

Jukujikun Learning to Improve Kanji Reading Skills

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ABSTRACT

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When learning Japanese, one cannot be separated from Kanji, as it is one of the essential writing systems used in the language. Kanji is particularly interesting because one might assume that if a person can write a character, they can surely read what they have written. However, this assumption does not hold true for Kanji. Even if someone can write a Kanji character, it does not necessarily mean they can read it. This challenge arises due to the existence of Jukujikun, which are specific readings that do not follow standard pronunciation rules. The difficulty in learning Jukujikun readings is experienced not only by learners but also by lecturers, as they may be unfamiliar with these non-standard readings of two-character Kanji compounds. To reduce the difficulties Indonesian learners face in mastering Jukujikun readings, the material is repeated several times until learners feel that the challenges of the Jukujikun readings have been successfully overcome.

INTRODUCTION

The One of the primary difficulties faced by Indonesian learners in studying Japanese is Kanji, primarily because written communication in Indonesia utilizes the alphabet rather than logographic characters. As Kageyama (1993:83) explains, Kanji are logographic characters, each representing a meaning and possessing one or more readings. Unlike alphabetic characters, which represent only phonemes, Kanji represents both sound and meaning. This complexity leads to a significant paradox for learners: the ability to write Kanji does not guarantee the ability to read it.

This challenge makes Kanji seem mysterious, especially due to *Jukujikun* (熟字訓)—readings that deviate entirely from standard phonetic rules. For instance, the two-character compound 時雨 (meaning toki [time] and ame [rain]) should logically be read as toki ame or jiu according to its constituent Kun yomi and On yomi readings. However, the correct reading is *shigure*. This failure to adhere to phonetic rules, where the reading is applied to the compound word as a whole rather than its individual components, makes Jukujikun particularly challenging for non-Kanji learners.

Standard Kanji also requires adherence to stroke count (画数 *kakusuu*), and typically offers both Chinese-derived (音読み *On yomi*) and Japanese-derived (訓読み *Kun yomi*) readings. While many Kanji compounds (Jukugo) follow these rules (combining On-On, Kun-Kun, etc.), Jukujikun does not. For example, 大人 (big + person) is read *otona* (adult), not *daijin*, because it is read as a whole word based on its meaning. The difficulty of Jukujikun necessitates frequent practice. Though the Japanese expression Kanji wa te de oboeru (remembering Kanji with the hand) suggests the importance of writing, mastering Jukujikun requires not only writing but also frequent reading and repetition to internalize the unique pronunciations.

Based on the challenges outlined above, this study aims to investigate the following issues:

- How can Jukujikun instruction be optimized to enhance Kanji reading competence?
- Why does the reading of Jukujikun pose a significant difficulty for learners in Indonesia?

This theoretical review will outline the theories utilized to address the research questions, namely Kanji, Jukujikun, and Jukujikun reading instruction.

Kanji

Kanji are characters that depict symbols and can stand alone or be combined with other Kanji. Kanji that stand alone are generally read with kunyomi. In contrast, compound Kanji (kanji jukugo) have four reading patterns: *Wago* (和語), *Kango* (漢語), *Juubako yomi* (重箱読み), and *Yutou yomi* (湯桶読み). *Wago* refers to Kanji read using kunyomi, *kango* is read using onyomi, *juubako yomi* is where the first Kanji is read using onyomi and the second Kanji is read using kunyomi, and *yutou yomi* is where the first Kanji is read using kunyomi and the second Kanji is read using onyomi. Additionally, there are also compound Kanji that are read as *jukuji* (熟字).

Yoshio, in Tresnasari (2012:3), defines Jukujikun (熟字訓) as follows:

明日、銀杏のように漢字二字以上からなる言葉の読み方で、一つ一つの漢字の音や訓とは関係なく、その言葉全体にあてられた訓読み。

Ashita, ichou no youni kanji niji ijou kara naru kotoba no yomikata de, hitotsu hitotsu no kanji no on ya kun towa kankei naku, sono kotoba zentai ni aterareta kunyomi.

“The reading of the Kanji Jukugo does not relate to the on and kun readings of its constituent Kanji characters and is read entirely based on the Japanese reading (Kun-yomi) applied to the word as a whole, such as *ashita* (tomorrow) and *ichou* (ginkgo).”

Kanji compounds consist of two-character compounds (*Niji Jukugo* - 2字熟語), three-character compounds (*Sanji Jukugo* - 3字熟語), four-character compounds (*Yonji Jukugo* - 4字熟語), and so on. Examples of the two-character compounds (*Niji Jukugo* - 2字熟語) are as follows.

On-yomi & on-yomi compound vocabulary (漢語 - *kango*)

- a. 湖水 (コスイ : Lake water)
- b. 練習 (レンシュウ Children, young people, teenagers)
- c. 熱湯 (ネットウ : Boiling water)
- d. 石炭 (セキタン : Coal)
- e. 倉庫 (ソウコ : warehouse)
- f. 返事 (ヘンジ : reply (letter))
- g. 幸福 (コウフク : happiness)
- h. 秒速 (ビョウソク : speed per second)
- i. 冰山 (ヒョウザン : iceberg)

- j. 詩集 (シシュウ : anthology/flowers of poetry)
- k. 左右 (サユウ : left and right)
- l. 風雨 (フウウ : wind and rain, rain storm)

Kun-yomi & kun-yomi compound vocabulary (和語 - wago)

- a. 青空 (あおぞら : blue sky)
- b. 野原 (のほら : field, swamps)
- c. 月日 (がつび : date)
- d. 切手 (きって : stamps)
- e. 朝日 (あさひ : sunrise/in the morning)
- f. 父親 (ちちおや/てておや : father)

On-yomi dan kun-yomi jūbako-yomi (重箱読み – juubako yomi) (on, kun)

- a. 毎朝 (マイあさ : every morning)
- b. 本箱 (ホンばこ : bookcase)
- c. 台所 (ダイどころ : kitchen)
- d. 地主 (ジぬし : landlord)
- e. 職場 (シヨクば : workplace)
- f. 銀紙 (ギンがみ : silver paper)
- g. 一割 (イツかつ : a piece)
- h. 駅前 (エキまえ : in front of the station)

Yutōyomi vocabulary (湯桶読み – yutou yomi) (kun, on)

- a. 雨具 (あまグ : rain gear)
- b. 見本 (みホン : examples, type, samples)
- c. 切符 (きっぷ : ticket)
- d. 夕刊 (ゆうカン : evening paper)
- e. 消印 (けしイン : postmark)
- f. 夕飯 (ゆうハン : evening meal)
- g. 荷物 (にモツ : baggage, burden, suitcase)
- h. 手帳 (てチョウ : notebook)

Sanji jukugo (3字熟語)

- a. 松竹梅 (しょうちくばい)
- b. 上中下 (じょうちゅうげ)
- c. 市町村 (しちょうそん)
- d. 同窓-会 (どうそう-かい : reunion meet)
- e. 運動場 (うんどう-じょう : sports ground, playing field)
- f. 外国人 (がいこく-じん : foreigners)
- g. 大-会社 (だい-かいしゃ : large company)
- h. 全世界 (ぜん-せかい : the whole world)
- i. 新-学期 (しん-がつき : new semester)

Yonji jukugo (4字熟語)

- a. 春夏秋冬 (しゅんかしゅうとう: spring, summer, autumn, winter)
- b. 東西南北 (とうざいなんぼく: east, west, south, north)
- c. 都道府県 (とどうふけん)

Jukujikun (熟字訓)

According to Satake (2005:67), Jukujikun is defined as:

“熟字訓は漢字2字以上が表す意味を利用してできた。”

Jukujikun wa kanji niiji ijou ga arawasu imi wo riyou shite dekita,

Which means Jukujikun is Kanji consisting of two or more characters that can represent a single meaning. According to the *Goken Henshūbu* (語研編集部), Jukujikun is a Kanji compound (Jukugo) that is read entirely as a single unit. This Jukujikun cannot be separated when read. It is entirely a single, indisputable Kanji unit.

Simple Jukujikun like 1日 (tsuitachi / the first day of the month) and 明日 (ashita / tomorrow) are Jukujikun Kanji taught in elementary school, where children are required to be able to write and read them because these Jukujikun frequently appear in daily life. As the educational level increases, the Jukujikun taught in class also become more difficult. Examples include Jukujikun such as 眼鏡 (*megane* / eyeglasses), 迷子 (*maigo* / lost child), and 河原 (*kawara* / riverbank). These Jukujikun are challenging to read and write (Hashimi, 1991:106). The meanings that arise from combining these

Table 1. Kanji result in new meanings and reading sounds, which differ from the original meanings and sounds.

熟語 <i>Jukugo</i>	熟字訓 <i>Jukujikun</i>
昨日	きのう
今日	きょう
明日	あす/あした
今朝	けさ
黄昏	たそがれ
一人	ひとり
二人	ふたり
一日	ついたち
二日	ふつか
梅雨	つゆ
紅葉	もみじ
時雨	しぐれ
吹雪	ふぶき
果物	くだもの

Jukujikun Reading Instruction

The current trend in Jukujikun reading instruction is contextual learning. This aligns with the view of Sudrajat, et al. (2020) that in the teaching and learning process, educators must enhance students' knowledge through the material delivered. To achieve this, teachers must be able to be creative, skilled at selecting appropriate strategies, providing motivation to learners, using engaging media, creating a pleasant learning atmosphere, and choosing learning models that encourage learners to play an active role in the learning process. If these steps are implemented by the instructor, it is expected to improve learner outcomes in every subject, especially in the Japanese language.

In the *NihongoKyouiku Jiten* (1989:479), Jukujikun is defined as follows:

漢字の読み方で、その本来の字訓を離れて、熟字の意味内容をそのまま日本語にあてはめて読む場合がある。

Kanji no yomikata de, sono honrai no jikun o hanarete, jukuji no iminaiyou o sonomama nihongo ni atehamete yomu baai ga aru.

'A reading method for Kanji where the reading deviates from the character's original kun reading and is instead read according to the Japanese meaning contained within the entire compound word.' (Yoshio, 1989:479)

According to Tsuchiya (1986:58), to understand the semantic relationships between the constituent Kanji in two-character compounds (*Niji Jukugo*), they can be grouped into seven structural patterns:

- Jukugo composed of two Kanji that have the same or nearly the same Kun reading meaning. Example: 河 + 川 → 河川 (*ka sen*: rivers)
- Jukugo composed of two Kanji that have opposite meanings. Example: 上 + 下 → 上下 (*jō ge*: up and down)
- Jukugo composed of two Kanji that have different meanings. Example: 軽 + 薄 → 軽薄 (*kei haku*: light, thin → frivolous, unreliable)
- Jukugo composed of two Kanji, where the first Kanji explains the second Kanji. Example: 医 + 学 → 医学 (*i gaku*: medicine, study → medical science)
- Jukugo composed of two Kanji, where the second Kanji explains the first Kanji. Example: 被 + 害 → 被害 (*hi gai*: receive, harm → damage, suffering loss)
- Jukugo where the second Kanji functions to complement or emphasize the first Kanji. Example: 美 + 化 → 美化 (*bi ka*: beautiful, transform → beautification)
- Jukugo where the first Kanji functions as a negation or softening of the second Kanji. Example: 不 + 良 → 不良 (*fu ryō*: not, good → bad, delinquent)

From Tsuchiya's opinion, it can be concluded that in two-character Kanji compounds (*Niji Jukugo*), there is always a relationship between the two Kanji. These relationships include having the same or nearly the same meaning, opposite meanings, different meanings, the first Kanji explaining the second, the second Kanji explaining the first, the second Kanji complementing or emphasizing the first, and the first Kanji functioning as a negation or softening of the second.

Jukujikun in this study is limited to two-character compounds (Niji Jukugo) because the quantity of two-character compounds is greater than three-character (Sanji Jukugo) and four-character compounds (Yonji Jukugo). Because Jukujikun readings do not comply with the general reading rules, Jukujikun needs to be repeated several times until learners fully understand the intended reading. Thus, learners' difficulties with Jukujikun readings can be minimized.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approach and Problem Solving

The approach used in this study to address the research questions is qualitative, utilizing a descriptive method. For data processing, the research instrument consists of a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert-scale rating system, and data analysis is performed using statistical software. The respondents for this study are Japanese language learners in Indonesia who do not have a Kanji character cultural background.

State of the Art and Novelty

The Nature and Formation of Jukujikun

Jukujikun has existed in Japan since ancient times, often created by observing natural phenomena or based on immediate feelings. For instance, the word 梅雨 (*tsuyu* / rainy season) is a Jukujikun composed of 梅 (*ume* / plum) and 雨 (*ame* / rain). Since the rainy season in Japan (June to July) coincides with the plum harvest season, the term was established.

Jukujikun can also be formed through the alteration or abbreviation of older vocabulary. The word 土産 (*miyage* / souvenir) is derived from the altered word *miage* (見上げ). An example of abbreviation is 浴衣 (*yukata*), which is a shortened form of the older term *yukatabira* (湯帷子).

A key characteristic of Jukujikun is that it has its own single, inseparable reading. Although some Jukujikun words can be read using other patterns (like On-yomi-On-yomi or Kun-yomi-Kun-yomi combinations), doing so results in a change of meaning, and the word is no longer classified as Jukujikun. For example, 一日 can be read as *tsuitachi* (the first day of the month), *ichijitsu* (one day/24 hours), or *ichinichi* (all day/entire day), with each reading carrying a distinct meaning.

Semantic Relationship and Difficulty

Kanji characters forming a Jukujikun word maintain a semantic relationship with the overall meaning of the Jukujikun. For example, 竹刀 (*shinai* / bamboo sword) consists of 竹 (*take* / bamboo) and 刀 (*katana* / sword), directly relating to its meaning.

The major difficulty for foreign learners, especially those from Indonesia, stems from the fact that Jukujikun readings do not follow standard phonetic rules. Consequently, it is often argued that Jukujikun can only be memorized. This research aims to find methods to better integrate Jukujikun into the learning process, allowing Indonesian learners to appreciate the appeal of Kanji.

Research Roadmap

Research Roadmap

This study is conducted by researchers competent in the field of Kanji. The research roadmap carried out by the chief and members over the last three years has been related to Kanji.

For this initial study on Kanji, the research team is focused on creating a Jukujikun data bank. The development of content will be carried out in stages according to the established research roadmap. This roadmap is designed to be applicable to future follow-up research conducted by subsequent researchers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used is descriptive qualitative, as it relies entirely on existing linguistic facts or empirically observed phenomena among speakers.

- Location: Japanese Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts Universitas Negeri Surabaya
- Population: All students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts Universitas Negeri Surabaya
- Sample: Fourth-semester students studying intermediate Kanji, during which Jukujikun is introduced

The study comprises several phases, beginning with creating the learning materials, followed by forming the research group. The data obtained from this research group will then be analyzed to determine the results. Briefly, the stages of the research are shown in Figure 1 below.

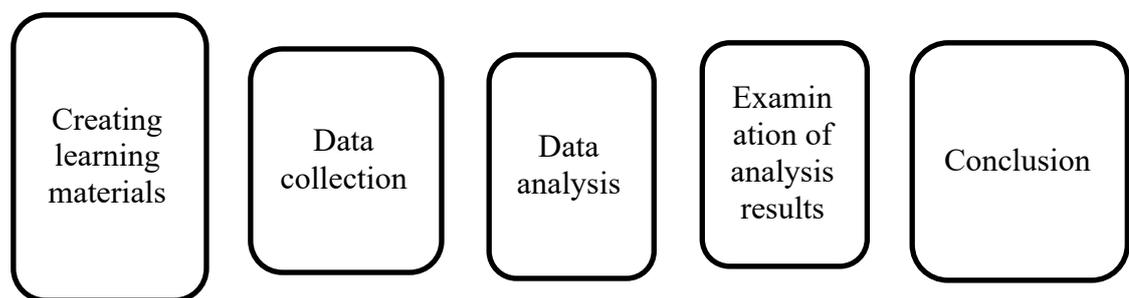


Figure 1 Research stages.

Research Procedure

- This research consists of four stages: Planning, Action Implementation, Observation and Monitoring, and Analysis and Reflection.
- Planning: In this stage, the researcher identifies the problem and plans strategies to address how the Jukujikun reading difficulty problem can be overcome.
- Action Implementation: The researcher provides mentoring to students enrolled in the Chūkyū Hyōki (Intermediate Notation) course.

- **Observation and Monitoring:** Observation is conducted by monitoring the mentoring process, specifically observing the interaction that occurs among students.
- **Analysis and Reflection:** In this fourth stage, the researcher reflects on the results obtained from monitoring the sequence of Jukujikun reading instruction.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain valid and reliable data, appropriate data collection techniques are required. The data collection techniques used in this research include:

- **Observation:** Observation is the process of recording data derived from teaching and learning activities within the classroom by observing all occurring events, specifically regarding students' motivation, participation, and achievement throughout the training process.
- **Documentation:** The documentation used includes both reading tests and non-test documentation, such as images or photographs taken during the research implementation.
- **Simple Questionnaire:** The type of questionnaire used to analyze Jukujikun reading is a simple, closed-ended questionnaire utilizing a Likert scale to measure motivation, by compiling a list of statements relevant to the data required by the researcher.
- **Field Notes:** Field notes are written records of what is heard, seen, experienced, and thought about during the process of data collection and reflection on Jukujikun instruction.

Data Analysis Techniques

After the data has been collected, the next step is to analyze the data concerning Jukujikun. The steps for analyzing the questionnaire data are as follows:

- **Preparation:** Checking the completeness of the data, including both the number of questionnaires administered and the content of the questionnaires themselves.
- **Tabulation:** Assigning score values to each question item for every respondent's answer.
- **Scoring Summation:** Summing the scores for each question item from all respondent answers regarding Jukujikun.

Outputs and Target Achievements

The outputs and target achievements of this research are:

- Progress Report
- International Seminar of the Association for the Study of Japanese Language Education (ASPBJI)
- Final Report
- Specialized book on Jukujikun
- Learning video about Jukujikun
- Game about Jukujikun

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will describe how Jukujikun instruction can enhance Kanji reading ability and why Jukujikun readings are difficult for learners in Indonesia.

Jukujikun Instruction to Enhance Kanji Reading Ability

The results of this study were obtained using an interview technique with students enrolled in the Shokyu Hyōki (Elementary Notation) course as the method of data collection. Based on the interviews conducted in the 2022 B class, it was found that out of 38 students, four were genuinely at the beginner level because they had never studied Kanji during high school. These four students are I N A (22020104007), M T A (22020104021), S R (22020104039), and D (22020104048).

- 1) Kanji Interest: The statement, "I am interested in learning Kanji," was mostly answered as Strongly Agree (30 students), accounting for 78.95%.
- 2) Overall Difficulty: The statement, "I experience difficulties when learning Kanji," was mostly answered as Strongly Agree (30 students), accounting for 78.95%.
- 3) Stroke Order Difficulty: The difficulty experienced, "is related to learning the Kanji stroke order," was mostly answered as Strongly Agree (30 students), accounting for 78.95%.
- 4) Kanji Reading Difficulty: The difficulty experienced, "is related to the method of reading Kanji," was mostly answered as Strongly Agree (32 students), accounting for 83.21%.
- 5) Jukujikun Reading Difficulty (Highest Agreement): The difficulty experienced, "is related to learning the Jukujikun reading method," received the most agreement as Strongly Agree (34 students), accounting for 89.74%.
- 6) Jukujikun as Memorization Aid (Prior Use): Responses regarding the prior use of Jukujikun instruction as a Kanji memorization aid indicated that 100% of students answered Never.
- 7) Preference for Jukujikun Instruction (Helpful for Memorization): Responses regarding whether students like Jukujikun instruction because it helps with Kanji memorization showed that 82.60% answered Very Much Like.
- 8) Perceived Helpfulness of Jukujikun Instruction: Responses regarding whether Jukujikun instruction helps students memorize Kanji were high: 39.13% answered Very Helpful and 39.13% answered Helpful (totaling 78.26% positive).

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data, the following can be concluded:

- 1) The difficulty of Jukujikun instruction is experienced not only by learners but also by lecturers because Jukujikun readings do not comply with standard Kanji reading rules. Nevertheless, learners' ability to execute and complete tasks assigned by the lecturer can be considered good. This is attributed to the high motivation and learning ability of the students in Kanji, particularly Jukujikun.
- 2) Jukujikun readings are difficult for Indonesian learners not only because of the sheer quantity of Kanji and the fixed number of strokes but also because the Jukujikun reading method does not conform to standard Kanji reading rules.

Therefore, to minimize the difficulties Indonesian learners face in studying Jukujikun readings, the instruction should ideally be repeated several times until learners feel that the difficulty of the Jukujikun readings has been overcome.

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