

A3! Visual Novel Game as an Audio-Visual Media that Motivates Japanese Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Audio-visual is one of many learning media that may be utilized in language learning. Games are an example of audio-visual media, which is a means for transmitting information with both audio (sound) and visual (picture) characteristics. A3! is a visual novel game with a Japanese setting. The game includes a number of storylines, as well as Japanese audio. The objective of this research is to see if the A3! visual novel game can be used as an audio-visual learning media to motivate people to learn Japanese. Data was collected by interviewing and giving a questionnaire to A3! players from various backgrounds. According to the interviews, A3! visual novel game affects players' language competence, with the following important points. First, the A3! visual novel game can increase players' Japanese language skills for those who have not learned or are currently learning the language. Second, the variable that motivates players to learn more Japanese is a more profound curiosity about the visual, audio, story, and characterization of A3! visual novel game. From that conclusion, it can be said that audio-visual media is effective in being utilized in Japanese language learning.

Keywords: A3!, audio-visual media, Japanese learning, learning media, visual novel.

1. INTRODUCTION

For native English speakers, Japanese is the most difficult language to learn (U.S Foreign Service Institute). Japanese has a characteristic of writing system that uses hiragana, katakana, and kanji, which affect a person's proficiency in mastering the Japanese language. In terms of Indonesian native language learners included in *hikanjiken* (not having a 'kanji culture' background), kanji becomes a challenging aspect of mastering (Renariah, 2002; Renariah, Rasiban, & Herniwati, 2018).

Difficulties in learning Japanese affect the decline in motivation for students. There are four demotivational factors of Japanese language learners in Indonesia: learning difficulties, speaking anxiety, worthless learning, and boredom (Yamashita, 2020). Of the four factors, speaking anxiety and boredom had a higher score than the other two factors. This indicates that students find it more challenging to maintain motivation when facing anxiety and boredom throughout their studies. Thus, a more exciting and less anxious way of learning is needed to prevent or minimize a decrease in learner motivation.

Sabiq (2017) states that learning methods that can increase student motivation include using audio-visual media. This media presents interesting pictures and videos in the learning process. Students also considered that audio-visual media made it easier to understand the material, especially in reading descriptive texts, because it provided real and interesting examples. Audio-visual media encourages them to open their minds and share listening results, thus contributing positively to language learning and improving reading skills (Sabiq, 2017).

Examples of Japanese audio-visual media are anime and drama. The use of anime in Japanese learning can help students concentrate more and give full attention because it shows character images and audio (Roshiyami, 2019). In addition, anime and drama are a means of Shigeki or something that arouses interest, curiosity, and enthusiasm for learning for Japanese language learners (Novianti, 2007).

Besides anime and drama, a visual novel is a relatively new audio-visual media that can increase learning motivation. A visual novel is an interactive fiction-based game that displays novel stories in the form of static images (anime style) equipped with conversation

boxes to convey the narration and speech of each character. Sometimes, each character has sound effects so that each character in the visual novel looks alive and can speak (Hikam, 2013). In addition, the typography feature in visual novels has a vital role in attracting users' or learners' attention to the stories in the visual novel (Kusumawati, 2019).

Lai and Chen (2021) conducted a study investigating the science fiction visual novel game “Angels and Demigods” effect learning English vocabulary. Players are divided into two groups: the group using VR (Virtual Reality) and the group using PC. The results showed that both the VR group and the PC group were successful in gaining vocabulary knowledge. In addition, the students in both groups enjoyed playing visual novel games and were willing to use them as a medium to learn English vocabulary, which is their second language.

In addition, Faizal (2016) analyzed the effect of the visual novel game “English Conversation Gambits” on academic achievement and students’ motivation to learn English. Students were divided into two groups: a group that used visual novels and a group that used books to learn English conversational gambits. The results showed that the motivation obtained by the group that used visual novel games showed a higher number than the group that used books to study. Moreover, students believed that the Visual Novel Game of English Conversation Gambits positively affected their mastery of English conversational gambits and their learning motivation. The reasons are that the game presented interesting characters, helpful audio for learning pronunciation, and they unconsciously can learn English conversation by playing this visual novel game.

Sarjana (2020) conducted research related to visual novel media as an instrument to determine the basic level of Japanese understanding of Shinjuku Nihongo Academy students. After recapitulating student scores and research validation by the teacher, there are significant differences in test results. So, it can be concluded that the visual novel developed is considered an excellent instrument and helps students understand Japanese learning. Meanwhile, Ningrum (2019) examines the development of visual novel games to introduce the Japanese fairy tale “Momotarou” and alternative media for learning Japanese to train the students’ ability of high school students in Sidoarjo in reading and listening to Japanese. The results showed that Momotarou’s visual novel game was feasible in terms of content and media construction. Furthermore, students assessed that this media was perfect for teaching materials related to Japanese fairy tales.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that visual novels affect students’ Japanese language learning process. This visual novel can also increase student motivation, as Lai and Chen (2021), and Faizal (2016) described for English learners. How about this visual

novel application to increase the motivation of Japanese learners? This study aims to answer this question.

2. METHOD

This study used the interview method to obtain primary data sources and the listening and note-taking method to obtain secondary data. All research data collection was carried out from June 8, 2021, to July 24, 2021. The first step is data collection regarding the A3! profile and the object of data analysis through the listening and note-taking method as secondary research data.

A3! (Acronym for “Act! Addict! Actors!”) is a visual novel game, developed in Japan (Liber Entertainment). A3! has an acting-themed world that focuses more on the story of friendship, with examples of game appearance in Figure 1 and Figure 2. For now, A3! has several parts of the story, namely Act 1-3, each consisting of 4 chapters. Each chapter consists of 30-40 episodes.

The data used for analysis material are the Act 1 prologue chapter, chapter 1 episodes 1–14, and episodes 22–28. The steps taken for the data analysis process are transcribing the game script, then processing it in Excel to produce data on the frequency of occurrence of vocabulary in A3!. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which are a combination of open interviews and closed interviews. The interview is conversation-like, which is expected to provoke tortuous topics and explore completely unexpected problems (Adams, 2015). Interviews were conducted with four A3! players selected by researchers based on their social background. Interviews were conducted online using Google Meet, Discord, and WhatsApp Chat.



Figure 1 A3! visual novel gameplay.



Figure 2 A3! visual novel gameplay.

Table 1. A3! visual novel game players' background and Japanese language learning period

Name (Initials)	Gender	Age	Japanese Learning Period	A3! Playing Period
AB	F	19	2016-2019	2020-2021
GI	F	27	-	2020-2021
NE	F	19	2016-2021	2018-2021
RR	F	21	2015-2021	2019-2021

The data is processed and presented in a qualitative descriptive manner with the following points: (1) the respondent's data profile, (2) the appeal of A3!, (3) Japanese language understanding after playing A3!, and (4) the relation between A3!'s appeal and motivation to learn Japanese. The data that has been collected is shown in Table 1.

Then, 71 vocabularies comprehension questionnaire was compiled from the data on the frequency of vocabulary. The questionnaire (See Figure 3) was submitted to four interview respondents via Google Forms in the form of word statements with multiple-choice answers stating whether they (1) did not remember, (2) were familiar, or (3) understood the vocabulary. From the questionnaires, numerical data will be obtained, which is packaged in the form of a percentage of vocabulary understanding.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires to respondents, analysis and discussion are presented in two parts, namely A3! visual novel game influence on players' Japanese language skills, and A3! appeal as an audio-visual media on players' Japanese language learning motivation.

Pemahaman Pemain Terhadap Kosakata yang Terdapat pada Game A3!

Berikut akan disajikan beberapa kosakata yang sering muncul di game A3! Episode 1. Silahkan pilih antara 1, 2, 3 dengan keterangan seperti dibawah ini :

1 = Tidak ingat
2 = Pernah dengar/familiar
3 = Familiar dan tahu arti

* Required

Nama (inisial) *

Your answer

あいつ aitsu *

1 2 3

Figure 3 Questionnaire using Google form.

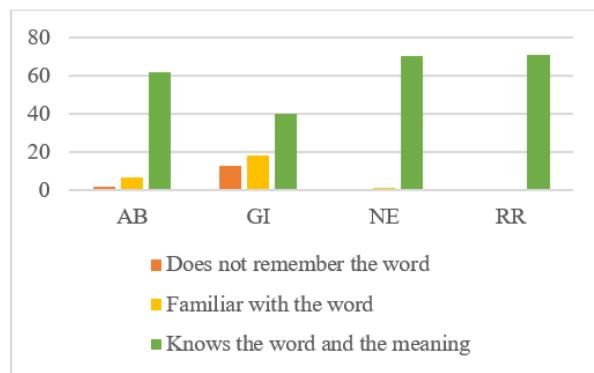


Figure 4 Interviewees' common vocabularies knowledge of A3! Episode 1.

3.1. A3! Visual Novel Game Influence on Players' Japanese Language Skills

From the four A3! visual novel game players interviewed, it is known that there are differences in the background of the players, both in terms of age, experience learning Japanese, and playing A3!. These differences were then linked to the Japanese skills of each player after playing A3!, which was obtained through a vocabulary comprehension questionnaire. The results can be seen in Figure 4, while referring to Table 1.

Regarding the player's study period (See Table 1), it can be seen that player AB has studied Japanese for three years in her school extracurricular. Player AB learns hiragana, katakana, basic grammar, and beginner level of kanji. After graduating from high school in 2019, Player AB has not continued to study Japanese anymore. Then in 2020, player AB started playing the A3! visual novel game, a Japanese language game. Even though player AB only learned basic Japanese, in Figure 4, it can be seen that Player AB has a high understanding of vocabulary, and there are only a few words that she does not know.

Player GI has never officially learned Japanese, but she said she had learned basic hiragana on a self-taught. Judging from the questionnaire results in Figure 4, player GI looks pretty familiar with some of the vocabularies from the A3! visual novel game. Things that affect player GI became familiar with the A3! visual novel game's vocabulary are because each character has distinctive vocabulary, and many of those vocabularies are spoken repeatedly. Player AB and player GI could not mention the vocabulary they got from the A3! game at the interview, which may be because they are not currently learning Japanese (Table 1), resulting in being hesitant to name vocabulary. So, after the interview, a questionnaire was given to provoke their memory of vocabulary from the A3! visual novel game.

Player NE studied Japanese in high school and is currently majoring in Japanese, with a study period of approximately five years. Player NE has a high understanding of vocabulary because she has a long

experience of learning Japanese. Player NE said, "There is a lot of vocabulary I learned from A3!. For example, in the A3! game, the characters often change the *tantou* (person in charge) of *ryouri* (cooking), like *bangohan*, *yashoku*, or *asagohan* (dinner, supper, or breakfast). In addition, I remember about *suidou* (water supply) and *denki* (electricity), because at that time in the story there were problems regarding electricity and water that wanted to be revoked." Player NE also added that sometimes there are some vocabularies that she does not know. So, she can get vocabulary knowledge by listening to words she does not know from the A3! visual novel game, then she looks up the meaning herself with a dictionary.

Player RR once studied Japanese in high school and is currently majoring in Japanese, with a study period of approximately six years. Just like player NE, because they have a relatively long experience of learning Japanese, player RR also has a high understanding of the vocabularies in A3! visual novel game. Player RR said, "I got a lot of vocabulary because the characters' conversations are the type that is often used in everyday life. So, it can increase my knowledge in vocabulary." For player RR, one of the vocabularies she knows very well from this game is "*sakaseru*," which means "make it bloom." She is familiar with that vocabulary because there is one famous quote from A3!, "*Oretachi o sakasete kudasai, Kantoku!*" which means "Please let us bloom, Director!". Player RR added, "Even now, that sentence still rings in my head."

Not only that, but player RR can also mention other vocabularies related to stages. Player RR mentioned, "Other vocabularies I remember are probably these: *kouen* (performance), *gekijou* (theater), *butai* (stage), *yakusha* (actor), *kantoku* (director), *daihon* (script), *adoribu* (ad lib), *kaatenkooru* (curtain call), *shonichi no kouen* (first-day performance), *senshuuraku* (final performance), and many more."

Due to her long experience of learning Japanese, an in-depth interview was conducted with player RR regarding how to play A3! can affect her Japanese learning. She mentioned that playing A3! helps her maintain her memory of the Japanese that she has learned; as she stated, "When I am on college holiday, I become lazy to open textbooks. Instead, I played the A3! game to not forget the Japanese that I have learned. It turns out that apart from that, my vocabulary knowledge has also increased little by little." Not only that, because she has been studying Japanese formally for a long time, player RR often finds herself aware of a vocabulary, expression, or even sentence pattern that she has heard on A3! appear in lectures. It made her dig deeper into her knowledge, as well as practice her skills.

From the interviews with the four players, it can be said that A3! visual novel game can improve understanding and help them learn the Japanese language, vocabulary, and expressions. It is because much vocabulary is often repeated, such as vocabulary that appears in everyday conversation and vocabulary related to acting or stage. Then, for players who are learning Japanese through formal education, A3! visual novel game can help them maintain their Japanese language skills. These things are in accordance with Yamaguchi (2020) which suggests that recognizing the same vocabulary repeatedly in a meaningful context or situation will strengthen memory and enable learners to understand vocabulary and its use.

3.2. A3! Appeal as an Audio-Visual Media on Players' Japanese Language Learning Motivation

As an audio-visual media, the A3! visual novel game has an appeal that motivates people to play it. As shown in Figure 5, based on the results of interviews with four players, the A3! visual novel game has four aspects of the appeal, namely visual, audio, story/plot, and characterization.

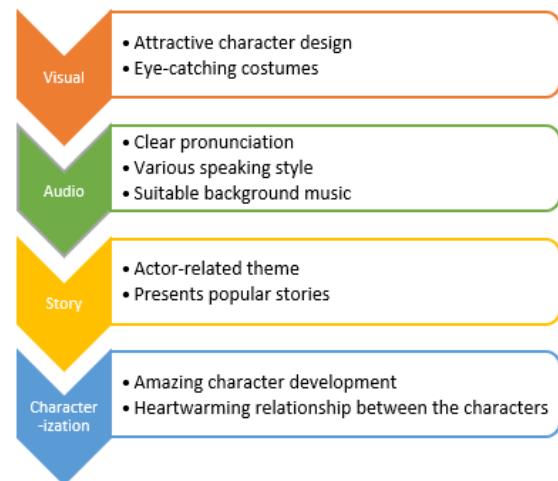


Figure 5 Four factors of A3! visual novel game appeal.



Figure 6 A3! attractive character design.



Figure 7 A3! character's costumes.

The first aspect is visual, which feature can be seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7. The four players found that the A3! game visuals were fascinating. According to Player RR, the character designs and outfits are one of the visuals that players find appealing; as she stated, “The depiction of each character is interesting, and the visuals are nice.” Player AB also added, “The costume designs and the game’s UI (user interface) are all very vibrant, which is nice to see.”

The second aspect is the audio. The audio presented by the A3! visual novel game has a good quality, as shown in Figure 8. Player NE stated, “The sound is nice, clear, and in accordance with the text when the characters speak. The sound’s pace is neither too slow nor too fast.” Player GI commented regarding the characters’ pronunciation that, “All of the pronunciations are clear, except for Citron and Kazu.”

Player GI does not imply that the two characters’ pronunciations are inaccurate; rather, the two characters have a distinct way of speaking. Citron, one of the characters in A3!, is not Japanese; hence he speaks with a foreign accent and uses incorrect grammar. Meanwhile, the other character, Kazu, speaks in slang that is difficult for Indonesian ears to follow. According to player AB, these are the traits that define A3’s character. “They describe their character through their voices. In terms of speaking, each character has their distinct style.”

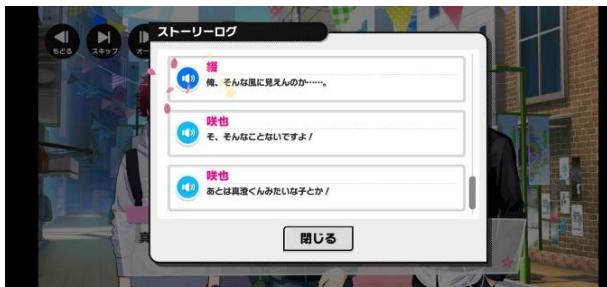


Figure 8 A3! visual novel game audio.

Then, because A3! is a visual novel game with the theme of acting, it will feel incomplete if no sound can be heard while the acting is in progress. Player AB said, “I think acting will feel like something is missing if we do not hear the voice. Then, from the audio, we can also feel the emotions shown by the character.” Player AB’s statement is similar to Player GI’s opinion, “One of the reasons I easily empathize with the story, especially the main story, is because of the voice actor.”

In this regard, A3! characters are voiced by well-known and professional voice actors in Japan, such as Hino Satoshi, who voiced Guy in A3!, who also voices Sai in the Naruto anime (Behind The Voice Actors). As an adaption to the Japanese language, this allows players to listen to conversations performed by native Japanese speakers. Player RR expressed her admiration for the voice actor, “I respect the *seiyuu* (voice actor). The characters in A3! game feels alive because of the voice actors’ voices. There is also a big contrast between when they are chatting normally and when they are acting in the roles they act, which is why I admire them.”

In addition to audio in the form of conversations, A3! game also has audio in the form of background music (BGM). Regarding BGM, player NE said, “The BGM supports the ongoing situation in the story.” This opinion is followed up by player RR, who stated, “The sound effect and BGM is very adjusted to the atmosphere of the scene, so we feel like we are right there among them.”

The third aspect is the storyline. Player GI finds that players are likely to be engaged in the story. Player GI stated, “We, as players, are like being pulled into the world of A3! through the story. As a result, we can easily relate to the character. We can also quickly comprehend what is happening in the story.” In addition, players can sometimes interact with A3! characters, as shown in Figure 9. Player RR said, “When we are reading the story, there are some dialogues that invite an interaction between us as players and the characters in the game.” She also added, “The story presented by the A3! game is started with young actors who initially could not act at all. Then, because they are guided by us, a player, who has the role of director in the game, they can finally become better actors. I’m delighted and touched. It is as if we’re becoming real directors and seeing the characters’ development gives me satisfaction.”

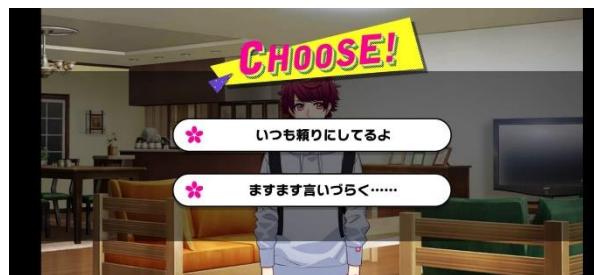


Figure 9 A3! character's interaction with players.



Figure 10 A3! popular story adaptation.

In addition to the overall game story, A3! characters also present other stories shown through their acting, as shown in Figure 10. Player AB said, “A3! visual novel game also presents popular stories I have read, such as Romeo and Juliet, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Arabian Night, The Phantom of The Opera, and Sherlock Holmes. That is also one of the reasons why I play this game.”

The last aspect is the character’s characterization. A3! has 24 characters, each with their unique personalities. Player RR stated, “Every character’s personality is different, which I think is unique.” Then, regarding the interaction between characters (as seen in Figure 11), player AB said, “Compared to other games I have played, A3! game shows a nice relationship and development of the characters.” Player NE even added that characters in A3! inspired her as well. Seeing the character that I love trying his best, motivates me to no give up as well. To improve, to maintain positive relationships with others, and to always be kind to others.”

All respondents stated that they felt motivated after playing the A3! visual novel game in varied ways. Player AB finds that the A3! theme, which is about the stage, motivates her. “A3! is a game that focuses on story, character development, and character relationships in a stage world. Because I’m new to this kind of theme, I enjoy discovering about them, especially about stages in Japan. That was something I had to look upon on the Japanese page that explained the stage. I am motivated to improve my Japanese language skills to fully understand what is stated on the Japanese page.” she explained.



Figure 11 A3! heart-warming relationship between characters.

Unlike player AB who was interested in learning about stages, Player GI had a different viewpoint. “I want to be able to enjoy the content that the A3! community has to offer. *Doujinshi*, or self-published print works such as magazines, manga, and novels, is one of the contents I’m looking for. As a result, I became inspired to learn Japanese so that I could enjoy the contents.”

Player NE stated that she wants to understand and follow A3! journey properly. “Yes, I become more motivated,” she added, “I read the story in Japanese for both the audio and the text, but there were some words I cannot recognize. So, to truly understand and follow the story, I wanted to learn. Also, I wanted to be able to speak Japanese more fluently.”

If player NE is motivated by the story, player RR is more focused on the dialogue spoken by the A3! characters. Player RR feels motivated to improve her Japanese language skills to understand everything the A3! characters say. Player RR stated, “Of course, by playing A3! I am motivated to understand more about what the characters are talking about.” Player RR also thinks that audio in the form of voice helps her in *choukai* (listening) and *kanji*. “I really like games with stories, especially those with voices. Even though the writing is in Japanese, which sometimes I don’t understand the kanji, this voice helped me understand better. So, I can learn kanji plus listening at the same time.”

Based on the opinions of the four players previously, the relation between the appeal of A3! as an audio-visual media with the motivation that improves players’ Japanese language skills can be concluded in Figure 12.

4. CONCLUSION

From the explanation in the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of the A3! affects increasing Japanese language competence and the motivation of its users, with the following important points.

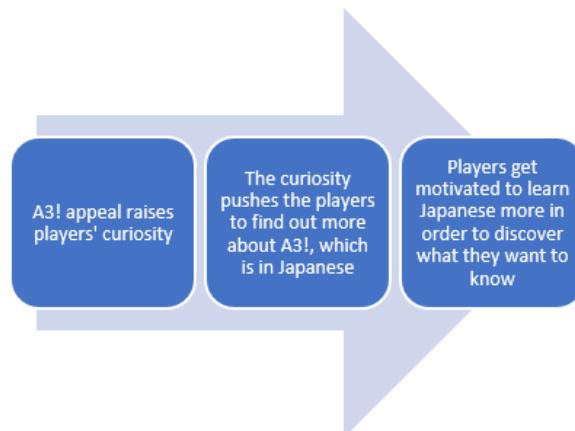


Figure 12 The relation between A3! appeal and Japanese learning motivation.

First, the A3! visual novel game can improve players' Japanese skills for those who have not and those studying Japanese. From the interviews with four respondents, it can be said that A3! improves understanding and assists them in learning the Japanese language, vocabulary, and expressions such as everyday greetings and vocabulary in the world of acting. For players who are Japanese learners, play A3! can maintain the memory of the Japanese language that has been learned. In addition, dialogue text as well as audio in A3! also helps Japanese learners on *choukai* (listening) and *kanji* skills. As for players who are not Japanese learners, the vocabulary repeatedly presented in A3! increases their understanding of Japanese. Second, the aspect that motivates players to learn Japanese is a more profound curiosity about the visuals, audio, stories, and characterizations in the A3 visual novel game! as an audio-visual medium. This curiosity encourages players to find out more about the information and content that players want to know. Players become motivated to learn Japanese in order to understand the information available in Japanese.

A3! appeal (the stories, characters, dialogues, stages, and contents) sparks players' curiosity. Players are motivated to learn more about the content they are interested in due to their curiosity, and in most cases, the information they seek is only available in Japanese. As a result, people become more motivated to study Japanese to understand the A3! visual novel game content they seek. It is in accordance with Firmansyah, Rahmawati, and Tanzil (2018), who concluded in their research that interesting content and features in audio-visual media are believed to be an effective way for teachers to teach Japanese and increase students' learning motivation in the classroom.

From this conclusion, it can be said that the visual novel game A3! as an audio-visual medium can increase the motivation of the players to learn Japanese and increase the player's knowledge of Japanese vocabulary. The respondents in this study were all women. In the subsequent study, male respondents will be interviewed to find out whether the results in this study can be generalized or not based on gender differences.

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