

Small-Group Literacy Activities for Introducing Japanese Culture

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Literacy,
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Literacy through reading and understanding simple Japanese texts is an effective way to learn Japanese characters while introducing Japanese culture in schools. Learning Japanese as a foreign language should not focus only on linguistic aspects, but also include understanding and knowledge of cultural values and daily habits found in Japanese society. Through small-group literacy activities, students are expected not only to learn how to read but also to develop cultural awareness, tolerance, self-discipline, and good daily habits. Observations were conducted with students working in small groups. The activities included reading simple Japanese texts, assessing the groups' ability to identify main ideas and process information, and observing their overall responses to the activity. The reading materials were simple illustrated texts written in Japanese, depicting the daily life of a small family consisting of parents and children, with their respective roles and routines from morning until night. The overall results of the small-group literacy activities showed that students were highly enthusiastic about reading Japanese texts. They took turns reading furigana, hiragana, and katakana in short paragraphs. Afterwards, students learned to identify the main ideas of the paragraphs they understood. At the end of the session, group representatives presented their comprehension results to other groups. The groups' ability to extract important information was rated excellent 88,3, and students showed a very positive response (95%), as the activity allowed them to gain insight into Japanese family life and everyday cultural practices.

INTRODUCTION

The growing demand for employment opportunities in Japan has led to an increasing interest in learning Japanese among Indonesian students. The motivations vary, including professional and educational goals. In this era of globalization, the ability to appreciate and understand foreign cultures is a crucial competency for language learners. Fundamentally, foreign language learning should not be limited to linguistic acquisition but must also include an understanding of cultural values underlying societal norms. Through cultural understanding, students develop broader perspectives, tolerance, and effective cross-cultural communication skills.

Japanese culture is widely recognized for its distinctiveness and appeal. The introduction of Japanese culture in schools should not rely solely on textbook information but can also be enriched through various media sources. However, to effectively enhance cultural knowledge while improving students' reading skills in hiragana, katakana, and kanji, an integrated literacy-based learning approach is essential.

Literacy encompasses not only reading and writing but also the ability to interpret and relate information within social and cultural contexts. Small-group literacy activities allow students to explore different aspects of Japanese culture such as traditions and customs through simple Japanese texts. Group-based literacy also fosters critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Within small groups, students assist each other with character recognition, exchange interpretations, discuss content, identify

positive cultural values, and develop curiosity toward Japanese culture. Consequently, literacy activities are expected to enrich students' cultural knowledge while simultaneously building character and social competence.

Based on these premises, the "Introduction to Japanese Culture through Small-Group Literacy Activities" aims to serve as an innovative learning strategy that promotes student engagement and creativity. Through these activities, students not only learn about Japanese culture textually but also relate it to real-life contexts, cultivating appreciation and openness toward global cultural diversity. The activity was conducted at MAN 3 Kediri as part of a community service program, where students engaged with Japanese texts depicting family life, roles, and daily routines. The focus was to examine how literacy-based cultural learning enhances students' cultural understanding and responses.

RESEARCH METHOD

The literacy activity conducted at MAN 3 Kediri adopted a small-group mentoring model. Thirty second-grade students participated, assisted by five lecturers from the Department of Japanese Language and Literature. The steps of the activity were as follows:

1. Initial assessment of students' prior knowledge about daily Japanese family life.
2. Formation of small literacy groups. Each group of six students, guided by one lecturer, read Japanese texts with different themes. Students took turns reading each sentence, discussed meanings collaboratively using digital dictionaries, and summarized the main ideas.
3. Group presentation. Each group representative presented their collective understanding in front of the class.
4. Reflection and feedback. At the end of the session, students filled out response questionnaires and participated in short interviews. The feedback was used for evaluation and future improvement of community service programs.

The instruments used for data collection are presented below:

Table 1: Instruments

No.	Instrument Type	Purpose	Indicators	Form
1	Student Observation Sheet	To observe students' activeness and participation during literacy activities	Attendance, reading participation, teamwork, comprehension ability, enthusiasm during presentation	Rating scale (1–5, descriptive)
2	Student Response Questionnaire	To collect students' feedback toward the literacy activity	Interest in reading, cultural understanding, motivation to learn Japanese	Likert scale

No.	Instrument Type	Purpose	Indicators	Form
3	Pre- and Post-Test	To measure students' comprehension of Japanese cultural content	Ability to identify moral values and cultural messages in the text	Short written test

The following data analysis techniques were applied after the data were collected:

Table 2: Data

Type of Data	Analysis Technique	Expected Output
Observation Data	Frequency analysis and qualitative description	Patterns of students' activeness and enthusiasm during the activity
Questionnaire Data	Quantitative descriptive analysis (percentage)	Level of students' positive responses toward the literacy activity
Test Data	Analysis of individual and group average scores	Level of students' understanding of Japanese culture through texts

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The small-group literacy activity introducing Japanese culture was implemented on February 25, 2025, at MAN 3 Kediri with 30 participants. The 4-hour session began with a brainstorming discussion about typical Japanese family activities. Students were divided into three large groups of ten, further subdivided into small groups of five, ensuring balanced kana-reading abilities. Pre-tests were administered to assess prior knowledge about daily routines, transportation, and social interactions in Japan.

Japanese texts with different themes were distributed among groups. Students collaboratively read and interpreted the passages, supporting each other with kanji readings and meaning interpretation. Active discussions emerged as students constructed understanding collectively. Group representatives then presented their summaries to the class, while others observed and took notes. The presentations proceeded smoothly, reflecting engagement and cooperation.



Figure 1. Group Presentation Activity

After all group representatives had presented the results of their group comprehension, a simple post-test was administered to each group related to the content of the texts that

had been read and explained by other groups. The following are the pre-test and post-test results from the Japanese cultural literacy activity conducted in the classroom.

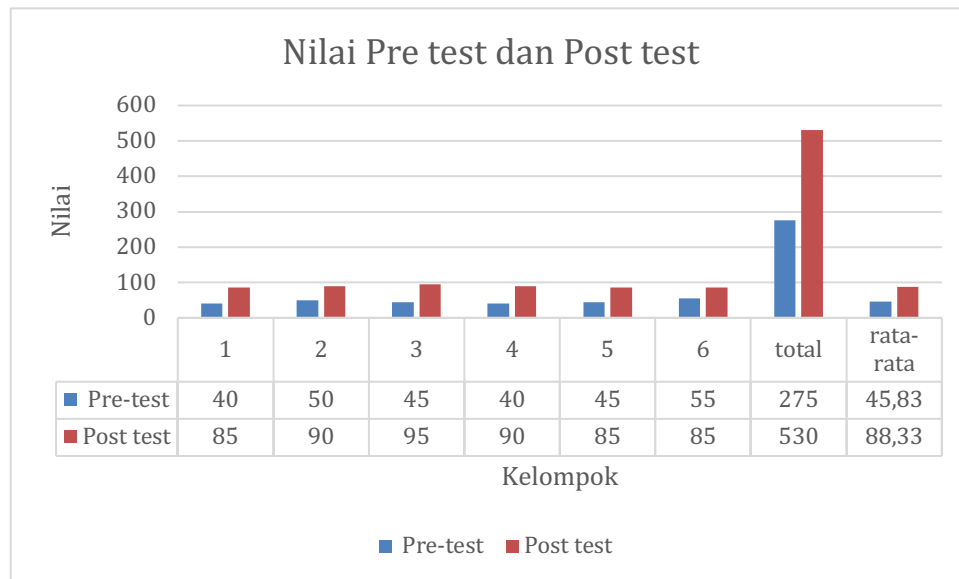


Figure 2. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

In Table 1, it can be seen that the pre-test and post-test scores of each group in the cultural literacy activity showed an increase in knowledge. Accordingly, the average post-test score of the groups also increased from 45.8 to 88.3. The students in each group were found to be capable of identifying and extracting key information, moral values, cultural elements, and daily practices as presented in the texts they had read.

Subsequently, a response questionnaire regarding the implementation of the activity was distributed to all students. The results of the students' responses to each question are presented in the following table:



Figure 3. Results of Students' Response Questionnaire

Based on Figure 2, it can be seen that for Q1, which states that reading Japanese texts helps students become more familiar with Japanese culture, students gave a highly positive response of 3.6 (90%) out of a maximum score of 4. Q2, related to text comprehensibility—the reading materials were easy to understand and interesting—received a very positive response of 3.8 (95%). Q3, concerning learning motivation—students became more enthusiastic about learning to read Japanese characters (Hiragana/Katakana) after participating in the classroom literacy activity—obtained a very positive response of 3.73 (93%).

Furthermore, Q4, regarding understanding cultural values—students were able to identify moral and cultural values from the texts they read—received a highly positive response of 3.7 (92.5%). Q5, addressing lecturer assistance—the lecturers' guidance helped students understand the reading materials better—obtained a response of 3.8 (96%). Q6, related to group activeness—literacy activities in groups made students more active in discussions—also received a highly positive response of 3.8 (96%). Q7, concerning communication skills—students felt more confident in retelling the content of the texts—was rated 3.77 (94%). Q8, on cultural knowledge enhancement—this activity increased students' knowledge about Japanese society—received 97%. Q9, concerning program continuity satisfaction, obtained a highly positive response of 98%. Finally, Q10, regarding extended learning motivation—after participating in this activity, students became more interested in studying Japanese further at the university level—received an excellent response of 100%.

Overall, the questionnaire results showed an average score of 3.8, or 95% positive responses. These findings indicate that the Japanese cultural introduction through reading simple Japanese texts effectively enhanced students' cultural awareness while motivating them to continue learning Japanese in the future.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Japanese cultural introduction through small-group literacy activities effectively enhanced students' cultural understanding and learning motivation. The significant increase in post-test scores (from 45.8 to 88.3) and the highly positive response rate (95%) indicate that group literacy activities fostered reading comprehension, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. Students not only practiced Japanese reading but also developed intercultural awareness and appreciation of Japanese family life, social values, and moral conduct. This approach is recommended as an effective strategy for integrating language and culture learning in Japanese education.

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