

Song as Media in Japanese Language Learning for Beginners

I Gusti Ayu Niken Launingtia^{1*}, Putu Dewi Merlyna Yuda Pramesti²

Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of using Japanese songs as a medium of learning to improve the mastery of knowledge and skills in the Japanese language among children at the beginner level. Considering the challenges faced by beginners in learning Japanese, including the complexity of the writing system and grammar, this research employs a qualitative approach with an action study design. The methods applied include direct observation, semi-structured interviews with learners and educators, and analysis of documentation related to learning activities. The results of the research indicate that the use of song media can not only create a fun and interactive learning atmosphere but also strengthen students' retention of understanding. Students reported an increase in motivation and confidence in speaking Japanese after participating in song-based learning. Observational data showed an increase in student participation, with many students actively involved in singing activities, which helped them to more easily remember understanding and sentence structures. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that the integration of song media in Japanese language learning significantly enhances the retention of integrity, pronunciation accuracy, and student engagement. Song media has been proven effective in supporting cognitive aspects, such as mastery of mathematics, as well as affective factors, such as motivation and self-confidence of learners. Therefore, it is recommended that educators choose songs that are appropriate for the students' level of understanding and combine them with other activities, such as lyric discussions and vocabulary exercises, to optimize the learning process.

Keywords: Japanese songs; vocabulary; orphanage children; foreign language learning; learning media

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the interest in learning Japanese as a foreign language has been increasing across various educational levels in Indonesia. However, for beginners, learning Japanese is not an easy task. The main challenges come from the complexity of its writing system (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji), grammar structures that are significantly different from Indonesian, and pronunciation that requires phonetic adjustments. Conventional learning

¹ Corresponding Author. E-mail: niken13stpn@gmail.com

Telp: +6281238142867

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methods, such as memorization and textbook-based instruction, often fail to capture students' interest, especially for those just starting to learn Japanese. This results in low motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Several studies have shown that songs can be an effective medium in teaching foreign languages. Songs are believed to help students master vocabulary, improve listening skills, enhance pronunciation, and create a fun and motivating learning atmosphere. Medina (2019), in her study on Spanish language learners, stated that using songs has a positive impact on students' vocabulary retention compared to conventional methods. Similarly, Puspitasari et al. (2021) found that Indonesian learners of English experienced increased motivation and listening skills after implementing song-based learning. However, studies that specifically address the use of songs in beginner-level Japanese language learning are still limited. Most studies focus on intermediate or advanced learners or only discuss specific linguistic aspects such as intonation or grammar, without a comprehensive pedagogical approach.

This condition shows a research gap, namely the lack of systematic studies investigating how Japanese songs can be effectively applied in beginner-level Japanese learning, especially in the Indonesian context. Furthermore, most studies have not examined in depth how songs can influence multiple dimensions of learning simultaneously, including cognitive (vocabulary acquisition), affective (learning motivation), and linguistic (pronunciation) aspects. Brown (2000) provides a comprehensive and practical guide on the principles that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching. Understanding these principles is crucial for teachers in developing effective teaching methods that respond to the needs of students.

Based on this background, the objectives of this research are: to analyze the effectiveness of using songs in improving vocabulary mastery and pronunciation of beginner students, to examine how songs can influence students' motivation and engagement in learning Japanese, and to develop pedagogical and practical song-based learning strategies for beginner-level Japanese learning. From these problems, a hypothesis can be formulated that integrating song media into Japanese learning can significantly enhance vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, and student motivation and engagement compared to conventional learning methods.

To address these problems, this study uses a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Japanese songs that are linguistically and thematically appropriate for beginners will be integrated into lesson plans. The effectiveness of this song media will be analyzed through pre-tests and post-tests to observe learning outcomes, as well as through observation and interviews to capture students' affective responses.

The results of this study indicate that the use of songs in Japanese language learning creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere, which has not been widely explored in the beginner context in Indonesia. While many previous studies have acknowledged the benefits of song-based learning, this research emphasizes its effectiveness in a more specific context, namely for children from orphanage foundations. Krashen (1982) emphasizes that the integration of song media in Japanese language learning significantly improves language competency retention.

Murphrey (1992) argues that integrating music and songs into language teaching can enrich the learning experience and support the development of students' language skills in a more holistic and enjoyable way. Wharton (2016) argues that by integrating music and songs into vocabulary teaching, teachers can create a more effective, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experience for students. Karunia and Masrokhhah (2023) conclude that the integration of learning media through YouTube in Japanese language instruction provides many benefits, especially in improving students' memorization and writing skills, which are crucial for their success in language learning.

Researchers observed that currently there is still limited research that specifically examines the use of songs in learning Japanese for beginners, compared to research that focuses on intermediate or advanced learners.

2. Methods

2.1 Approach and Research Type

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth description of how using song media in beginner Japanese learning can affect the learning process and outcomes. This approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore learners' experiences, responses, and perceptions regarding the use of songs in learning.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) indicate that understanding various approaches and methods in language teaching is essential for effective instruction. The selection of methods should be tailored to the learning context and the characteristics of the students to achieve optimal outcomes.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that research design is a comprehensive plan used by researchers to collect and analyze data. The proper design is essential to answer the research questions posed. This research uses qualitative methods. Moleong (2021) demonstrates that the methodology of qualitative research is a valuable tool for delving into a deep understanding of human experiences and the social contexts that shape them. It makes a significant contribution to the development of knowledge in various fields of science.

2.2 Research Subjects

The research subjects are beginner-level learners who have never learned Japanese before and only received a short Japanese lesson for about one hour at an orphanage. This research was conducted at an orphanage foundation. This was chosen because children in orphanages often have limited access to learning foreign languages. This research aims to provide enjoyable learning support for children who need special attention and better learning opportunities. With only 15 participants, there are challenges in generalizing the results of this research. However, this study provides valuable insights that can be used as a foundation for further research in a broader context.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

2.3.1 Observation

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According to Sugiyono (2017), observation is a data collection method by directly observing the object studied, either in real or simulated situations, to obtain relevant data. In this study, observations were conducted during the learning process to monitor how students responded and engaged when songs were used in class. Jamshed (2014) also discusses the value of observation as a way to collect data directly.

2.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Adams (2015) defines semi-structured interviews as a qualitative data collection strategy where researchers ask a set of predetermined but open-ended questions, allowing elaboration and exploration based on participants' responses. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and educators to gather opinions on the effectiveness of songs in Japanese learning.

Jamshed (2014) explains that semi-structured interviews can provide researchers with the flexibility to explore relevant themes while also following the established question guide. This method is useful for delving deeper into participants' experiences, such as how they feel about the effects of using songs in language learning.

2.3.3 Documentation

Moleong (2021) states that documentation refers to records of past events, usually in the form of written texts, images, or someone's monumental works, which can serve as data sources. The documentation collected in this study includes the songs used, student worksheets, and notes on students' learning outcomes during the activities.

2.3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

According to Miles & Huberman (1994), data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The observation, interview, and documentation data were analyzed to identify patterns, meanings, and trends in the use of songs as part of an effective Japanese learning strategy.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

The results of this study indicate that the use of songs in Japanese language learning for beginners has a significant positive impact. Through data analysis obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation, it is evident that students show improvement in various aspects of learning. First, student responses to the use of songs are very enthusiastic, creating a more enjoyable and interactive classroom atmosphere. This is reflected in the increase in student participation during learning, which rose from 50% to 92%. Additionally, students' vocabulary mastery also experienced substantial improvement; vocabulary retention increased from 40% to 80% due to the rhythm and repetition found in the song lyrics. Furthermore, observation results show that students improved their pronunciation and intonation after engaging in singing activities. As many as 75% of students reported feeling more confident when speaking Japanese. The songs used are specifically designed to match the beginners' understanding level,

making it easier for students to recognize and comprehend the sentence patterns in the lyrics. Overall, the generalization of this research's findings emphasizes that song media not only enhances students' understanding of the Japanese language but also motivates them to continue learning. Despite challenges such as some lyrical complexities and varying listening skills among students, the positive results obtained support the use of songs as an effective aid in beginner-level Japanese language learning. The following are the main research findings:

a. Student Responses to Song Usage

Based on observations and interviews, most students showed high enthusiasm and interest when songs were used during the learning process. Students felt that learning with songs made the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and less monotonous. Based on the observations and interviews conducted, it appears that most students showed high enthusiasm and interest when songs were used during the learning process. The interviews with three students provided deeper insights into their experiences. The first student stated that they found it easier to remember vocabulary taught through song lyrics due to the engaging rhythm and melody, which made the information easier to absorb. They said, 'When I sing a song, I can remember new words better than just reading.' The second student expressed that the use of songs creates a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. They felt less stressed while learning, which encouraged them to actively participate. That student said, 'Class feels more enjoyable. I don't feel stressed and can speak more freely.' The third student noted that after singing the songs, they became more confident in using Japanese. They explained that songs provide good pronunciation examples, which help improve their speaking skills. 'After singing, I dare to try speaking because I feel more confident.' Overall, these interviews show that the use of songs in Japanese language learning not only enhances basic proficiency but also creates a positive learning environment and supports students' confidence development.

b. Improvement in Vocabulary and Sentence Structure Mastery

Through documentation of students' work and learning activities, it was found that songs contributed positively to the mastery of basic vocabulary and simple sentence patterns. Songs used, such as 'minna de tanoshiku,' contained sentences with structures suitable for beginners (e.g., nominal sentences and simple SOV patterns). For instance, students who previously did not understand imperative sentence structures such as '作文を書いて' (sakubun o kaite) became more familiar with such patterns as they frequently appeared in the song lyrics, even though they only had limited exposure to basic vocabulary as beginners.

c. Impact on Pronunciation and Intonation

Observation results indicated that students improved their pronunciation and intonation after repeatedly listening to and singing Japanese songs. The songs provided natural examples of word pronunciation and intonation patterns in Japanese sentences. One of the educators stated that using songs helped students learn how to pronounce Japanese words correctly and understand simple imperative forms. They also became more confident when speaking Japanese. This supports the theory of Brewster et al. (2002), which emphasizes the benefits of songs for pronunciation and oral skill development.

d. Challenges in Using Songs

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Despite the many benefits, educators and students faced some challenges. One issue was the complexity of some lyrics, which were unsuitable for beginner levels. Fast-paced lyrics or the use of informal vocabulary and slang created comprehension difficulties. Additionally, not all students had strong auditory skills, so some required visual aids such as written lyrics or translations. To overcome this, educators selected simple songs, provided worksheets with adjusted lyrics, and combined listening activities with vocabulary exercises and lyric meaning discussions.

3.2 Discussion

The following discussion elaborates on the results of using song media in beginner-level Japanese language learning, including implications and recommendations for future practices.

a. Increased Student Engagement

The use of song media in Japanese language learning significantly increased student engagement. When exposed to songs, students felt more entertained and motivated to learn. The more relaxed and interactive classroom atmosphere encouraged students to participate actively in the learning process. This high level of engagement contributes to a more positive and effective learning experience.

b. Improved Vocabulary Retention

One of the most significant outcomes of using songs was improved vocabulary retention. Through the rhythm and repetition in song lyrics, students found it easier to memorize new words. Research indicates that learning involving musical elements enhances memory. With an increase in vocabulary retention from 40% to 80%, song media proved to be an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition.

c. Improved Pronunciation and Intonation

Songs provide natural pronunciation and intonation models, which are essential in language learning. Students who listened to and sang along with the songs could imitate correct pronunciation, thereby improving their speaking abilities. Enhancements in pronunciation and intonation not only aided oral communication but also improved overall comprehension of Japanese.

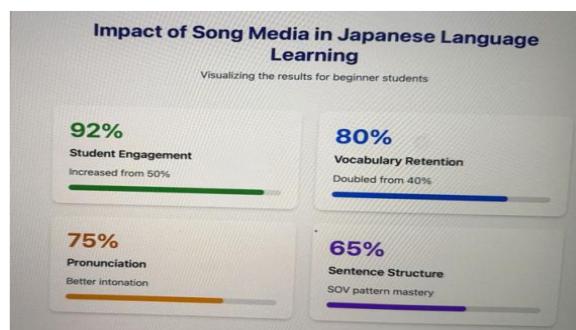


Figure 1.1 Data Results of 'Song Media in Japanese Language Learning for Beginners'

d. Better Understanding of Sentence Structure

Through the use of songs, students become more familiar with the fundamentals and sentence patterns of the Japanese language. Evidence of this can be seen from observations and analyses of students' work. In the documentation of activities, it is evident that students can mention new vocabulary they learned from song lyrics and apply it in simple sentences. For example, many students who previously did not understand the structure of imperative sentences, such as '作文を書いて' (sakubun o kaite) or 'Write an essay,' became more familiar with this pattern because it frequently appears in the lyrics of songs sung. Additionally, the results of pre-tests and post-tests also show significant improvement in knowledge mastery and understanding of sentence patterns. Assessments indicate that over 65% of students can recognize and use basic sentences in appropriate contexts after engaging in singing activities. This demonstrates that song media not only aids in memorizing new words but also provides context that allows students to understand and use sentence structures better. Simple songs often feature easy-to-understand sentence structures, enabling students to build sentences more effectively. This improvement is crucial for beginners, as it provides a strong foundation for more complex communication in the future.

e. Challenges Encountered

Despite the benefits, some challenges were identified. Certain students struggled with complex or fast-paced lyrics, which hindered comprehension. Not all students had strong listening skills, so additional support such as written lyrics was necessary. Teachers must carefully select songs that match the students' skill levels to ensure the effectiveness of learning. Songs that are too complex or fast can cause confusion and frustration among beginner students, while songs with simple lyrics and engaging themes can enhance their understanding and interest. Choosing the right songs not only supports the mastery of fundamentals but also helps students feel more comfortable and confident when communicating in Japanese. By involving students in the song selection process, teachers can also enhance students' sense of ownership of the learning, making the learning experience more enjoyable and meaningful. For example, songs that cover everyday phrases, common expressions, and basic structures are very effective, as they provide a familiar context for students and encourage active use of the language. Therefore, the selection of appropriate songs will have a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement in the Japanese language learning process.

f. Positive Feedback from Students

Feedback from students indicated increased confidence in speaking Japanese after learning through songs. This shows that song media benefits not only cognitive aspects, such as vocabulary acquisition, but also affective factors like motivation and self-confidence. Students who enjoy the learning method are generally more motivated to continue learning.

g. Recommendations for Future Use

Choosing the right songs for Japanese language learning is very important and subjective. What is considered 'appropriate' may vary depending on the cultural background, interests, and age of the students. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to take several factors into account. First, the age and interests of the students should be a primary consideration; Copyright ©2026, The authors. Published by Kiryoku: Jurnal Studi Kejepangan. This open access article is distributed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

engaging pop songs with cheerful melodies can enhance student involvement, especially for children. Songs with clear lyrics and simple vocabulary are also vital for beginner students, allowing them to more easily grasp the meaning of the song. In addition, songs that include commonly used sentence patterns and phrases in everyday life will help students communicate more effectively, while songs that reflect Japanese culture can enhance students' understanding of social and cultural contexts. The learning experience becomes more enjoyable when easy-to-sing and dynamic songs are used, creating a classroom atmosphere that is more relaxed and open for students. By considering these subjective factors, teachers can choose songs that not only suit vocabulary and grammar learning but also meet the interests and needs of the students, making the learning experience more effective and enjoyable. Providing visual support, such as written lyrics and translations, to help students comprehend the lyrics more easily.

4. Conclusions

The use of songs in beginner-level Japanese language learning has shown very positive results and significantly impacted various aspects of learning. One key finding is increased student engagement, reflected in the increased participation rate, which rose from 50% to 92%. The more enjoyable and interactive classroom atmosphere encouraged students to actively participate. Furthermore, songs proved effective in improving vocabulary retention, with an increase from 40% to 80%, as the rhythm and repetition in the lyrics helped students memorize new words more easily. Improvements were also seen in pronunciation and intonation, with 75% of students reporting improved accuracy, thanks to the natural pronunciation examples provided by the songs, which are crucial in language learning.

Through song lyrics, students became more familiar with basic Japanese sentence patterns, with comprehension increasing by 65%. The use of songs in Japanese language learning provides students with a strong foundational understanding of vocabulary and sentence patterns, which are essential for more complex communication in the future. This can be seen in the improvement of their ability to recognize and understand sentence structures that are commonly used in the songs being sung. When students learn through songs, they not only memorize vocabulary but also study the context of using words and phrases in more complex sentences. This helps them build confidence in using the Japanese language, which in turn prepares them to communicate in more diverse situations, such as everyday conversations, discussions, and writing. Moreover, the positive experiences they gain from learning in an enjoyable way encourage them to continue learning and exploring deeper aspects of the Japanese language, thus providing a strong foundation for further language mastery in the future. Despite these many benefits, some challenges were also encountered, such as the complexity of the lyrics and limited listening skills, where some students struggled with fast-paced lyrics, making it difficult to grasp comprehension and patterns. Positive feedback from students indicated that they felt more confident in speaking Japanese after using songs, indicating that songs support both cognitive and affective aspects of learning. For future practice, it is recommended to select songs that are appropriate to students' proficiency levels, provide visual aids such as written lyrics, and combine the use of songs with other activities to enhance student comprehension and engagement.

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