Can Japanese Learners Pass the JLPT N3 by Reading A3! Visual Novel?

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Info Artikel	Abstrak
	Visual novel adalah media bacaan berisi percakapan antar tokoh yang ditampilkan dalam gaya anime statis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemungkinan visual novel yang umumnya digunakan sebagai game untuk hiburan, juga dapat digunakan sebagai media pembelajaran bahasa Jepang untuk lulus Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) dari N5-N3. Dengan memilih visual novel A3! (A3!) sebagai sampelnya, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif. Data berupa kosakata bahasa Jepang dikumpulkan dari soal JLPT tahun 2018 dan dari transkrip percakapan A3! sebanyak 21 chapter dengan teknik simak catat. Data kosakata yang terkumpul dari A3!, dihitung tingkat kecocokannya dengan aspek yang dinilai dalam JLPT yaitu moji goi, bunpou, dokkai, dan choukai di setiap level N5-N3. Dari hasil analisa data diketahui bahwa tingkat kecocokan kosakata pada A3! dengan kosakata pada JLPT secara rata-rata adalah sedang. Tingkat kecocokan ini cenderung tinggi pada JLPT N5 namun cenderung sedang pada JLPT N4 dan N3. Dari sini dapat disimpulkan bahwa visual novel A3! belum dapat direkomendasikan secara kuat sebagai media pembelajaran untuk lulus JLPT N4 dan N3, namun sangat direkomendasikan untuk digunakan sebagai media pembelajaran untuk dapat lulus JLPT N5.

Abstract

The visual novel is a reading media containing conversations between characters displayed in a static anime style. Equipped with audio and text in Japanese, it is estimated that visual novels can be used as an exciting media for learning Japanese. This study aims to determine the possibility that visual novels can also be used as a medium for learning Japanese to pass the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) from N5-N3. This study uses a quantitative method by choosing the A3! visual novel (A3!) as the sample. Japanese vocabulary data were collected from JLPT 2018 questions and 21 chapters of A3! with note-taking techniques. Vocabulary data collected from A3! is calculated according to JLPT aspects: Moji goi, bunpou, dokkai, and choukai at each level N5-N3. From the results of data analysis, the level of vocabulary match between A3! and JLPT vocabulary on average is medium. This match rate tends to be high on N5 but is moderate in N4 and N3. From this, it can be concluded that the visual novel A3! cannot be strongly recommended as a learning medium to pass JLPT N4 and N3. However, it is highly recommended to be used as a learning medium to pass JLPT N5.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese is one of the most challenging languages to learn. Japanese has three writing systems: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. To function as a literate adult in Japanese society, it is estimated that one must know around 2,000 characters (Yamashita and Maru, 2000). Each of them has its alphabet and character. In addition, some skills need to be mastered, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Japanese language learners often have difficulty because of the large amount of material that needs to be studied. However, interest in Japanese can be pretty high. According to The Japan Foundation (2019), more than 1,268,511 people from 87 countries took part in the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) in 2019.

As a difficult language to learn, it is common for students to experience a demotivation in learning Japanese. There are four factors of demotivation in learning Japanese: Course difficulty, Speaking anxiety, Devalued learning, and Boredom. Boredom has the highest score among those demotivation factors due to the Japanese language learning process that takes a long time (Yamashita, 2020). In this era of digital technology, there are many ways and methods to learn Japanese and a variety of material from which students can choose. To overcome boredom during the learning process and the amount of material, students need to find alternative learning that suits their needs and interests. One of them is to use non-textbook learning resources, such as games.

A3! (Acronym for "Act! Addict! Actors!") is a Japanese visual novel game developed by Liber Entertainment. The game offers a series of stories as well as Japanese audio. Throughout the story, this game uses a wide range of vocabulary, including common words and vocabulary from the acting context. With a game base that does not demand hands-on learning, A3! can be a fun and non-boring way to learn Japanese without feeling pressured to memorize the language.

Visual novel, sometimes called Voice novel, is a game that can be played on PC and partially released on game consoles such as PSP. The game is based on interactive fiction that features novel stories in the form of static images (attracted in anime style) and comes with a conversation box to convey each character's narration and speech, and sometimes each character has a sound effect that makes them look alive and can talk (Hikam, 2013). A visual Novel is more similar to a digital book due to its dense text format. However, due to the use of vital images and sounds, a Visual Novel can be a type of interactive medium that usually revolves around fiction and can also be used as a digital interactive book (Munandri, 2012).

Bícová (2019, 16) states that the visual novel can be divided into two categories based on the degree of interactivity presented to the player. The kinetic novel focuses on telling one linear story with minimal to no player input. The entirety of the kinetic novel hinges on narrative text and dialogue. The player might have the option to choose additional dialogue options, input text, or progress the story by clicking a prompt rather than the traditional "next frame" control key. This type does resemble a novel with visual aspects rather than a video game. The second category is the typical visual novel with a branching narrative in which the player is offered options that ultimately lead to one of the numerous endings. These various branches are commonly referred to as "routes" or "storylines," terminology commonly used in roleplaying games. The appeal of these games lies in the replay value, as depending on the game, a different route can take the player on a path with slight or significant differences from the previous one.

Cavallaro (2010, 8) points to the motivation to explore the game to the maximum. Dedicated players will spend hours upon hours replaying the same video game to get all the alternative branches, endings, and dialogue options. In this light, the visual novel can be seen as a natural progression of the gamebook.

Ningrum (2019) published a study titled "Pengembangan Media Game Visual Novel Untuk Mengenalkan Dongeng Jepang Momotarou 「桃太郎」". The purpose of this study is to look at the development of visual novel game media to introduce the Japanese fairy tale Momotarou and as an alternative medium for learning Japanese to improve the students' capacity to read and listen to

112

Japanese at SMA Negeri 1 Krembung Sidoarjo. The results showed that Momotarou visual novel game media is feasible to use with a value of 92.5% for the content of the material and 88% for the construction of the media. Furthermore, the visual novel game Momotarou scored 89.5% based on student responses, which stated that this media was perfect for teaching materials related to Japanese fairy tales.

Sarjana (2020) published research titled "Visual Novel Sebagai Instrumen Untuk Mengetahui Pemahaman Bahasa Jepang Tingkat Dasar Siswa" (Visual Novel as an Instrument for Knowing Students' Basic Japanese Language Comprehension). The results showed that there was a significant score difference from using a visual novel in reviewing lessons. Then, the analysis results showed that the Visual Novel test results' final average score was "Very High," concluding that the impact given to student learning is excellent. Lastly, the validation results conducted through a quantitative assessment from the teacher showed that the Visual Novel in this study was "Very Good." The researcher concluded that Visual Novel is a method that affects students' level of understanding in language learning. This research is successful and beneficial for students and teachers in teaching and learning activities at the Shinjuku Nihongo Academy Japanese language course.

Agusalim (2015) has conducted research entitled "Developing Visual Novel Game of English Conversation for DEP EEPIS." The research aims to create innovative, interactive learning media and motivate DEP EEPIS (Distance Education Program in Electronic Engineering Polytechnic Institute of Surabaya) students to study independently. The method used is Research and Development. As a result, the visual novel game in this study obtained very suitable material, namely 86.7%, based on assessing attractiveness factors, font shape and size, layout and color, audio, and delivery organization. Based on the validation of the media expert team, the percentage result was 88.5%, which means the feasibility level is very high based on the conformity assessment syllabus, conformity with SAP, material suitability, fitness evaluation, and student suitability. It can be said that the English conversation game for

the DEP EEPIS is declared feasible after seeing the validation results that have been mentioned.

This study has the topic of visual novel games as a learning media, which resembles Ningrum's, Sarjana's, and Agusalim's research. Those research, on the other hand, develop visual novel games for educational objectives. Meanwhile, the A3! visual novel game employed in this study is not an educational game, which has piqued the author's interest in seeing if it is possible to pass JLPT N3 simply by playing A3!.

This study aims to see if the visual novel game A3! can make Japanese learners pass the N3 exam by comparing the vocabulary in the visual novel game A3! Act 1 to the JLPT N3, N4, and N5 of 2018. The goal of this comparison is to see if A3! visual novel contains the JLPT vocabulary that can be memorized by players.

METHOD

This research uses a quantitative method, which is a process to find knowledge using numeric data as a tool to analyze what we want to know (Kasiram, 2008). The quantitative approach is also known as the traditional method since it has been utilized for such a long time that it has been customary to use it for research.

Statistical analysis is a type of quantitative analysis that is often utilized. The type of analysis performed in this study is descriptive statistical analysis. Data presentation in tables, frequency distributions, and crosstabs is one of the quantitative analysis techniques. This analysis will reveal if the research findings have a low, medium, or high propensity (Muhson, 2006).

The listening and note-taking method were also employed to collect data in this study. According to Sudaryanto (2015, 203), the listening method is a language study method that involves listening and the use of words on the item being examined. Listening is accomplished through listening to the dialogue in Act 1 of the A3! visual novel, and note-taking procedures were used to record the data. The note-taking technique entails recording various forms relevant to the research through written language (Mahsun, 2005, 93). Data

recording is done by transcribing the dialogue in Act 1 of the A3! game and arranging vocabulary in JLPT based on nouns, adjectives, and verbs that will be utilized as data sources.

The steps for the research were: listening and transcribing the audio from A3! visual novel, arranging the vocabulary that comes out of the A3! visual novel and JLPT, calculating vocabulary and the matching percentages, grouping them into verbs, adjectives, and nouns using Microsoft Excel, and concluding the results of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
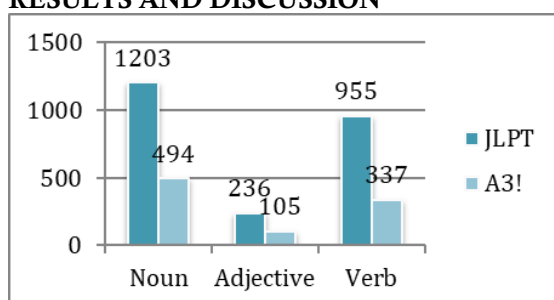
Graph 1. Comparison of the vocabularies in A3 that match the vocabulary of JLPT N5-N3

1203 nouns, 236 adjectives, and 955 verbs were identified after gathering all vocabulary data from 2018 JLPT questions at the N5, N4, and N3 levels. The authors compare this amount of data to the A3! game transcript data in the prologue chapter, chapters 1–14, and chapters 22–28. There are 494 nouns, 105 adjectives, and 337 verbs in these results, similar to the vocabulary of the JLPT questions. In other words, JLPT N5 – N3 questions contain 41 percent of nouns, 44 percent of adjectives, and 35 percent of verbs in A3.

The following is a full explanation of the vocabulary the author has gathered and classified into levels N5-N3, vocabulary in nouns, adjectives, and verbs, alongside examples of using each word in phrases.

N3 Level
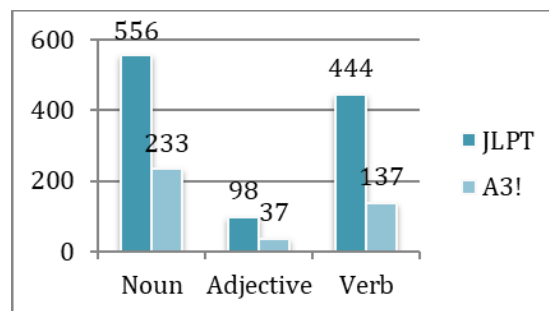
Graph 2. Comparison of the vocabularies in A3! that match the vocabulary of JLPT N3

JLPT 2018 N3 Level contains 556 nouns, 98 adjectives, and 444 verbs. A3 game (chapters mentioned above) matches the JLPT's 233 nouns, 37 adjectives, and 137 verbs. According to graph 2, there is a huge gap in noun and adjective words, but it is smaller than in the overall graph.

・N3 NOUN
(1) 部屋から急に人が飛び出してきたので、ぶつかりそうになった。(JLPT 2018 N3V)
Someone suddenly exited the room, and I nearly bumped into him.
(2) 咲也：自分の部屋を持つのは初めてだから、うれしいです。 (Episode 1, Chapter 2)
Sakuya: It's my first time having my own room, and I'm happy.
(3) 「多くのお客様が希望しているサービスは、私たちが考えていたのとは反対のものだったんです。」 (JLPT 2018 N3R)
The service that many of our customers wanted was the opposite of what we had in mind.
(4) 支配人：あわわ！待ってください！お客さんはこれから入るんです！(Prologue, Chapter 2)
Manager: Whoa! Wait a minute! The guests are about to enter!

Because the characters in the game are living together in a dorm, the term 部屋 (room) in sentence (2) is frequently used in their daily conversations and is a common word, as is 部屋 in sentence (1). Also, 客 in sentence (3) means "guests," since A3! game is about actors who perform in front of guests. Meanwhile, 客 in sentence (4) means "customer" as it is commonly translated.

・**N3 ADJECTIVE**

(5) 店員「大変申し訳ありません。」(JLPT 2018 N3G)
Clerk: "I'm terribly sorry.

(6) 綴：その練習が大変そうっすけどね。(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 9)
Tsuzuru: I think it's going to be hard to practice that, though.

(7) 留学生活に不安は当然ありました。(JLPT 2018 N3V)
Naturally, I was worried about my study abroad life.

(8) 監督：（先行き不安すぎるけど、お父さんが大事にしていた MANKAI カンパニー、絶対に守ってみせるからね！）(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 1)
Director: (I'm too worried about the future, but I'll definitely protect the MANKAI company that my father cherished!)

While the word 大変 from sentence (5) shows the depth of the speaker's apology, in sentence (6) it is used to show the amount of difficulty of their practice. Meanwhile, the word 不安 has the same meaning in both sentence (7) and (8): "worry."

・**N3 VERB**

(9) 中田 「あ、私、ABC 銀行の中田と申しますが、山石さんをお願いします。」(JLPT 2018 N3G)
Nakata: "Oh, my name is Nakata from ABC Bank, and I'm looking after Mr. Yamaishi."

(10) 咲也： これから、よろしくお願いします！(A3! Prologue, Chapter 6)
Director: "I'm *looking* forward to working with you!"

(11) つぎの文章を読んで、文章全体の内容を考えて、19 から 23 の中に 入る最もよいものを、1・2・3・4 から一つえらびなさい。(JLPT 2018 N3G)
Read the following sentence, think about the content of the whole sentence, and select one of the best ones from 19 to 23 from 1, 2, 3, and 4.

(12) 真澄： 何も考えないで台詞言ってるって感じ。(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 10)
Masumi: It's like you're saying the lines without thinking.

There is not an exact translation for お願いします. It is commonly referred to be the formal manner of saying "please." In sentence (9), the speaker politely asks about Mr. Yamaishi's whereabouts. In sentence (10), the speaker used the most common phrase to say "Please treat me kindly" to a person we just met. The other verb, 考え, means "to think" in both sentences (11) and (12).

N4 Level
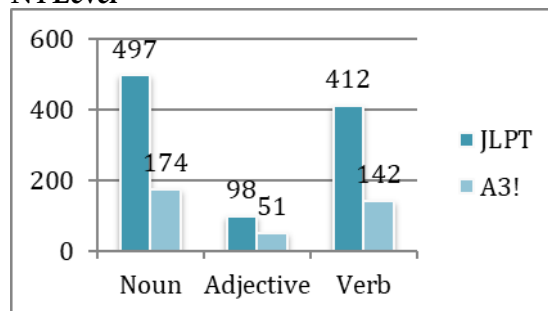
Graph 3. Comparison of the vocabularies in A3! that match the vocabulary of JLPT N4

JLPT 2018 N4 Level contains 497 nouns, 98 adjectives, and 412 verbs. A3! game (chapters mentioned above) matches the JLPT's 174 nouns, 51 adjectives, and 142 verbs. According to graph 3, the gap is smaller than graph 2, and the overall graph.

• **N4 NOUN**

(13) 次の週から町のプールで泳ぐ練習を始めました。(JLPT 2018 N4G)
The next week, I started practicing swimming at the town pool.

(14) 監督：それに専用劇場があるので、練習場所には困りません！ (A3! Prologue, Chapter 4)
Plus, we have our own theatre, so there's no need to worry about where to practice!

(15) 男の人と女の人が話しています。女の人は、昨日友達と一緒に何をしたと言っていますか。(JLPT 2018 N4L Script)
A man and a woman are talking. What does the woman say she did yesterday with her friends?

(16) すごく気の合う友達だったんすけど、疎遠になっちゃいました。 (A3! Episode 1, Chapter 9)
We used to be very good friends, but we drifted apart.

While sentence (13) shows that the 泳ぐ練習 means "to swim practice," the practice information is not included in sentence (14). However, because the game is situated in a theatre, players will think

that the "practice" stated above is a rehearsal. Meanwhile, the meaning of each of the 友達 terms above is the same: "friend."

● **N4 ADJECTIVE**

(17) 今日はとても<u>楽しかった</u>ですね。(JLPT 2018 N4V)
It was a lot of <u>fun</u> today.

(18) 監督：そうだね。にぎやかで<u>楽しい</u>。(A3! Prologue, Chapter 3)
Director: That's right. Lively and <u>fun</u>.

(19) 南 「あ、いいね。あしたは 都合が<u>悪い</u>けど、あさってならだいじょうぶだよ。」 (JLPT 2018 N4G)
Minami: "Oh, that's good. Tomorrow is <u>not a good time</u>, but the day after tomorrow will be fine.

(20) はると：なにそれ、僕が<u>悪い</u>っていうの？ (A3! Prologue, Chapter 1)
Haruto: What, you're saying it's my <u>fault</u>?

In sentences (17) and (18), the term 楽しい implies "fun." In sentence (19), 悪い describes how the speaker's schedule is "not a suitable time" for her. However, in sentence (20), the phrase 悪い implies "fault," as in "a mistake we made."

● **N4 VERB**

(21) ここにいらないものを<u>捨てて</u>ください。 (JLPT 2018 N4V)
Please <u>throw away</u> the things you don't need here.

(22) 真澄：「だめだ、僕は家族を<u>捨て</u>られない」 (A3! Episode 1, Chapter 25)
Masumi: "No, I can't <u>abandon</u> my family."

(23) やさいを<u>切って</u>ください。 (JLPT 2018 N4V)
Please <u>cut</u> the vegetables.

(24) 支配人：時間<u>切れ</u>、ですかね。 (A3! Prologue, Chapter 5)
Manager: Time is <u>up</u>, I guess.

The word 捨て means "to throw away" in sentence (21). Meanwhile, it implies "to abandon" in sentence (22) since it was a line from a theatre play when the character was asked to leave his family. While 切って in sentence (23) means "to cut" as in "to split into pieces," 切れ in sentence (24) means "to cut (the time)" as in "to end the activity at that precise moment."

N5 Level
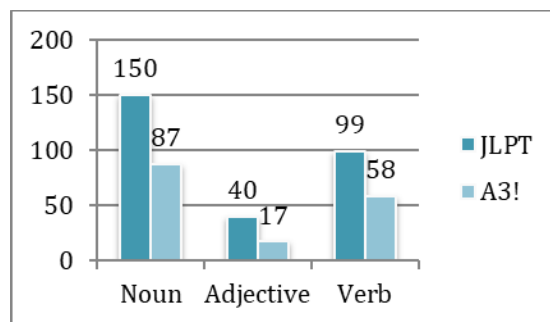
Graph 4. Comparison of the vocabularies in A3! that match the vocabulary of JLPT N5

JLPT 2018 N5 Level contains 150 nouns, 40 adjectives, and 99 verbs. A3 game (chapters mentioned above) matches the JLPT's 87 nouns, 17 adjectives, and 58 verbs. According to graph 4, the gap of the noun, adjective, and verb is getting smaller than the overall graph, graph 2, and graph 3, especially the verb.

● **N5 NOUN**

(25) リー「日曜日に、私の<u>家</u>でアンさんとべんきょうを します。」(JLPT 2018 N5G)
Lee: "On Sunday, I'm going to study with Ann at my <u>house</u>."

(26) 咲也：「<u>家</u>も名を捨ててくれ、ジュリアス！」(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 25)
Sakuya: Give up your <u>house</u> and your name, Julius!

(27) F：ジョージさん、冬休みに<u>国</u>へ帰りますか。(JLPT 2018 N5L Script)
F: George, are you going back to your <u>country</u> during the winter vacation?

(28) シトロン：私の<u>国</u>では一般常識だよ。(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 12)
Citron: It's common knowledge in my <u>country</u>.
家 refers to a house or a building for human to live. However, according to the sentences, 家 has two meanings: in sentence (25) it means "a house," and in sentence (26) it means "family," even though it is written as 家. Then, the term 国 in both sentence (27) and (28) has the same meaning: "country."

● **N5 ADJECTIVE**

(29) この カメラは <u>たかい</u>ですね。(2018 N5V)
This camera is <u>expensive</u>.

(30) シトロン：なんか、あんた、テンション<u>高い</u>。(A3! Episode 1, Chapter 9)
Citron: Somehow, you have a <u>high</u> tension.

116

(31) このみちはくるまがおおいです。(JLPT 2018 N5V)

There are many cars on this road.

(32) 真澄：人が多い。 (A3! Episode 1, Chapter 23)

Masumi: There are a lot of people.

高い means "high" in Japanese. However, the word "high" has a different meaning in sentence (29) than it does in sentence (30). It means "a high price" or "expensive" in sentence (29), while it implies "high tension" or "high spirit" in sentence (30). Then, the term 多い means "many" in both sentences (31) and (32). However, each sentence describes more precisely that there are "many cars" and "many people."

- **N5 VERB**

(33) それを 聞いて びっくりしました。 (JLPT 2018 N4V)

I was surprised *to* hear that.

(34) 咲也：今日の雄三さんの言葉聞いて、どう思いました？ (A3! Episode 1, Chapter 14)

What did you think when you heard Yuzo's words today?

(35) F: りんごと、それから、みかんとバナナを少し入れました。 (JLPT 2018 N5L Script)

I added some apples, then some mandarin oranges and bananas.

(36) 真澄：アンタも劇団に入るんだよな。

You're going to join the theatre company, aren't you? (A3! Episode 1, Chapter 1)

In sentence (33), 聞いて means "to hear." While it also means "to hear" in sentence (34), it is more akin to "listening to a coach's advice." Then there is 入りました and 入った which indicate "sign-in" and "enter." It has the meaning of "adding" in sentence (35), which leads to "adding fruits," and it has the meaning of "enter" in sentence (36), which leads to "joining the theatre."

Of course, some words are only found in the JLPT, and some are only found in the game. A3 contains words related to acting and stage plays, such as 舞台 (stage), 監督 (director), 劇団 (theatre company), 役者 (actor) and many more, which rarely appear in JLPT. However, because those words appear frequently, the player will be able to memorize them as new vocabulary. Furthermore, because the actors in the story live in a dorm, there are numerous greetings and everyday dialogues, such as おはようございます (Good morning), いただきます (Let us eat), ただいま (I am home) and many more, that the players may use in their daily life.

There are also several metaphors in A3!, such as 「俺たちを咲かせてください、監督！」, means "Please let us bloom, Director!." "To guide them until they become a great actor" is what the term "bloom" implies. Though the meaning is not revealed in the game, players will be able to figure it out independently by playing the chapters. This kind of metaphor does not appear much in JLPT; therefore, the player will be learning something new.

In Ningrum's research, it is stated that Momotarou's visual novel is highly usable because Momotarou's visual novel is intended to introduce Japanese fairy tales. Meanwhile, A3 is not used to make the player guaranteed to pass the JLPT. However, it helps the player learn vocabularies in a fun way since A3! is pure fiction with entertainment purposes, which is in accordance with Agusalim's research: creating innovative and interactive media in the form of visual novels to motivate students to study independently.

CONCLUSION

Quantitative studies have been done to answer whether Japanese Learners may pass the JLPT N3 by reading A3! Visual Novel and the results reveal that the proportion of matching vocabulary is all under 50%. The level of vocabulary match between A3! and JLPT vocabulary on average is medium. This match rate tends to be high on N5 but is moderate in N4 and N3. From this, it can be concluded that the visual novel A3! cannot be strongly recommended as a learning medium to pass JLPT N4 and N3. However, it is highly recommended to be used as a learning medium to pass JLPT N5.

Despite the average percentage, A3! has a positive aspect. Reading A3! Visual Novel makes the player happy, which is a great approach to learn if the learner does not want to use a book only. As a result, it can be stated that reading A3! Visual Novel can help Japanese learners in passing the JLPT N3. The average percentage of the matching vocabularies

117

might have occurred because the vocabulary data utilized in this research came solely from the JLPT 2018 and a few chapters from the A3! game. Therefore, in the future, the data from the JLPT 2018 and prior years' JLPTs, and more chapters from the A3! game will be used in order to get more accurate answers.

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