pronunciation of katakana letters. Whereas the studies above’ research participants consist of beginner-level university students, which reaffirms that comprehensive Japanese as a foreign language learning is widely available in either secondary or tertiary education, research by Mardani et. al. (2022) focuses on young learners in elementary school by generating a specific learning set in the form of lesson plans, worksheets, and animation media to gain students’ attention and motivation. Mardani et al. produced this set of activities, knowing that their students were still elementary school children, hence using animation media with attention-grabbing characters and an easy-to-follow storyline to promote critical collaboration. Additionally, young learners tend to pay the utmost attention to cartoon characters, especially if they are

equipped with pleasant-sounding voice acting; thus, by incorporating their favourite things in foreign language learning, teachers can increase learners’ concentration on the material.

As aforementioned, selecting and choosing the right digital technology for a particular age group and proficiency level is crucial. Referring to previous research, beginner-level secondary and tertiary education learners who are already experts in using mobile gadgets may be exposed to independent applications. However, young learners who need surveillance and limited exposure to digital applications must be carefully directed. Therefore, this research wants to report on the guided use of YouTube inside the classroom in the context of elementary education in Malang, Indonesia.

As a versatile medium for providing authentic materials to learn a foreign language, YouTube has been widely utilized as an affordable alternative to facilitate authentic teaching and learning activities (Brook, 2011). Teachers can find abundant materials to use inside the classroom on YouTube, and learners can easily access the same material when they are home under their parents’ surveillance. In this study, YouTube provides authentic audio-visual entertainment where learners are exposed to Japanese songs to memorize the vocabulary. This strategy is supposed to help them memorize and pronounce the words better alongside the songs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative method to study the subject’s condition in a naturalistic (and non-experimental) way, where the researcher serves as the primary tool. Qualitative data analysis and findings emphasize meaning rather than mere generalization (Sugiyono, 2017).

Apart from that, the data used in this research is both primary and secondary. Primary data was collected from respondents by observing elementary school students who were Japanese learners in a classroom. In contrast, the secondary data was taken from several literature reviews related to the current study. Afterwards,

the phenomena that arose from the raw data were synthesized and analyzed so that conclusions could be reached.

This research focuses on elementary school learners who have yet to be exposed to learning Japanese as a foreign language. The school does not have a mandatory or elective Japanese course, but it allows learners to learn Japanese through an extracurricular activity. As the nature of the activity was informal, the use of gadgets and digital media at the time of data collection was not limited.

However, the young learners only used the gadgets indirectly but through the tutor's guidance. In this case, the tutor used YouTube as the media. Utilizing digital media was also considered necessary since the goal was to engage learners to learn a foreign language that was entirely novel for them. By doing so, the extracurricular program, which was technologically aided, was expected to be able to facilitate a fun and entertaining learning environment for first-time learners to learn the Japanese language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Implementation of Teaching Japanese Using YouTube as a Learning Media

This research focuses on using YouTube, a video-sharing medium famously known to facilitate language teaching and learning for various ages and proficiency levels. YouTube was chosen because it stores various authentic Japanese videos that teachers and tutors can choose to complement their classroom activities. Language learners are expected to gain motivation after being exposed to audio-visual media provided by YouTube, especially young learners who tend to get drawn into illustrations.

Videos stored on YouTube can cover various topics for essential Japanese learning, from basic grammar to everyday conversations. These videos can be integrated into structural lessons to give learners authentic illustrations of real-life scenes or dialogue between native speakers. This can help learners improve their listening skills and understand the intonation

and pronunciation of words. Pictures that visualize vocabulary, phrases, or grammar can help learners understand the context of use in Japanese. In addition, material that combines text with images or graphics can help students understand the material visually and textually.

That said, in every extracurricular meeting where classes were held offline, a set of learning materials integrated with YouTube videos was arranged systematically. At the time of the data collection, tutors and learners came across the learning theme "*aisatsu*". The tutor chose suitable videos that reflected the learning theme and let learners watch the videos several times. The illustrations in the videos engaged learners in learning the vocabulary appearing in the videos through the subtitles. After watching the videos, the tutor practised pronouncing the correct *aisatsu* by simultaneously displaying the scenes in the video along with the subtitles. At first, the tutor started with the essential words to observe how learners responded. Most students were observed to be capable of correctly pronouncing the words, as illustrated in the video. The tutor then recorded the learners as the final assessment of the program using the following indicators: 1) learners can use the vocabulary taught from the first to the current meeting, 2) learners can make a simple sentence using the vocabulary they learned, and 3) learners can speak in basic Japanese with the correct pronunciation and intonation. With the following indicators, the tutor asked learners to describe themselves using the vocabulary and sentence structures that had been taught. This trains students to improve their writing skills, speaking skills, and confidence simultaneously.

Learning Japanese using YouTube videos shows positive results with the support of students who can understand the material. Apart from that, students also said that learning using video methods was more fun and exciting. In this way, YouTube videos can facilitate the learning process of students learning basic Japanese at the elementary school or early childhood level.

A key characteristic of young language learners is their tendency to be more active than

others; therefore, teachers should pay attention to learners whose behaviour tends to be either too passive or too active. Another characteristic often observed in learners is their high activity level and curiosity. Early language learners can often make confident decisions about their learning and possess pre-conceptions of their preferences (McKay, 2008). After all, children learn other languages better and faster than adults do, and this is often used as a basis to support early foreign language teaching. Ellis (2013) states that young learners sit at the elementary school level in the education system. Unlike adults, young learners can concentrate for hours on a specific subject, particularly one they like. It is also explained that language learning for young students only takes 15-20 minutes on average. Therefore, this relatively short attention span needs to be considered when planning classroom teaching and learning activities.

The Importance of Introducing Foreign Language to Young Learners

Introducing foreign languages at an early age brings many intellectual and social benefits to children's development. Foreign language teaching and learning at an early age will not only expand their communication repertoire but also improve other skills, some of which are:

- Improved cognitive skill: Early childhood is a critical period in brain development. When children learn a foreign language, particularly one they prefer, they simultaneously develop various cognitive skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and brain functions, especially one related to memory.
- High learning motivation: Children generally have a high interest and motivation in learning a new language. Children can learn quickly and naturally without significant hurdles, which adults often experience.
- Multilingual skills: Learning a foreign language at an early age helps children develop strong speaking and listening skills in more than one language. This can help

them develop effective communication in a global context.

- Increased sensitivity to culture: Language and culture are often closely associated. Therefore, introducing them to foreign languages opens up a variety of opportunities for them to understand and appreciate different cultures in the world, helping them increase their sensitivity and empathy and nurturing their tolerance to be well-rounded individuals.
- Career benefit: In an increasingly globalized world, speaking a foreign language can be valuable to children's future careers. This opens up career opportunities in various fields and interacting with international colleagues.
- Improved social relationships: Children who speak more than one language exhibit various social advantages, as they may demonstrate extraordinary communication skills with several people from different cultural backgrounds, which helps expand their social network.

That being said, introducing young learners to a specific foreign language is a noteworthy approach and investment in children's self-development that will bring about long-term benefits, both in intellectual development and in preparation for an increasingly globally connected world.

Introducing Japanese Language to Young Learners

Teaching Japanese to young learners aims to introduce the Japanese language and culture to the younger generation. In growing globalization, mastering a foreign language has become a valuable skill. When children are attracted to learning Japanese, they are not only introduced to a different communication system. However, they are also involved in cross-cultural learning to shape their perspective of the world. Teaching Japanese at an early age has several benefits, including:

- With their quick absorption skill, children can quickly grasp new words and language

structures, which is similar to how they learn their mother tongue.

- As Japanese is one of the most widely used languages in the world, especially in business, technology, and international relations, young learners can sharpen their communication skills on a global scale.
- By understanding Japanese culture through language learning, children can also appreciate Japanese traditional culture, e.g., food, festivals, art, and customs or traditions.
- Children can increase their multicultural sensitivity as they learn foreign languages and cultures and consequently open their eyes to cultural diversity worldwide.
- Speaking Japanese opens many career opportunities in various fields, including international trade, tourism, technology, and even the arts.

That being said, teaching Japanese to young learners can help prepare a more globally connected generation with valuable language skills and can appreciate cultural diversity. With a strong foundation in Japanese, children can face the future with confidence and a broader understanding of the world.

The Appropriate Japanese Language Teaching Methods for Young Learners

Determining the appropriate and suitable teaching methods for young learners is a principal step before creating an effective and engaging learning environment. Several teaching methods that Japanese teachers have widely applied in the process of teaching Japanese to young learners include:

- Learning by Playing

As children are fond of playing games, formulating learning activities that can quickly improve their language skills can invite them to participate actively in the classroom. Fun activities such as role-playing games, board games, and team-based games can teach Japanese vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills. Flashcards can support this method.

- Musical Learning

Music and children's songs can be a powerful combination in language teaching as teachers can expose learners to Japanese vocabulary, intonation, and rhythm of the language. YouTube is the perfect supporting media to help implement this method.

- Visual Learning

Teachers can also use word cards, pictures, and illustrations to visualize Japanese vocabulary and its definitions, which will help children improve their vocabulary. Flashcards can also be the perfect medium for teaching young learners this learning method.

- Project-based Teaching

By inviting children to work on projects involving Japanese expressions, they can demonstrate both their creativity and critical thinking skills as they learn the Japanese language simultaneously. For example, children can create comic strips in Japanese or arrange small performances where they learn to make their dialogues in Japanese. To encourage their confidence, these activities can be presented in front of the classroom to be shared with their peers.

- Technology-based Learning

Nowadays, there are many language applications and educational software for young learners to learn any language they prefer, especially Japanese. For instance, teachers can incorporate YouTube or other video-sharing platforms to aid learners in listening to audio or watching videos by native Japanese speakers.

All in all, it is essential to combine various learning methods according to learners' needs and preferences in the classroom. Flexibility in choosing suitable teaching methods can help create a more engaging and practical learning experience for young learners when learning Japanese.

Use of Educational Media to Support Learning Activities

Educational media, such as illustrations, songs, and games, effectively support children's experience in learning the Japanese language. The following list details the use of each media and its integration into learning activities:

- Illustrations

By using illustrations, young learners can visualize and understand better the meaning of a specific expression or vocabulary, concepts of Japanese culture, and even everyday situations in Japanese.

- Songs

Choosing the right Japanese songs for young learners can help them learn intonation, rhythm, and new vocabulary. Songs even allow children to remember specific phrases, expressions, or proverbs better as they are integrated into the musical elements.

- Games

Educational games in Japanese, such as word puzzles, board games, or even role-playing games, are all engaging activities to be played in the classroom to practice speaking and understand each word and expression better. Games are also able to stimulate critical thinking and social interactions.

- Videos and Audio

Watching videos or listening to conversations in Japanese can enhance young learners' listening ability and express themselves in the language. Videos can also introduce children to many aspects and elements of Japanese culture, such as festivals or daily life activities.

However, it is also essential for teachers to consider the following things:

- Appropriate Contents
Ensure the content on YouTube is appropriate for the children's age and follows the teaching objectives.
- Supervision
Students should always be supervised using YouTube to prevent children from exploring inappropriate content.
- In balance with offline/outdoor activities

YouTube should be used only as a supplementary tool in language teaching. Balancing screen time with offline activities is important to support children's language development. With careful supervision and YouTube, it can be an effective tool in helping young children acquire language skills.

CONCLUSION

In principle, children of various ages cannot be separated from devices, and technology must also be able to go hand in hand with the learning process. Therefore, the YouTube platform, in general, has become an essential part of young learners' teaching and learning process, especially foreign language teaching. Most types of Japanese educational content are used by teachers when teaching young learners. It is of paramount importance that teachers can choose and determine what kind of YouTube content that can be used in the learning process. This is why the current research focuses on using YouTube videos as the learning media for teaching Japanese to young learners to improve their Japanese language skills, especially when they are still at beginner level or first timers.

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