

# The Use of Anime in Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language

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## ABSTRACT

The study of popular culture is now becoming an emerging research area within education. While many studies have confirmed that students' interest in anime has driven much of enrolment in Japanese language courses, the impact of using anime as a teaching tool has not been studied thoroughly in the teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) classroom. This article attempts to propose a model that can be used to plan lessons by using anime as a teaching tool in JFL classrooms. By introducing the teaching idea of using anime in a Japanese language classroom, this article is hoped to be able to encourage more Japanese language teacher to consider the use of anime in teaching JFL.

**Keywords:** *anime, cartoon, Japanese as a Foreign Language, language education, popular culture*

## INTRODUCTION

Heavily influenced by mass media, popular culture has increasingly received more attention nowadays. The study of popular culture is now becoming an emerging research area within education. For example, using graphic novels to enhance students' reading and writing ability (Frey & Fisher, 2004) and using the highly popular hip-hop culture and rap as a transformative educational tool despite their controversial position in mainstream education (Alim & Pennycook, 2007). According to Black (2008), incorporating popular culture in the classroom could unite the students and encourage possible connection with one another based on their interests outside of school.

In the case of teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL), prior studies have confirmed the apparent connection between interest in Japanese animation (anime) and interest in learning Japanese language (Abe, 2009; Fukunaga, 2006; Manion, 2005; William, 2006). Furuhashi-Turner (2013) suggested that, "by using materials in which students are already interested, language teachers can expect that students will enhance and improve their language competencies" (p. 73). Besides, we believe that various interactive activities derived from the use of anime as a teaching tool can make the classroom more dynamic, creative, and fun. Interactive activities such as active viewing, role play, and follow-up discussion will create a more learner-centered learning environment to encourage students to practice their Japanese language speaking skill, besides stimulating their critical thinking skill.

The use of anime in teaching JFL has not been studied in depth in the classroom context (Spindler, 2010). Some of the difficulties reflected in using anime as a teaching tool in the JFL classroom include: (1) underdeveloped theory on facilitating learning through anime in classroom context (Spindler, 2010; William, 2008) and (2) lack of teaching manual for language teachers intending to use anime as a teaching tool in the

classroom (Furo, 2008). This article aimed at proposing a model that can be used to plan lessons by using anime to teach JFL.

### **Anime and Cartoon**

What is anime? Anime is often correlated and compared with the concept of cartoon. According to Napier (2005):

“To define anime simply as ‘Japanese cartoons’ gives no sense of the depth and variety that make up the medium. [...] Essentially, anime works include everything that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action films – romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, even psychological probing of a kind seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television. [...] Unlike cartoons in the West, anime in Japan is truly a main-stream pop cultural phenomenon” (p. 6)

From Napier’s statements, the clear distinction between cartoon and anime could be observed. In addition, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) coined the word “*Japanimation*” to describe animation produced in Japan by claiming that, “Japanese animation has been acclaimed worldwide for its originality, Japan-based culture and content, to the extent that it is called *Japanimation*” (Dateline JETRO, 2005, p. 4). Aeschliman (2007) explained that while the term anime is used as a blanket term to refer to all animation from all over the world in Japan, many dictionaries in English define anime as a style of animation developed in Japan. In view of these definitions, the term anime is used to define and distinct animation made in Japan with other region’s animation (cartoon) in this article.

Bahrani and Soltani (2011) claimed that cartoons have been effective in increasing language learners’ motivation because cartoons provide variation for the brain as “visual information in the form of cartoons is usually processed by the right brain which is the holistic, creative, artistic side” while “the spoken word engages the left side of the listeners’ brain” which is “is analytical, recognizes and interprets words, performs calculations and so on” (p. 20). No matter how convincing and interesting the lesson, after a short time, learners will start to feel the dullness of the same manner of teaching involving the constant use of the left side of the brain. On the other hand, cartoon is a kind of visual information processed by the right side of the brain. Therefore, cartoons can be served as a tool for creativity and variety in keeping the learners less bored (Bahrani & Soltani, 2011).

Barker (2009) explained that making the learners interactive is the best way to keep them interested and engaged in lessons. By adapting cartoons into the classroom with suitable and applicable activities, teachers can promote learners’ observational, analytical, and higher order thinking skills. According to Oliveri (2007), cartoons can ignite meaningful conversation, and create opportunity for teachers and students to discuss issues such as family life, social, and current events, as well as moral values and religious philosophies.

Using cartoon in the teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom has shown positive effect in improving students’ language competence (Arikan & Taraf, 2010; Munir, 2016; Velez Gea, 2013). This suggested the possibility of anime as an effective teaching tool in a JFL classroom.

### **The Use of Anime as a Teaching Tool in a JFL classroom**

According to Richards (2013), “input” in language teaching refers to teachable and learnable units of linguistic content. Richards (2013) stated that different approaches to course design “reflect different understanding of the nature of language” such as grammar, functions, and vocabulary (p. 6). After “input” has been determined, the domain of “process” concerning the issues of teaching methods, instructional materials, and classroom activities can be addressed. Finally, “output” refers to the learning outcomes. The “output” refers to what students are able to do as the outcome of a period of instruction.

#### *Input (Approaches)*

Nunan (1988) suggested that a language teaching course should be started with mainly the analytical/formal approach. The analytical approach should focus on the language form explanations and

language form learning activities to meet the students' conditions and expectations. Then, the communicative learning approach should gradually replace the formal approach to facilitate the students' communicative skills. Using the analytical approach, the teacher emphasizes on the language analysis such as the phonological and lexical components of language to help students become aware of these components and be able to practice them, whereas the experiential approach emphasizes the inductive method of learning through the students' experience. The language is regarded as a tool to encourage comments, responses, and expressions from the students based on the text itself or its theme/topic (Robinson, 2007).

#### *Process (Classroom Activities)*

To integrate the analytical and experiential approaches into practical instructional methodology in the classroom and to get a successful outcome in language learning, there are some classroom activities that should benefit both teacher and students. Cakir (2006, p. 69) outlined some practical techniques or classroom activities for using video in classroom (see the [Appendix](#)).

Unlike passive viewing where the viewer is only exposed to the video content but does not engage with the video content at any critical level, active viewing requires the viewer to identify and analyze the viewing experience. Classroom activities such as freeze framing and prediction activity, silent viewing activity, sound on and vision off activity, repetition activity, role play activity, reproduction activity, dubbing activity, and follow-up activity can be carried out in pairs and groups depending on the class size. Pair work and group work can effectively stimulate communication, foster knowledge sharing, and develop cooperative skills among the students. For example, the repetition activity can be carried out as pair work using the analytical approach where the students are required to analyze the dialog lines in certain short scenes; the follow-up activity can be carried out as group work using the experiential approach where the students are given opportunities to express their personal responses about the anime watched and discuss issues related to real life situations.

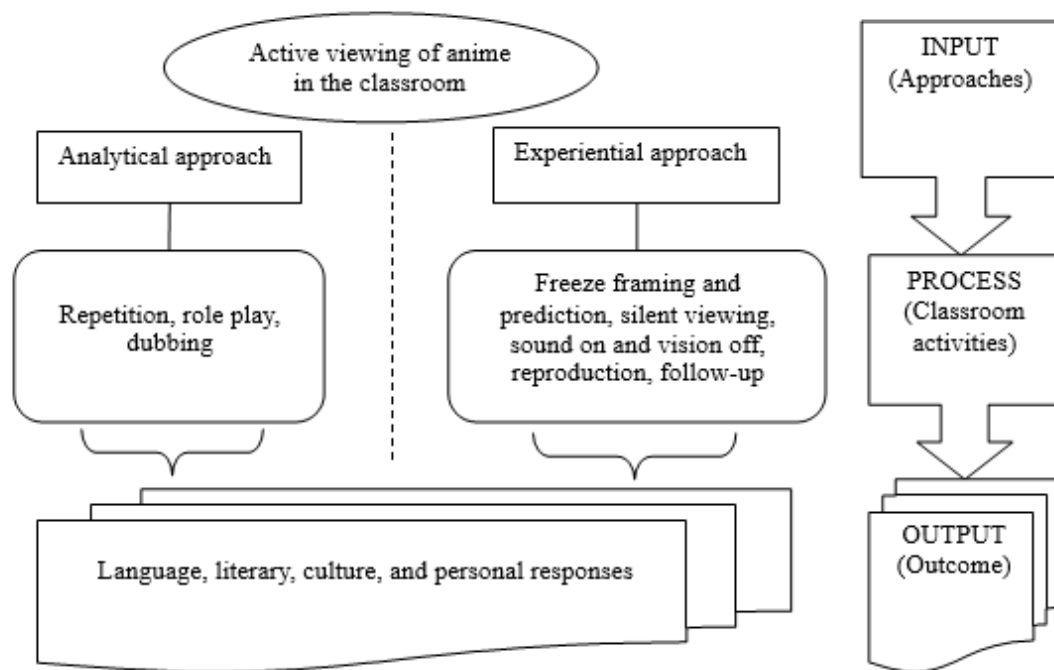
#### *Output (Outcome)*

Frey and Fisher (2008) suggested numerous valuable resources that may help teachers develop film selection criteria for classroom viewing and instructional activities, for example, "Reel conversations: Reading films with young adults" by Teasley and Wilder (1997), "Reading in the dark: Using film as a tool in the English classroom" by Golden (2001), and "Great films and how to teach them" by Costanzo (2004). However, "none of these books devotes more than a few paragraphs to anime" (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p. 74). To solve the problem, the film analysis framework (Eken, 2003; Tanriverdi, 2007; Teasley & Wilder, 1997) can be used to analyze anime for classroom teaching purpose. The film analysis framework was chosen because it provides a rich source for examining different aspects of a film, as well as anime.

The aspects proposed in the framework by Teasley and Wilder (1997) include "literary" aspect (narrative, characters, setting, theme, sign, and genre), "dramatic" aspect (acting, costumes, and make-up), and "cinematic" aspect (camera angles, music, sound and vision, and lighting). Eken (2003) refined the framework by adding the "language work" aspect to analyze the vocabulary and language skills that could be learned from the film. Tanriverdi (2007) added "cultural" aspect to the framework to analyze the culture background and ideology of the film.

In this article, we compared the film analysis framework proposed by Teasley and Wilder (1997), Eken (2003), and Tanriverdi (2007) and decided to focus only on the "literary", "language", and "cultural" aspects of anime by leaving out other aspects such as "dramatic" and "cinematic", which were too technical or irrelevant to apply to the analysis of anime for language and culture learning purposes. In addition, the aspect of "personal response" can be added into the framework to examine the students' impression of the anime. The "personal response" component will deal with the students' overall opinions about the anime, comparison with real-life situation and the good points or bad points of the anime.

By integrating these theories, Figure 1 illustrates the model that can be used to plan lessons by using anime as a teaching tool.



**Figure 1.** Lesson planning model for the use of anime in teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language

### Other Pedagogical Considerations

Here are some pedagogical suggestions to be considered by Japanese language teachers who intend to start using anime as a teaching tool.

#### *Anime Selection*

Anime can be classified into different genres. Anime genres are also often uniquely classified by targeted audience group such as *kodomo* (children's), *shoujo* (girls'), *shounen* (boys') and various ranges of genres targeting the adult audience such as  *josei* (women's), and  *seinen* (men's). Japanese use various styles of language (e.g., polite-plain form, dialect-standard language, etc.) depending on the situation and human relations. These language use variations are also reflected in anime. In the context of learning JFL, *shoujo* anime which is driven by "human relations (*ningenkankei*)" (Yu, 2015, p. 21) and daily life situations is more suitable for use as a teaching tool as compared to *shounen* anime which focus heavily on the action, fighting, and competition. Most importantly, anime selection should respond to the students' needs and learning objectives. Additionally, other criteria such as cultural appropriateness, length of anime, availability of hardware, visual quality and compatibility should be considered as well (Syaifuddin, 2010).

#### *Useful Websites*

Of course, it is true that every class is different, as is every teacher or every student. The most important aspect to consider when choosing the anime as a teaching tool is the class objective. As a matter of fact, it is not difficult even if the teacher does not know much about anime. A bit of research on the Internet will take care of that. Here are some of the useful websites:

- (1) Japanese in Anime and Manga (<http://anime-manga.jp/index.html>)

As a starter, the website Japanese in Anime and Manga could be used to discover the new experience of learning Japanese language through anime and manga (Japanese comic or graphic novel). This e-learning

website was created by the Japan Foundation, Kansai, Japan. This website aims at giving Japanese learners and anime/manga fans from all over the world an opportunity to learn Japanese in an enjoyable way by using the anime/manga as a gateway to their studies.

(2) MyAnimeList (<http://myanimelist.net>)

MyAnimeList is the world's largest anime and manga database and community. This website introduces visitors to anime and manga, besides helping them organize their own manga and anime collections by creating a personal watchlist. Functionality includes site search, anime and manga listing, and forum.

(3) Anime News Network (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com>)

Anime News Network is an anime industry news website that reports on anime, manga, video games, Japanese popular music and other related culture. The website offers reviews and other editorial content, forums where readers can discuss current issues and events, and an encyclopedia containing a large number of anime and manga with background information, theme songs, plot summaries, and user ratings.

(4) YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)

YouTube can be used to explore the trailers, short clips, and reviews of anime. YouTube is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others. Originally created in 2005, YouTube is now one of the most popular sites on the web.

#### *Copyright Issues*

As far as using audio-visual material as a teaching tool is concerned, the teacher has to be very careful to not infringe copyright law. To avoid this, the teacher should not rip, copy, and alter the audio-visual material in any way. Also, the teacher has to take copyright concerns very seriously when uploading or placing the audio-visual material in an online repository for student use outside the classroom (McLelland, 2013). The teacher also needs to be reminded that although YouTube clips can be played live in the class, recording and redistributing the clips infringe the copyright guidelines.

#### *Class Size*

In addition, given the large number of students, it is sometimes difficult to address individual concerns. Therefore, using anime as a language and culture teaching tool seems more practical for smaller class size of 10 to 15 students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nowadays, students spend much of their time networking with popular culture. Therefore, using popular culture as an educational tool allows teachers to make that time more fruitful. Besides, in order to make the classroom teaching more relevant to the students, teachers should learn more about the students' learning habits outside the classroom. Exploring the students' fandom of popular cultural texts "maybe a way to get students interested in school literacy practices" and provide teachers "with insight into students' out-of-school lives" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000, p. 445).

Although using audio-visual popular culture texts, such as movie, drama, song, and cartoon in language teaching has become a common approach for language teachers, many of them might not be aware of using anime in the context of teaching JFL. For successful communication, language learners should have clear understanding not only of the lexicon, grammar, cultural patterns, but also the pragmatic background of the situation. In other words, learners need to understand how context contributes to meaning in order to construct meaningful and effective communication in a foreign language. In the case of teaching and learning JFL, anime could be useful to help language teachers and students to achieve these language teaching and learning goals. By introducing the idea of using anime in a Japanese language classroom, this article seeks to

encourage more Japanese language teachers to consider use of anime as a Japanese language teaching tool.

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## APPENDIX

## Practical techniques for using video in the classroom

Technique	Classroom implication
Active viewing	<p>Active viewing increases the students' enjoyment and satisfaction and focuses their attention on the main idea of the video presentation. So, it is necessary for students to take an active part in video teaching presentations. Before starting the presentation the teacher writes some key questions on the board about the presentation so that the students get an overview of the content. After viewing the questions the students answer the questions orally, or they may take notes while viewing. For more detailed comprehension students are provided a cue sheet or viewing guides and let them watch and listen for specific details or specific features of language. However, it should be kept in mind that the level of the students should be taken into account and the technique should be adapted according to their level.</p>
Freeze framing and prediction	<p>Freeze framing means stopping the picture on the screen by pressing the still or pause button. Video gives us an additional dimension of information about the characters' body language, facial expressions, emotions, reactions, and responses. Teacher freezes the picture when he or she wants to teach words and expressions regarding mood and emotions, to ask questions about a particular scene, or to call students' attention to some points. By freezing the scene the students can be asked what is going to happen next. So they speculate on what will happen in the next act. Freeze framing is excellent for speculation. This activity also fires the imagination of the students by leading them to predicting and deducing further information about the characters.</p>
Silent viewing	<p>As video is an audio-visual medium, the sound and the vision are separate components. Silent viewing arouses student interest, stimulates thought, and develops skills of anticipation. In silent viewing, the video segment is played with the sound off using only the picture. This activity can also be a prediction technique when students are watching the video for the first time. One way of doing this is to play the video segment without the sound and tell students to observe the behavior of the characters and to use their power of deduction. Then press the pause button at intervals to stop the picture on the screen and get students to guess what is happening and what the characters might be saying or ask students what has happened up to that point. Finally, the video segment is replayed with the sound on so that learners can compare their impressions with what actually happens in the video.</p>

Sound on and vision off activity	This activity can be interesting and useful to play a section of a video unit and remove the visual element from the presentation by obscuring the picture so that students can hear only the dialog but are unable to see the action. Through this activity the students predict or reconstruct what has happened visually depending only what they hear.
Repetition and role play	When there are some difficult language points in the video unit, close repetition can be a necessary step to communicative production exercises. A scene on video is replayed with certain pauses for repetition either individually or in chorus. When students have a clear understanding of the presentation, they are asked to act out the scene using as much of the original version as they can remember. When students become confident with role playing and are sure of vocabulary and language structures, more creative activity can be introduced in which they are asked to improvise the scene to fit their views of the situation and the characters they are playing. Role-play involves students as active participants. As students play the assigned role, they become more and more involved. This activity also helps students to better understanding their own behavior and to be more able to respond in a positive way to various human relationships. In other words, role playing is a good communicative activity and true preparation for real-life situations. It gives a chance to students to apply what they are learning.
Reproduction activity	After students have seen a section, they are asked to reproduce either what is being said, to describe what is happening, or to write or retell what has happened. This activity encourages them to try out their knowledge. Students will benefit from experimenting in English, even though it is challenging and mistakes are made. As it seems a bit difficult to perform, guidance, help and reassurance may be needed.
Dubbing activity	This activity can be done when students have the necessary language competence. In this activity, students are asked to fill in the missing dialogs after watching a sound-off video episode. It is interesting and enjoyable for the students to complete a scene from the video by dubbing.
Follow-up activity	It is important that a video presentation should lead to follow-up activity as the basis for further extended oral practice. Discussion stimulates communication among students, and it helps to achieve communicative practice. With this activity students have an opportunity to develop sharing and co-operative skills.

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*Note.* Adapted from “The use of video as an audio-visual material in foreign language teaching classroom” by Cakir, I. (2006). Copyright 2006 by *The Turkish Online Journal of Education Technology*.