



Poster Presentation: A Project-Based Integrated Language Learning to Enhance Soft Skills of Japanese Language Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates how Japanese language students view group poster presentations as a project-based integrated language learning process. Japanese language students in higher education must possess both the hard and soft skills necessary for the workplace in the twenty-first century. Therefore, developing Japanese language learning methods is necessary to enhance both learners' soft skills and Japanese proficiency. The project-based learning (PjBL) approach was carried out through a project assigned in the Speaking course, namely in group poster presentations. This research investigated students' perceptions after implementing poster presentation activities to develop their soft skills. The research data were collected using questionnaires, interviews with selected students, and observations during the 8-week project. The results of this study show that the Japanese language students respond favourably to the implementation of the group poster presentation project. Poster presentation activities encourage the students to practice their four Japanese language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in realistic communication. At the same time, these group project activities help the students understand the value of interpersonal skills, project management, critical thinking and problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills in completing a project.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, vocational education has been seen as an important key to supporting economic development in Indonesia. In late 2020, the Indonesian government established the Directorate General of Vocational Education under the Ministry of Education and Culture to improve the country's vocational education quality. This institution aims to prepare human resources to face the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, which requires skilled workers who are experts in their fields (Ditjen Vokasi, 2020).

To achieve its goals, vocational education institutions must equip students with the skills required in the workplace. Mouzakitis (2010) suggested that vocational education should enable students to develop into productive, responsible people, well-equipped for life and work in today's technology-based knowledge society. He also mentioned that using technology and developing creativity, independence, communicative skills, knowledge, and understanding are indispensable for improving workforce qualifications. Therefore, the appropriate curricula and learning methods are needed so that the knowledge gained and the skills trained in the higher education institution align with the needs in the workplace.

Regarding the learning method, project-based learning (henceforth, PjBL) is appropriate for vocational education (Lesmana & Jaedun, 2015; Muam, 2017; Triyono & Utami, 2017). Kavlu (2017) and Kato et al. (2020) emphasized that PjBL can increase students' motivation and academic engagement. Lamer et al. (as cited in Noviansyah & Sudira (2020) also suggested that project-based learning is an effective teaching strategy to help students to prepare for their career and encourages them to think critically.

According to Wuriyanto (2018), in the context of vocational education, foreign language education is crucial in facing the industrial revolution 4.0. Language education plays a role in improving students' communication skills and language mastery so that Indonesian human resources can coexist with the global community

in various spheres of life, be it political, economic, social or cultural. One of the foreign languages indispensable in Indonesia is Japanese because the economic partnership between Indonesia and Japan is vital for Indonesian economic growth.

Wahidati & Djafri (2021) showed evidence that graduates of Japanese language studies programs who work in Japanese companies experienced difficulties communicating with Japanese expatriates or local staff. This obstacle is caused by differences in work culture and ways of communicating between Indonesia and Japan. This kind of obstacle is related not only to their hard skills but also to their soft skills. As a result, innovation in Japanese learning methods that can build soft skills relevant to workplace needs is critical.

Sadly, research focusing on this topic in the Indonesian context still needs to be completed. Few studies have been conducted to investigate soft skills of Japanese speaking staffs in the workplace (see Dwiwardani & Wahidati, 2019; Setiana et al., 2019). While a study on enhancing students' soft skills through small group discussions in Japanese language learning has been conducted by Noviana (2017), the result of this study was only analyzed based on teachers' observations on one particular course of language skill, namely reading skills, in a class. Whereas in realistic communication, including in the workplace, a person must use his or her language skills in an integrated manner involving various language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing).

Therefore, the researchers felt that research related to the Japanese language learning method that can improve learners' integrated language skills and soft skills at the same time is needed. This study investigates how Japanese language students view group poster presentations as project-based integrated language learning to develop students' soft skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PjBL, Foreign Language Learning, and Student's Skills Development

Several researchers have researched the implementation of PjBL in foreign language

learning (see Assyahbana, 2019; Kato et al., 2020; Kavlu, 2017; Muam, 2017; Susanti et al., 2020). Susanti et al. (2020) indicated that learning a foreign language using PjBL can lower students' anxiety when they use the language being studied. In addition to that, according to Kavlu (2017), incorporating PjBL into language learning increases students' social communicative abilities and language skills.

Moreover, implementing PjBL in classes effectively develops students' soft skills (Assyahbana, 2019; Jalinus & Nabawi, 2018; Musa et al., 2011,2012). Assyahbana (2019) provided empirical evidence that project-based learning, in which the activity is designed to engage the student in creating certain products, can increase student creativity and responsibility in teamwork. Kato et al. (2020) implied that with appropriate project selection, PjBL could motivate students to overcome adversity and learn. Musa et al. (2011, 2012) also suggested that through PjBL, students can develop other soft skills needed in the workplace, such as managing conflict, decision-making, and communication skills. Students tend to be more independent, confident, and productive in generating and discussing ideas with their group members to finish their projects.

However, the teacher plays an essential role in successfully implementing PjBL. Assyahbana (2019) stated that in project-based language learning, the teacher's feedback on students' work is important so that the student can fix their mistakes. Teacher assistance and motivation are also necessary to show that the teacher is empathetic in developing the students' projects so they can enthusiastically complete them. Most importantly, with structured mentoring, the main goal of the course, which is improving students' hard skills, can be achieved. In other words, the intensity and the quality of interaction between teacher and student greatly affect the success of the PjBL (Assyahbana, 2019; Muam, 2017). In addition, the teacher must plan the program properly because time management is crucial, and it helps the students to complete their projects on time (Muam, 2017). Furthermore, Fatmawati (2018) suggested that to

impact the development of students' 21st-century skills significantly, the lecturer should carefully plan the implementation of project-based learning and incorporate specific skill targets.

Based on the previous relevant studies, it can be concluded that PjBL is a suitable method that can be used to enhance both students' language skills and soft skills.

Integrated Language Skills

To communicate in real life, a person must activate his/her four communication skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Aydogan and Akbarof (as cited in Supina, 2018) reveal that these four abilities are basic skills that must be mastered to carry out communication activities. In realistic communication, we often use more than one language skill simultaneously. For example, we use our speaking and listening skills in a conversation. When communicating via telephone, we listen and speak, and sometimes we also write down a note or message and read it back for confirmation (Considine, 2018).

Therefore, after the students complete their basic Japanese courses in the first year, the intermediate-advance Japanese learning approach for second and third-year students focuses on language learning for communication purposes. In this regard, implementing the PjBL method in language learning provides opportunities for Japanese language learners to practice what they learned in class and actively use the four basic language skills in realistic communication.

Soft Skills Needed by Japanese Language Learners

Cobo (as cited in Dean & East, 2019) stated that in today's world of fierce global competition, soft skills are one of the most significant qualities an employee can have. Wahidati & Djafri (2021) stated that Japanese-speaking Indonesian staff working in a Japanese company play a crucial role as a communication bridge between the locals and expatriates. This role often puts them in a difficult situation, sandwiched between two people with different cultural backgrounds. In the worst case, if they

cannot express their thoughts effectively, they will be judged as if they stand on one side against the other, causing the atmosphere in their workplace unfavourable. Those kind of problems often become the main cause of stress. Therefore, Wahidati & Djafri suggested that teachers need to provide an environment where students can interact with people from different cultural backgrounds to enhance their soft skills, which include communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work effectively in a team.

According to Musa et al. (2012), PjBL can be utilized to develop at least five employability skills. They are communication, interpersonal, problem-solving, teamwork, and project management skills. These soft skills are interrelated and influence each other. Tarricone & Luca (2002) confirmed that interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills are essential for effective teamwork. Effective teamwork, then, will lead to a successful project.

This research is conducted to investigate the students' perception regarding workplace skills that they developed during the implementation of PjBL in an integrated Japanese language learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted on the Speaking IV (*Berbicara IV*) course, with the ability to do public speaking in Japanese as a learning outcome. The research participants were all fourth-semester students enrolled in the course, a total of 27 students.

This research was a mixed-methods research. The data were collected using questionnaires, interviews with selected students, and observations during the activity. The questionnaire used in this study is a modification of the questionnaire designed by Musa et al. (2012). The questionnaire was distributed to the students after the completion of the project. The questionnaire was divided into two sections to capture students' perspectives towards the poster presentation project, namely: 1) students' general opinion about the poster presentation project (6 items); and 2) students' view about collaborative

learning applied in the project, including teamwork (3 items), communication skills (7 items), interpersonal skills (4 items), problem-solving skills (4 items), and project management skill (5 items).

The questionnaire uses a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 5 representing "Strongly Agree". Students' answers were examined using descriptive statistics, and the results were quantitatively and qualitatively discussed.

The Implementation of PjBL in the Form of Group Poster Presentation

PjBL was implemented in the Speaking IV course (*Berbicara IV*). This subject is compulsory for third-year Japanese Language Study Program students of the Vocational College of Universitas Gadjah Mada. This subject aims to train the student how to do public speaking, such as presentation and speech, using appropriate expressions in Japanese. Table 1 shows the PjBL activities and their learning outcomes per week.

As one of the tasks in this course, students were tasked with making a group poster presentation about cultural differences between Indonesia and Japan. The students must interview a native Japanese speaker to collect the data for the presentation. The task was a group project because it is believed that to have meaningful communication using foreign language inside and outside the classroom, students need social support from their surroundings, be it from their teachers or friends (Saidah, 2021). The project was conducted for eight weeks during the second half of the semester.

Poster presentations were chosen as the projects that the students must do because, according to Prichard & Ferreira (2014), poster presentation activity is more beneficial for language learners than a usual class presentation in a way that it can help students to recall so much more information from other student's presentation. After the presentation, students can interact and discuss with the presenter in a more relaxed manner so that they can get a better comprehension of the topic being discussed. Meanwhile, the interview activity was chosen to

allow the students to interact with native Japanese speakers so that they could utilize their Japanese skills in real-life applications.

Moreover, combining these two activities activates all the basic foreign language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Through interviews, students can interact directly with native speakers using Japanese to practice speaking and listening. The interview results must then be written on a poster and presented to the public.



Figure 1. Poster presentation conducted by a group of students

Table 1. Student learning outcomes

Week	Activity	Student learning outcomes
1	group formation	Ability to express their own opinions and thoughts in Japanese.
2	deciding the topic of the interview and presentation	Ability to express their ideas, thoughts, and argument in a peer discussion.
3	preparing the list of interview questions	Understand the procedure for an interview, commonly used expressions, proper aizuchi (response), and how to proceed with the interview.
4-5	conducting interview with Japanese native speaker	Ability to gain the needed information from the interviewee using Japanese and able to communicate directly with native speakers.
6	summarizing the results of the interview and create a text for the poster presentation	Ability to summarize the results of the interview into written language using appropriate Japanese expressions.
7	poster making	Ability to determine the important points displayed on the poster.
8	poster presentation, question and answer, evaluation	Ability to present the interview results and express their opinion in public and ability to answer the questions related to the topic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perception of Poster Presentation Activity in General

This part focuses on the student's overall impressions of the poster presentation project. Table 2 illustrates students' perception of poster presentation activity in general.

The data analysis revealed that the students responded positively to the poster presentation activities. Most students indicated that the interview and poster presentation project improved their Japanese skills (A1, mean= 4.56). Moreover, students' responses toward items A2 (mean= 4.41) and A5 (mean=4.19) indicated that group projects benefited them. Working in a

group is preferable to undertaking individual assignments for most students since it reduces their workload (A5). They can also exchange ideas with other members, allowing them to obtain ideas from their teammates (A2).

Meanwhile, students' responses to items A3 (mean=4.33) and A4 (mean=4.22) indicated that the group projects assigned were also beneficial for individual learning. The lowest mean was the "A6 Interviews and poster presentation did not take too much of my time" (mean=3.33). It indicated that some students thought that the project was time-consuming. This is understandable because, in addition to doing individual tasks, they also have to take the time to discuss with their teammates.

Table 2. Students' responses on the project in general (N=27)

No	Statements	Mean	Mode	SD
A1	This interview and poster presentation project help me improve my Japanese.	4.56	5	0.577
A2	The input/suggestions of peers in one group are quite helpful to me.	4.41	5	0.636
A3	Project assignments (interviews and poster presentations) provide many opportunities for me to actively investigate something so that it allows me to understand concepts, apply information and convey my knowledge in a variety of ways.	4.33	4	0.679
A4	I find the interview and poster presentation tasks very fun and challenging because I can play an active role in planning activities	4.22	4	0.751
A5	Working in groups is better than doing individual tasks	4.19	4	0.681
A6	Interviews and poster presentation project did not take too much of my time	3.33	4	1.038

According to the data analysis, project-based learning, applied as group poster presentations and conducted for eight weeks, provides space for students to think, learn, and act independently and in groups. Therefore, students benefit because they can develop individual learning skills, but at the same time, they also learn the importance of teamwork to accomplish their projects successfully.

Students' Perception of Soft Skills Learned during the Project Implementation

This section discusses the soft skills learned through a poster presentation project based on students' perceptions. The discussions will emphasize the most significant findings of the study. Table 3 shows students' assessment of the soft skills they have developed during the project. The soft skills discussed include teamwork, communication, interpersonal, problem-solving, and project management.

Table 3 shows that most students agreed that the poster presentation project allowed them to learn soft skills. Most students learned that teamwork quality significantly impacts the group's ability to complete the project (B1, mean=4.7). While running the project together for 8 weeks, they must have encountered various problems. However, by committing to complete the targeted tasks, they learned to work in teams to solve problems and get things done (B2, mean=4.1). They also learned how to express opinions politely and protect group members'

feelings during discussion (B3, mean=4.37). Scarnati (as cited in Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018) defines *teamwork* as "a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results". The findings of this study support it. Students with different strengths and weaknesses can contribute in different ways by utilizing their strengths to help other team members and work together to achieve their goals at the highest level.

Khambayat (2017) stated that working in a small group could help students to learn the concepts of communication deeper. Tiwery & Souisa (2019) also mention that interaction and collaboration between two or more learners are needed to achieve communication in foreign language learning. The findings of the research are in line with those statements above. Most students indicated they gained communication skills through the group poster presentation project. Students' response to item B4 shows they learned non-verbal communication skills (mean=4.30). Because their Japanese language skills were still limited (approximately equal to Japan Foundation Standard level B1), they learned to communicate using gestures and facial expressions when interviewing native speakers. Clough & Duff (2020) stated that gesture has an important benefit for both the speaker and the listener, and combining speech and gesture can enrich the language context. Therefore, interviewing native speakers is a valuable experience for students because it allows them to use gestures, which is one of the communication

strategies for delivering information to the listeners, especially when they do not know how to express their thoughts using proper Japanese expressions.

Students also stated that they developed their verbal communication skills while working on the project. They learned how to ask a question and seek information from other people (B5, mean=4.26), make a convincing presentation to the audience (B6, mean=4.22), and increase their confidence to communicate verbally with Japanese people (B9, mean=4.07). Besides, they also learned written expression, such as how to convey ideas clearly through writing (B7, mean=4.15), how to contact Japanese via e-mail/WhatsApp/other electronic

media (B8, mean=4.07), and how to answer written messages from Japanese (B10, mean=4.04). This evidence shows that group poster presentation projects can enhance students' oral and written communication skills. This is aligned with the study conducted by Brooks & Wilson (2014), which demonstrates that presentations offer a more authentic means of second language (L2) practice than simple speaking drills. This is because they require students to communicate their comprehension of the issues they present to others using their L2. Students can hone their research and critical thinking skills and linguistic and communicative abilities because this is similar to how language is used in everyday life.

Table 3. Students' responses toward soft skills developed during the project (N=27)

Soft skills	No	Statements	Mean	Mode	SD
Teamwork	B1	I learned that good teamwork supports successful group assignments	4.70	5	0.609
	B2	I learned to work in teams to solve problems and get things done	4.41	4	0.694
	B3	I learned how to express opinions politely and protect group members' feelings during discussion	4.37	4	0.565
Communication skills	B4	I learned to do non-verbal communication (for example: using gestures)	4.30	5	0.724
	B5	I learned to ask questions and seek information from other people	4.26	4	0.712
	B6	I learned to make a convincing presentation to audience	4.22	4	0.506
	B7	I learned to convey ideas clearly through writing	4.15	4	0.602
	B8	I learned how to contact Japanese people via text message (via e-mail / WhatsApp / other electronic media)	4.07	5	1.035
	B9	I am increasingly confident to communicate verbally with Japanese people using Japanese	4.07	4	0.781
	B10	I learned how to answer written messages from Japanese people (via e-mail / WhatsApp / other electronic media)	4.04	4	0.854
Interpersonal skills	B11	I learned to work with individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds	4.48	4	0.509
	B12	I became more understanding and sensitive to the needs of other members when working on group assignments	4.33	4	0.620
	B13	I improve my social skills by meeting Japanese people	4.33	5	0.734
	B14	I learned to interrupt appropriately when interacting with other people	4.00	4	0.679

Problem-solving skills	B15	I learned how to draw conclusions from the results of group discussions	4.41	4	0.501
	B16	I am motivated to speak up and express opinions when identifying problems and finding solutions	4.30	4	0.669
	B17	I learned how to assess solutions and identify good views / input from group members	4.30	4	0.609
	B18	I can easily focus on the main thoughts / ideas needed to work on and complete a task	4.07	4	0.730
Project management	B19	I learned how to brainstorm and convey ideas appropriately during group discussions	4.33	4	0.620
	B20	I learned to develop a desire for knowledge-seeking	4.30	4	0.542
	B21	I feel confident about giving suggestions freely during group discussions	4.30	5	0.775
	B22	I learned to identify relevant ideas from written information related to the themes of the interview and poster presentations	4.30	5	0.775
	B23	I learned to gather information from various sources relevant to the project theme	4.26	4	0.594

In addition to the data mentioned above, based on the classroom observations throughout the course and interviews with selected students, it became clear that students practiced their four language skills in various activities to complete their assignments. Those language activities are as follows:

- *Reading skill*: based on interviews with students, they stated that they read various sources in Japanese through the internet to determine the presentation topic, develop their interview questions, and search for vocabulary related to the topic.
- *Speaking skill*: students learned to gather information from native speakers using informal spoken languages, give oral presentations using formal spoken languages, and participate in a question-and-answer session with their peers.
- *Listening skill*: during interviews, students practice listening to and interpreting native speakers' responses, while during the poster presentation session, they learn to comprehend the content of their classmates' presentations.
- *Writing skills*: students work on their writing skills by composing interview questions, creating presentation texts, and compiling the content for the poster.

This finding supports previous research by Brooks & Wilson (2014), which stated that one of the benefits of presentations is that they require the use of all four language skills.

In addition, this project also allows the students to learn how to communicate effectively with their peers. While working on this project, they must meet and discuss frequently in and outside class to complete their assignments. Hence, they also naturally practice their interpersonal skills during the process. Item B11 (mean=4.48) indicated that they learned to work with individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds. They also acknowledge that they became more understanding and sensitive to the need of other members (B12, mean=4.33) and learned to interrupt appropriately when interacting with others during the project (B14, mean=4.00). The students tried to be empathetic to their peers' conditions. They were considerate of one another, respected, and supported one another at difficult times. This finding aligns with Järvenoja & Järvelä's (as cited in Lee et al., 2015) statement that collaboration in a team requires the group members to share not only knowledge, opinions, and ideas but also their feelings and emotions.

The next discussion is regarding students' responses to problem-solving skills. Most

students agreed they learned how to conclude from group discussion results (B15, mean=4.41). They also indicated that during the project, they were motivated to speak up and express their opinion when they had to identify any problems occur in the process and were triggered to find the best solutions for the problems (B16, mean=4.30). Additionally, this project enabled a student to evaluate ideas or inputs from their peer and identify whether those ideas were appropriate to solve their problems (B17, mean=4.30). The finding is consistent with the prior study by Rodzalan et al. (2020), which found that students tend to think critically in solving their problems when they have high interest and autonomy in a task given.

Project management is also an important soft skill for a successful project that students must learn. Project management refers to "how project knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques can be applied to the outlined project tasks to accomplish the requirements of the project" (George, 2020). Therefore, it requires basic research ability that allows students to fill any knowledge gaps that may enable them to finish the task more efficiently (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Regarding these basic research skills, students learned how to brainstorm and convey ideas during group discussions (B19, mean=4.33). At almost every project step, each group must decide on something, such as the presentation topic, the interviewee, and what will be displayed on the poster. They were given many opportunities to discuss, exchange ideas, and share their knowledge with their peers. The discussions required them to seek knowledge (B21, mean=4.30), to identify relevant ideas from written information (B22, mean=4.30) as well as to gather information from various sources relevant to the project (B23, mean=4.26). Additionally, the discussion between students allows them to feel confident in giving suggestions freely (B20, mean=4.30).

In addition to the survey finding, based on the researchers' observations throughout the group presentations, the quality of teamwork and communication within the group was noticeable from the design of their poster as well as the

performance of each student during the presentation. The group, with good teamwork, succeeded in presenting their topics using creative poster designs. On the other hand, a few groups of students offered simple poster layouts and less in-depth presentation material. Even though the instructors provided mentoring throughout the project planning and preparation process, the team's poor cooperation and coordination led to unsatisfactory outcomes. Therefore, a more structured assistance strategy is needed to improve the effectiveness of group project-based learning in enhancing students' soft skills.

Based on the above discussion, group poster presentation activity helps Japanese students learn and realize the importance of soft skills in a successful project. Students' communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, project management, and good teamwork greatly affect their performance and the outcome of their work. Thus, project-based learning in the form of group poster presentations can be considered an appropriate language learning method to promote students' soft and Japanese skills.

CONCLUSION

This research provided empirical evidence that group poster presentation is suitable for project-based language learning that can improve students' soft skills. This project allows students to learn Japanese in an integrated manner, allowing them to use their four Japanese language skills in realistic communication to accomplish the assignment. Moreover, during the project, students interact with people from different cultural backgrounds to improve their communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills. Through this project, students also learn the importance of teamwork and project management to complete tasks successfully and efficiently. More importantly, this project allows students to learn in a fun and enjoyable environment.

However, the Japanese native speakers involved in this research were all about the same age as the students. In a real workplace environment, a person will interact and

communicate with people of different ages, genders, and positions. In Japanese culture, differences in age, gender, and position will affect communication. Therefore, in future research, it is necessary to consider involving the participation of various age groups.

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