

Problems in Reading Comprehension on JPN-101 Course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology Students

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were 1) to investigate the problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students; and 2) to study supplemental opinions and suggestions. The samples of this research were 260 TNI students in 2018 academic year derived through Simple Random Sampling technique. The instrument used in this study was rating scale and open-ended questionnaire. The statistical values were the frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and content analysis. The findings suggested that TNI students had the overall difficulties at a high level ($\bar{x}=4.18$). For the opinions and suggestions, the students highlighted as follows: 1) Teaching reading article should be more concerned; 2) Simple articles seen in daily life such as leaflet or news should be used as teaching materials to make a clearer content of sentence; 3) Kahoot should be used in the class to practice Japanese; 4) Kanji should be more emphasized in the course objective; 5) Interesting comic or fictions can create positive learning environment; and 6) Teaching should be more focus on vocabulary memorization with practice.

Keywords: Problems of Reading Comprehension, Japanese Language, Teaching-Learning Approach

Introduction

Reading comprehension is considered as one of prominent language skills for learners. In this skill, students are required to catch some implied and stated information from the text by interpreting or analyzing the sentences to really get the answers for the questions. Students have various problems in doing reading comprehension test related to their level of mastery. Students with rich knowledge of vocabulary will find that reading comprehension is easy. So, will those with good knowledge on grammar. Each student may face different difficulty from others causing different needs on teaching methods and learning activities.

Similarly, Kern (2000:16–17) discusses seven principles that are central in his critical reading approach. He suggests that it involves: (1) interpretation (both the writer's interpretation of the world and the reader's interpretation of the writer's interpretations through their own conceptions of the world), (2) collaboration between the writer and reader, (3) cultural conventions that evolve through use and are modified for individual purposes, (4) knowledge about a cultural system from which readers and writers are operating, (5) problem solving to figure out relationships between words, between larger units of meaning, and between texts and real/imagined worlds, (6) reflection and self-reflection on language and its relations to the world and themselves,

and (7) knowledge of how language is used in spoken and written contexts to create discourse. With these principles in mind, the teacher decided to direct students' attention from the literal meanings of texts to such aspects as: the writer's interpretation (of the world), the writer's language choice based on cultural (and linguistic) conventions, his/her purpose in writing and target readers, and the underlying socio-cultural background information. In doing so, the teacher aimed to help students engage in critical reflections on the texts and on the reading processes through which the students interpret the meanings of the texts, rather than merely decode words to retrieve the information.

There is a commonly-held assumption that the development of reading and writing skills in Japanese requires a great deal of time and work; therefore, there may be a tendency to spend much of the class time on language exercises that emphasize literal comprehension and learning of vocabulary and kanji in Japanese classrooms. Not only does the Japanese writing system use an entirely different orthography from English (the language that many students in the United States are most familiar with), but they also utilize reading and writing conventions that are very different from English (e.g., no spacing between words; vertical writing still commonly used in books, newspapers, and magazines). Hence, Japanese teachers who are involved in intermediate- and advanced-level language instruction may feel compelled to focus on language (e.g., kanji characters, vocabulary, grammar) and on literal comprehension of texts.

Research Purpose

The purposes of this study were

- 1) to investigate the problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students; and
- 2) to study supplemental opinions and suggestions.

Research Methodology

Population and Samples

Population of this study was 800 TNI students in three faculties: Faculty of Engineering; Faculty of Information Technology and Faculty of Business Administration in the first semester of 2018 academic year at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

Samples in this study were 260 TNI students derived through simple random sampling technique.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire based on problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students.

The first part of this questionnaire asked for the demographic information on the students' gender and faculty. The second part concerned problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students. This part comprised 20 items. The five levels of opinion used in the questionnaire were ranked as "The highest level", "High level", "Moderate level", "Low level" and "The lowest level". Responses from the student questionnaires were subsequently coded. The data of the students' coded responses were statistically calculated and analyzed. The computation of Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of reliability was

employed to indicate how reliable the research questionnaire results were. Reliability was defined as the proportion of the students' responses to each item in the questionnaire and the reliability coefficient or calculated alpha was a lower bound of the true reliability of the research instrument, or the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics was also used to determine the individual summary statistics for each of the 20 items in the questionnaire.

The third part was open-ended question for more opinions and suggestions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis from questionnaire both single item and whole questionnaire which presented a form of rating scale. These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation and then translated based on criteria developed by Best (1981) as follows:

1.00 \leq $<$ 1.50 refers to the lowest level.

1.51 \leq $<$ 2.50 refers to low level.

2.51 \leq $<$ 3.50 refers to moderate level.

3.51 \leq $<$ 4.50 refers to high level.

4.51 \leq $<$ 5.00 refers to the highest level.

The collected data was analyzed using computer program. The statistics used for analyzing the data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

Results

Phase 1: The results of demographic data

The analysis of the data from the students' questionnaire was presented in the first section deals with the demographic variables from the students' responses to Part 1 of the questionnaire in the following table.

Table 1 Table of the results of demographic data of respondents

Demographic data of respondents	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	147	56.64
Female	113	43.46
Total	260	100
Faculty		
Engineering	74	28.46
Information Technology	69	26.54
Business Administration	117	45.00
Total	260	100

The table presented that there were 147 male students which were 56.54 percent, and 113 female students which were 43.46 percent. For faculties, the highest numbers of the students were from Business Administration (45%) followed by Engineering (28.46%), and Information Technology (26.54%).

Phase 2: The results of problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students

Table 2 Table of mean and standard deviation of problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students.

Items	n	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1. I don't know many Japanese words.	260	4.59	0.54	The highest
2. It is not easy for me to read Japanese.	260	4.41	0.87	High
3. I don't like reading Japanese books outside of class.	260	4.32	0.69	High
4. I find Japanese grammar difficult.	260	4.20	0.74	High
5. It is difficult to do well in this Japanese course.	260	4.10	0.63	High
6. I don't have confidence in my ability to read Japanese.	260	4.61	0.77	The highest
7. When I read Japanese, I need to look up many words in dictionary.	260	4.73	0.54	The highest
8. When I read Japanese, I am not very interested in what I read.	260	4.28	0.89	High
9. I find studying Japanese boring.	260	3.00	0.47	Moderate
10. After reading Japanese, I am not very interested in what I read.	260	4.14	0.75	High
11. I don't need to read more Japanese.	260	3.50	0.66	Moderate
12. I don't have motivation to learn Japanese.	260	3.19	0.67	Moderate
13. I do not enjoy reading Japanese.	260	4.00	0.41	High
14. Considering how I study Japanese, I can honestly say that I do just enough to pass.	260	3.87	0.82	High
15. I am a slow reader when I read Japanese.	260	4.57	0.63	High
16. When I read Japanese, I understand relatively little.	260	4.46	0.44	High
17. I think Japanese reading is difficult to understand.	260	4.49	0.58	High
Items	n	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
18. I try to speak Japanese outside of class but it is very difficult.	260	4.31	0.62	High
19. It is hard for me to read Japanese words.	260	4.39	0.77	High
20. I feel uneasy when I see Japanese textbooks.	260	4.44	0.79	High
Total	260	4.18	0.67	High

The above table presented that the mean score of problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students was at a high level ($\bar{x}=4.18$). The highest problem was *When I read Japanese, I need to look up many words in dictionary* ($\bar{x}=4.73$), followed by *I don't have confidence in my ability to read Japanese*. ($\bar{x}=4.61$). However, the lowest problem at a moderate level was *I find studying Japanese boring* ($\bar{x}=3.00$).

Phase 3: The results of suggestions and opinions about problems in reading comprehension of JPN-101 course of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students.

The suggestions from the respondents were listed as follows:

1. Teaching reading article should be more concerned.
2. Simple articles seen in daily life such as leaflet or news should be used as teaching materials to make a clearer content of sentence.
3. Kahoot should be used in the class to practice Japanese.
4. Kanji should be more emphasized in the course objective.
5. Interesting comic or fictions can create positive learning environment.
6. Teaching should be more focus on vocabulary memorization with practice.
7. Reading test should be arranged in the class.

Conclusions and Discussion

From the research, it can be concluded that all of the students' difficulties in reading comprehension test is caused by vocabulary, especially the limited knowledge or mastery of vocabulary. In order to overcome the problems, students propose an interactive learning for reading activities, both in forms of audio visual and games. Although games are not proven to improve their ability in mastering vocabulary, it can help them enjoy the class better resulting a little improvement though it is not significant. Teachers as the provider of facilities should be aware of this needs and become more creative in term of providing and involving students in interactive techniques or methods or teaching activities.

Vocabulary Francie (2018) in his article proposed the importance of vocabulary on reading success that can be summarized into; 1. Comprehension improves when you know what the words mean. Since comprehension is the ultimate goals of reading, students cannot overestimate the importance of vocabulary development. 2. Words are the currency of communication. A sophisticated vocabulary improves all areas of communication — listening, speaking, reading and writing. 3. When children and adolescents improve their vocabulary, their academic and social confidence and competence improve, too. It shows that Vocabulary represents one of most important skills necessary for teaching and learning a foreign language. It is the basis for the development of all the other skills: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing, spelling and pronunciation. Vocabulary is the main tool for the students to use language effectively. Intentional vocabulary acquisition is memorizing straightforwardly term after term with their respective translations from a list. Intentional learning is quick and usually preferred by learners, but it is also superficial. Learners find vocabulary in an isolated, often infinitive form and remain incapable of using it correctly in context. Moreover, intentionally learned vocabulary sinks faster. Recommendable vocabulary acquisition pushes learners to every term, embedding it deeply and solidly in the mental lexicon (Iman, 2016). In other words, students are expected not only memorize the words and the meanings but also use them in the correct context.

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