

Development of Comic Books as Teaching Media for Japanese Language Learners in Indonesian High Schools

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ABSTRACT

The main reason why Indonesians learn Japanese is because of interest in Japanese comics. However, Japanese comic-based teaching media to meet the needs of these students are still not widely available. This study aims to produce a manga-style comic book (Japanese comics) that prioritizes stories followed by Japanese language learning. The method used is Reeves' DBR (Design-Based Research) model. From the results of the implementation of the four stages of development, it is known that interviews to dig up information related to the lives of Japanese students in high school are effective in getting data on characterizations and story settings more accurately than proofreading from native speakers of conversational scripts can produce communication in the suitable comics with social attributes (Kansai dialect, slang, etc.) speakers. Expression in comics by considering the two stages passed previously, and questionnaires from high school students who have read the comics provide valuable input for improvement so that the contents of the comics can be more easily understood.

Keywords: *Comic books development, comic-based textbook, Japanese in high school.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the number of Japanese language learners in the world has increased quite rapidly. In Indonesia, as Djafri (2018) stated regarding a survey conducted by The Japan Foundation regarding the current state of Japanese language education worldwide, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Japanese language learners in Indonesia since the 2000s. Japanese language learners in Indonesia are spreads from junior high school to college/university levels.

Many Japanese textbooks were developed and published to be used by learners, both elementary and intermediate levels. Although in terms of content, the material presented is good, under the Japanese language material at each level, almost all books have the same characteristics: entire text and minimal illustrations/pictures in each chapter. It fears that it will not attract learners' interest, especially novice learners, to understand and deepen the material. It is because in learning foreign languages, especially Japanese, examples of sentences and conversations will be easier to understand if accompanied by illustrations/pictures.

To overcome this, textbooks in the form of comics can be the solution. Comics are image media in the form of illustrations arranged sequentially according to the storyline. One of the advantages of comics is that they can attract the interest of their readers by having an extraordinary quality in the combination of words and illustrations (Fenwick, 1977). Based on the previous narrative of Fenwick (1977), it hopes that comics in language learning can stimulate the imagination of learners regarding the material, especially for primary Japanese learners. When used in basic Japanese, the entire content of comic stories can illustrate examples of sentences from grammar and their use in basic daily conversation so that students can understand them well.

A good combination of words and illustrations can stimulate the imagination of comic readers. Huxley and Ormrod in Krusemark (2016) stated that comics had been widely known and enjoyed by children, teenagers, and even adults. The use of comics in teaching has increased quite rapidly in the 21st century, including in language teaching.

Many studies have been on comics as learning material or media (Cary, Hammond, Pantaleo, Tilley &

Weiner in Wallner, 2017), including language learning. Several reputable international studies on the use of comics in language learning include the research of Issa (2017) and Krusemark (2016). Issa (2017) describes comics as an effective medium to improve language skills such as English composition and creative writing. Krusemark's research (2016) shows that comics can also enhance students' critical thinking in reading and writing English. In learning Japanese, Nursyaban (2013) and Saifudin (2017) use comics to learn composition and linguistics.

Based on the previously described research results, this study also tries to apply comics to learn basic Japanese—several studies related to comics as teaching media using existing or previously published comics. As in the research of Krusemark (2016), Issa (2017), and Saifudin (2017), comics used as teaching media come from different sources such as comic books, magazines, newspapers, and even previous research. Taking comics from several different sources with different illustration styles makes the quality of teaching media different. Therefore, this study chose to use comics that developed by themselves for making study books.

The development of a comic book draft for learning basic Japanese and the quality of a comic book draft for learning essential Japanese will discuss in detail in this study. This study also aims to describe the development of a comic book draft for learning basic Japanese is like and then describe its quality as a comic book in learning basic Japanese. As a follow-up to the development of comics for learning to write (Kusrini, Dewanty & Hidayat; 2020), this year, comics will be developed for learning Japanese as a whole at the primary level, targeting young beginners with different characteristics compared to adults.

Language learning requires creativity from the teacher to carry out learning activities effectively (Constantinides, 2010; Richards & Cotterall, 2015). Because creativity in the development of materials and teaching media can increase motivation in learning (Kohnke, 2018), especially the use of visual-based creative media such as icons, illustrations and comics can support the delivery of material in language learning. Zagkotas & Fykaris (2017) explain in their research that visualizations such as images can simplify the process of delivering material while making the learning process more enjoyable. The use of images as teaching media can develop into more exciting teaching materials such as comics.

Comics are image media in the form of a combination of words and illustrations that are arranged sequentially according to the storyline to attract the reader's interest (Fenwick, 1977). The widespread of comic lovers ranging from children, teenagers to adults, make comics considered an effective medium for delivering information because they are packaged

attractively and can facilitate delivery, understanding, and storage of information (Farinella, 2018). So, it is not surprising that today many practitioners, teachers, and researchers in education use comics as teaching material in teaching (Vassilikopoulou, Retalis, Nezi, & Boloudakis, 2011).

Along with the increasing use of comics in teaching, the use of comics in language teaching also increases. Comics are easy to use as learning media, are culturally relevant, and can be adapted to textbooks and other learning activities (Liu, 2004). Csabay (2006) argues that comics are original and valid media for language teaching and learning. Not only for teaching reading but comics can also use for teaching three other language skills, including writing.

There have been many studies on comics as material or language learning media (Wallner, 2017). The results show that comics are an effective medium for improving language skills such as composition and creative writing and improving critical thinking in learning to read and write (Issa, 2017; Krusemark, 2016; Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011). In research related to learning Japanese in higher education, comics are used for linguistic learning and writing in Japanese. Through typical Japanese comics in the humor genre, linguistic phenomena in comics use as material for teaching grammar (Saifudin, 2017). Meanwhile, the results of an experimental study on students who study *sakubun* show an increase in writing skills using comic media (Nursyaban, 2013). Several studies related to comics as teaching media using existing or previously published comics. Taking comics from several different sources with different illustration styles makes the quality of teaching media different. In addition, it is also prone to problems with copyright. Therefore, this study chose to use self-developed comics to use in teaching Japanese writing. The illustration style in comics made in the same way makes the quality of teaching media more consistent. Adjustments to teaching materials will also be more accurate because comics are made based on the material's content to teach.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method. The subjects of the study were primary Japanese language learners at the high school and university levels. Stenhouse in Postholm (2014) emphasizes that the ability to research and development is a way to show an increase in understanding of the material and teaching methods in learning. This study uses Reeves' DBR (Design-Based Research) model. Wang and Hannafin (in Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppala, 2012) define DBR as a systematic but flexible methodology that aims to improve educational practice through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation. DBR consists of four stages (Reeves, 2006).

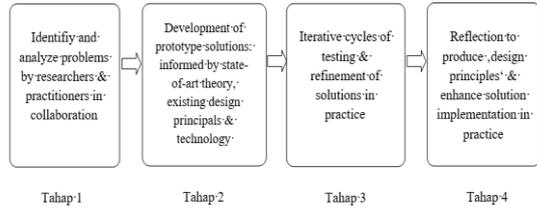


Figure 1. DBR (Design-Based Research) model

In more detail, based on Reeves (in Herrington, McKenney, Reeves and Oliver, 2007), the implementation of the DBR stages applied in this study can be seen in the figure 1. In stage 1, to determine the story that will raise, identification of the lives of Japanese high school students is carried out through interviews with Japanese high school students. Stage 2, the character's determination, the storyline continues with the making of the conversation script of the characters. In Stage 3, a Japanese readability test was done by a native Japanese speaker. Then in stage 4, the comic book is made based on the conversation script. At stage 5, the conversation transcript attaches with the Latin reading method, the meaning of the vocabulary, and the grammatical explanation. Stage 6, a comic readability test, was carried out for high school students. At stage 7, a revision makes to the appearance of the comic. At the 8th or final stage, the revised comics are re-examined to high school students. By going through these eight stages, comic books as a teaching medium for learning Japanese can be realized according to the targets that have been set previously.

The questionnaire used is a modification of the questionnaires in the research of Huda, Hikmah, and Rima (2017) and Mamolo (2019) to evaluate aspects of language and writing, aspects of image display, and aspects of the material in comics. Students are asked to give opinions on each statement in the questionnaire by choosing appropriate numbers (scale of 1 to 4). The score categories in table 1 will be used as a reference in analyzing the results of the questionnaire data to find out whether comics are suitable to overcome the difficulties that arise in the problem identification stage.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The following three things are known from the results of developing comics and experiments on several high school students. It is story development, comic development and translation script development.

3.1 Story Development

From the interviews with Japanese high school students regarding life in Japan, in this comic, we created Rika and Raka, high school students from Bandung, as the main characters. They had the opportunity to study at a high school in Osaka for a one-

year student exchange program. They meet new friends and a new cultural environment in the city of Osaka. The story of the adventures of the two, we tell in several chapters. For this chapter, we will give the title “Rika to Raka no Nihon de no Bouken (Natsu Yasumi)” (RIKA and RAKA Adventure in Japan (Summer Vacation Chapter)) which tells the story of what happened during summer vacation in Japan. The story for this summer vacation plan begins with the Japanese character Sayaka who invites Rika to participate in an excursion to a famous tourist spot as one of the famous gardens in Japan called Amanohashidate. There was also *18 kippu*, a one-way ticket for JR only, to which they could travel on a much cheaper ticket.

3.2 Comic Development

The first step before starting the comic creation process is to determine the character design. Based on the story ideas, themes, and characterizations that have been discussed previously, several alternative character designs were made in the form of sketches. Character designs are made based on the name, country of origin, gender, and the characteristics/nature of each character that appears in the story. Figure 2 show the process of determining character designs from rough sketches to finishing *name* (comic storyboard) is a sketch image that contains a rough description of illustrations, scenes, and dialogue balloons based on comic dialogue scripts. In making this comic, the name was made based on the dialogue script "RIKA and RAKA Adventure in Japan (Summer Vacation Chapter)." The script is still a long dialogue without any dialogue breaks on each page.

Before making a rough sketch on the name, the lengthy dialogue in the script is broken down into dialogues for several comic pages first. After determining the dialogues per page, the *name* of each comic page can be created. The *name* (Figure 3) contains a rough sketch of each scene per page that includes a background image (where the conversation takes place), the characters' gestures in each scene, the distribution of comic panels, and the placement and size of the dialogue balloons. The *name* for this comic was created digitally using CSP (Clip Studio Paint) software.



Figure 2. The process of determining character designs



Figure 3. Comic name



Figure 4. Comic Sketching Process

The name that has been created is then discussed again with the team. Revisions and input at the name creation stage are beneficial to avoid significant revisions when making the final sketch later. By revising at this stage, making comic sketches to the final comic result can run more smoothly. After receiving input and revisions to the name, comic sketches can be made. Comic sketching process can be seen in figure 4.

Comic sketches are made based on names that have been discussed and revised previously. The sketches are made digitally using CSP (Clip Studio Paint) software. This process includes sketching the characters that appear in each panel, sketching the background images of places and objects around the characters, sketching dialogue balloons, and making comic panel lines/boxes for each page.

The lining art process in making comics is the process of redrawing comic sketches that have been made previously with clearer, neater, and cleaner lines. Lining art still uses CSP (Clip Studio Paint) software to be drawn digitally.

Before lining art on the sketch, comic panels are made first as a boundary between one scene. Each page has various comic panels, as many as 3 to 5 panels. One comic panel contains 1 scene. The shape of the panels is adjusted to the flow from one scene to another. In order not to seem rigid, panels are not always made in a

straight square or rectangle but are also made in a slanted shape and other shapes.

After defining the panels, the scene sketches of each panel are neatly redrawn. Starting with the lining art of the characters, followed by the background images and other details.

The comic coloring process is carried out after the lining art is made. Because this comic is a black-and-white comic, the colors that appear are black and white derived colors such as black, white, and gray. This comic uses flat colors without any effect for white and black. Meanwhile, the screen tone feature in CSP (Clip Studio Paint) software is used for coloring comics with colors other than black and white. Screen tone is a feature to give color variations to comics with a choice of specific motifs.

The dialogue balloons in each panel/scene in the comic are adjusted to the dialogue on each page's script prepared previously. The shape of the dialogue balloon is adjusted to the content and length of the conversation. Comics use oval dialogue balloons in conversations with stable intonation. Meanwhile, a more varied form of dialogue balloons is used for dialogues that require emphasis, such as those when surprised, happy, or excited. After determining the shape of the dialogue balloon, the conversation can be entered, and the font size adjusted to the size of the dialog balloon. The discussion and revision process were carried out again on several completed comic pages. After revising some dialogues and scenes, the comic is ready to be tested.

After revising the comic based on the discussion process, the comic was piloted on a limited scale. The comic that was tested was 1 chapter of "RIKA and RAKA's Adventure in Japan," namely the "Summer Vacation" Chapter. Respondents were asked to read comics in the pdf file "Japanese comics rikaraka." For respondents who are interested in the meaning of the conversation, they can view the pdf file "translated into Indonesian." After reading the comics to completion, respondents were asked to write their impressions and input on the tested comics.

From the test results, it is known that respondents find comics interesting, with attractive and simple character designs. Respondents also considered that comics succeeded in making readers curious about the contents of comic stories. Respondents were looking forward to what new Japanese vocabulary and expressions would appear in the following chapters. The translation and reading sections of the tested comics were also considered very helpful for respondents in adding Japanese material and helping them enjoy and understand the story more. However, there are weaknesses in the comics presented, namely the lack of clarity regarding the timestamp. Comics are considered not to show the timeline clearly.

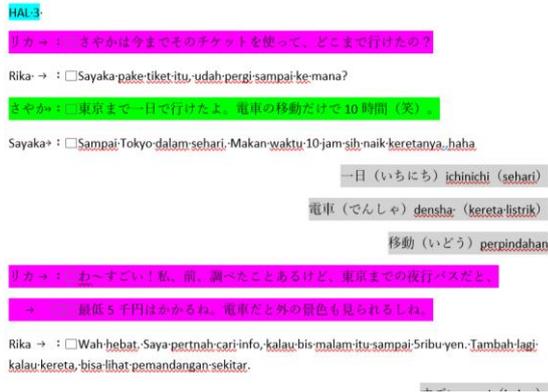


Figure 5. Comic dialogue script

The final revision for comics improves the results of respondents' assessments about clarity regarding timestamps (background). The timeline in comics will be shown more clearly by adding panels containing additional scenes to make the timeline look more sequenced. The background image of the place will also be clarified in each scene.

3.3 Translation and Vocabulary Appendix Development

To support learning Japanese, we re-enter the conversation accompanied by Japanese writing, followed by Latin writing, followed by Japanese writing, as shown in figure 5.

4. CONCLUSION

The development of this comic book turned out to require a minimum of 8 stages from the start of the idea to create this comic book.

First, to create a comic book set in the life of Japanese high school students, it is necessary to interview Japanese high school students. Second, Indonesian figures are raised so that the context of the conversation is under the needs of students. Third, Japanese readability tests need to be carried out by Japanese native speakers to produce natural scripts. Fourth, start entering the process of making comic books. Fifth, the attachment made to the conversation transcript and how to read Latin, the meaning of vocabulary and expressions.

Then at stage 6, a comic readability test was conducted for high school students. Next, in stage 7, the comic display is revised. At stage 8, the comic readability test was carried out again.

By going through these eight stages, comic books as a teaching medium for learning Japanese can realize according to the targets that have been set previously. The results of a questionnaire on prospective readers of this comic book, namely high school students, know that it is fun and interesting to read. Furthermore, the

attachments on how to read Latin, a list of vocabulary meanings, and expressions equipped with Indonesian explanations can motivate high school students to learn Japanese more deeply.

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