

The Application of Small Group Discussion Method in Dokkai Class by Using Nama Kyouzai as the Learning Media

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Abstract: Dokkai is a course that is given to a 6th semester university student of the Japanese department at Andalas University. The literal definition of Dokkai is “to read”; but in practice, the subject is designed to improve student’s reading capability in understanding texts which are written in Japanese. Even though the main purpose of the subject to improve the Japanese reading skill, it also includes kanji mastery, Japanese sentences patterns, as well as general oral and written Japanese competency. In the previous semesters the learning process is teacher centered. However, this method is inappropriate for the educational aims of Dokkai. This essay proposes a Student Centered Learning (SCL) approach in the form of small group discussions by making use of available electronic and conventionally published Nama Kyouzai (learning materials). This method succeeded in improving student’s reading capability as the students became more active within the classes. As the result, students improved their Japanese language skills and examination mark.

1 INTRODUCTION

Dokkai (SJP 332) is given to Japanese department students in Andalas University in their 6th semester, the course is worth 2 credits. Dokkai literally means “to read” and the course is proposed to improve the reading ability of students. As the students improve their reading skill they will also be able to improve other language skills including:

- a. The ability to understand *kanji*, words, the structure of Japanese sentences.
- b. The capacity to interpret Japanese text
- c. The ability to discuss texts that are written in Japanese.
- d. Skills to convey and to deliver the content of the text in Japanese

Dokkai is given to the students to complement Chuukyuu Nihongo course (intermediate to Japanese language structure), Chuukyuu Sakubun (intermediate to Japanese composition), Chuukyuu Kaiwa (intermediate to Japanese speaking), and Hyouki II (understanding Japanese *kanji*). In other words, Dokkai is given to the student to improve their language ability in term of understanding *kanji*, words, and sentences structure. The aims of the courses are described as follow:

- a. Students can understand *kanji*, words, and intermediate Japanese language structure
- b. Students may give an argument about the theme of the Japanese texts and then discuss it in front of the class
- c. Students escalate their Japanese language skill in both speaking and writing
- d. Students are purposely designed to improve their soft skill in both intrapersonal (independency, critical and analytical thinking) and interpersonal skill (team works and oral communication), as well as basic values including integrity, discipline, hard work, politeness, and confidence)

The Japanese department of Andalas University uses the KKNi curriculum that prepares students for the N3 level in Nouryoku Shiken (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) which has a range of levels from N1 (highest) to N5 (lowest). Nouryoku Shiken (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) is a Japanese government exam and it is conducted at the same time around the world. One of the main aspects that are examined at every level of the Japanese Language Proficiency test is Dokkai. This reflects the fact that Dokkai plays a primary role in Japanese language curriculum system, even though it is an elective course. Encouraging students to take a Dokkai course will eventually help

them to improve their ability in understanding Japanese text. As students become familiar with text in Japanese language, they will undoubtedly perform better in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. If students can pass the Japanese Language Proficiency Test then the Japanese Language Department will also have fulfilled the *KKNI* curriculum standard.

The Dokkai course was previously conducted using Teacher Centered Learning (TCL). The lecturer prepared the course materials such as books written in Japanese language which were then discussed during each meeting by the entire class. The types of texts that are given to the students included narrative texts, folklore texts, and any other type of books that are available for Dokkai course. The books that have been given to the Japanese Language Department Students of Andalas University so far are: *Minna no Nihongo Chukyu 1 - 6*, *Dokusho no Jikan*, *The Nihongo Journal*, "Naze Nihonjin wa Kinben, Kiyuu, Yuufuku nano?", as well as texts from the Japanese Language Proficiency examination. Texts from *Nouryoku Shiken* are given so the students can be familiar with the Dokkai section of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test.

TCL requires the teacher to actively transfer their knowledge to the students; students only passively follow the teacher's instruction by translating the text in small sections or word by word individually. After the reading process, the students are required to answer the questions regarding the texts that have been read in group. However, this teaching method is considered a less optimal way to achieve the expected outcomes of the Dokkai Course that correspond to the *KKNI* standard.

The TCL teaching method presently used in the Dokkai course is only applicable to improve student understanding of *Kanji*, Japanese words and language structures along with an intermediate level of interpretation and translation of Japanese texts. However, it cannot fulfill two of the main aspects of the Dokkai course: to improve student's ability in discussing a Japanese text producing a written text and oral speech to convey the content of Japanese text. This is because the students only work with the exact content of the text during each meeting; they are only encouraged to understand the text, but are not trained to discuss the text orally or in written form. As the result, the actual outcomes of Dokkai course may be less suited to the current curriculum.

The aspects of Dokkai course that are not covered in the current TCL approach consist of making an argument and using Japanese oral and written language and intrapersonal and interpersonal soft skill competencies. The cause of this shortcoming comes from the fact that students are not required to speak in Japanese during Dokkai course sessions. Students work individually instead of in discussion groups, so the student can not practice and improve their interpersonal soft skills. It can be implied that this TCL approach for the Dokkai course is not suitable in fulfilling the purposed outcomes and a different teaching approach is required to fit *KKNI* curriculum.

A pass in a Dokkai course was easier when the TCL approach was used as evidenced by the results of the previous semester before the SCL approach was trialed. The following record is taken from 46 students from Dokkai course of the previous semester.

Table 1: Students grade in Dokkai Last Semester

Course Result	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	E
Number of Students	5	4	3	7	6	8	3	4	6	0
Percentage	10.8 %	8.69%	6.52%	15.22%	13.04%	17.39%	6.52%	8.69%	13.04%	0%

No students got an E grade, but 6 students got D and the mode was C+. This result indicates that TCL does not distributed the knowledge evenly which is represented by the student's record.

Bloom (quoted in Cotton: 2001) stated that critical thinking has the following dimensions:

- a. Knowledge (C1)
- b. Understanding (C2)
- c. Application (C3)
- d. Synthesis-analysis (C4)
- e. Evaluation (C5)
- f. Creativity (C6)

The TCL approach in the Dokkai course will only address the learning outcomes up to C2, to know and to understand. As the result, it might inhibit the ability of the students to reach the *KKNI* standard.

This research proposes an alternative teaching method to deliver the Dokkai course to students. This is a SCL approach that uses small group discussion and could be expected to better fulfil the aims and outcomes of the Dokkai course.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of using small group discussion as a teaching method for the Dokkai course. The merits of

this research lie in its ability as teaching method reference for Dokkai as well as being a case study of small group discussion methodology in classes.

2 METHOD

The TCL approach used by the Japanese Department of Andalas University is considered no longer appropriate to the current situation (Brewer, 1997; Cotton, 2001; Kenz and Greg, 2000). As the result, this research focuses on an alternative Student Centered Learning method adjusted to the needs of the Dokkai course that was titled *nama kyouzai*. The success of this approach was measured.

The research is conducted from February to June 2018 over 5 months. This research is classified as classroom action research, as the lecturer was the researcher who monitored the implementation of the small group discussion approach. It should be noted that the Dokkai course only took place within the classroom.

The implementation of the *nama kyouzai* Dookai course was planned for during syllabus arrangement and discussed in a team teaching discussion forum before the actual implementation.

The small discussion approach was implemented after the midterm examination. There were 6 meetings where the students were required to find their own learning materials (*nama kyouzai*) from various available sources.

At the first class meeting, the lecturer explained the class syllabus and the class plan. From the 2nd to the 7th meeting, the TCL teaching approach was used so students could understand the type of texts used during the Dokkai course. This approach helped the student to be able to find their own learning materials for *nama kyouzai* to be presented in front of the class later in the course. The materials given to the students during the TCL teaching phase were taken from the Japanese Language Proficiency Test to give the students familiarity with the examination. By mid semester, students were expected to be familiar with the type of texts and questions that were usually discussed during Dokkai course and the small group discussion phase was implemented.

The midterm examination took place after the 8th meeting and was based on the texts and questions that had been discussed in class. It was designed to measure students' understanding of this materials that had been given by the lecturer. On the 9th meeting, the lecturer explained the implementation of small group discussions. The lecturer informed the students about how to obtain their own reading materials, present

their findings and formulate their own questions which would then be discussed within the classes.

The 10th meeting was conducted differently from the previous meetings; the students are required to find their own *nama kyouzai* and given to their lecturer one day before the presentation. Students usually collected texts from the following sources

- a. Japanese restaurant menus
- b. Advertisements about tourist destinations in Japan
- c. Advertisements about amusement parks in Japan
- d. Advertisements about tour packages in Japan
- e. Product Advertisements
- f. Advertisements selling Japanese food

The materials could be chosen freely, as the students could access them from the internet. The advertisements that were collected by the students were mostly downloadable leaflets. Before presenting the advertisement, the entire small group were required to discuss the selected materials.

The result of this discussion was then presented in Japanese. The students were encouraged to deliver the message of the text using simplify Japanese language and formulate 3 to 5 questions to be answered by other students during their presentation to ensure that their presentations were understood by the class members. These questions were written in Japanese and had to relate to the text that was presented by the group. The other groups answered the questions through group discussion, the answers were then given to the presentation group to be cohered? and marked.

The final examination was conducted on the 16th meeting and was not conducted as a written text. Instead, each student prepared their own presentation video about a certain Japanese product before this date. The presentation was conducted in Japanese to allow the students to express their creativity. The videos were collected on the day of the examination.

During the implementation of the small group discussion approach on Dokkai course, the lecturer focused on how the student presented their ideas in front of the class. Observations were made regarding the students' ability to use Japanese language, the compatibility of the chosen *nama kyouzai* and their understanding of the text as well as the format of the questions given to the other class members. Observation was required to measure students' understanding of the *nama kyouzai*.

The lecturer also recorded observations during question and answer sessions. The answers to the

questions given by the presentation group were then collected and marked. The lecturer observed the suitability of the questions and their answers as a way to judge the presentation group's ability to formulate questions.

Evaluation was conducted in every meeting at the end of the small group discussion. As the questions from the presentation group were discussed and answered in groups the lecturer was able to conduct an evaluation to measure each group's understanding of the presented materials (Sagala, 2007). Their ability to answer correctly indicated their capacity to read the Japanese text and listen to the presentation in Japanese. The presentation group's ability in formulating the questions and responding to the answers which were given by other participants was also evaluated.

The questions were used to measure the level of understanding of the presented text, the answers were marked based on the comprehension of the questions. The responses to the answers were not to only be about whether they were right or wrong but also to indicate the cause of the misunderstanding and to give a more appropriate answer. Their ability to look for the cause of misinterpretation was part of the evaluation criteria for the presentation group.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Learning Achievement

Based on the learning outcomes, it can be concluded that the small group discussion approach using *nama kyouzai* was successful in achieving all the learning outcomes for the Dokkai course. Students took responsibility for finding their own reading materials and presenting them in front of the class as part of a group project. During the presentation, each members of the group presented their own parts in Japanese.

In presenting the text, the student needed to understand the content of the text. In other words, student should have achieved the required intermediate level of *kanji*, vocabulary and Japanese language structure. The *nama kyouzai* encouraged the students to study in groups to interpret the text, vocabulary and Japanese language structure.

As the student understood the content of the text, they present them in front of the class using simplified Japanese, that is using their own words and not those from the *nama kyouzai* text; except when those words were standard words which were irreplaceable. Each group member presented their part in Japanese and the ability to do this indicated a second level of language achievement, as they demonstrated ability to deliver their argument about certain texts in their own words.

The third language level achievement was fulfilled when the student could speak and write in Japanese as the preparation and delivery of the presentation improved their capacity in using Japanese language. TCL was unable to fulfill this aspect, but small group discussion can easily achieve this level as the students were not only required to present the text but also answer the questions given. The student had to write down their answer on a piece of paper by using appropriate Japanese language so providing opportunity to improve their writing skills.

Development of student intrapersonal and interpersonal soft skills can only be gained through student centered learning method. Group discussion allows each student to interact and to improve their critical thinking and discussion ability. Their capability to communicate and work in team is a positive value that can only be gained through group discussion. Group presentations require responsibility, discipline and independency. Students will realize that the negligence of one student will negatively affect the entire group, so responsibility was required during this Dokkai course.

3.2 Final Mark Distribution

The number of students who took Dokkai course during this semester was around 54 students, an increase from the previous year where number of students was 46 students. The implementation of the small group discussion on Dokkai course resulted in changes in the spread of the students' final marks, as it is showed in table 1.

3 students obtained an E result, not because of their incompetence, but, due to a less than 50% attendance.

Table 2: Students Final Mark

Final Mark Distribution	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	E
Number of Student	10	23	15	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
Percentage	18.5%	42.6%	27.8%	-	-	1.8%	3.7%	-	-	5.6%

3 students obtained a C because they did not come during the presentation, only one of them who asked for an opportunity to improve their grade with an extra assignment. However, they did not do well in this so the student only achieved a C+ for the course. Generally, the implementation of small group discussion on Dokkai course could be regarded as a successful practice. The percentage of students who got A grades for the course has increased by 7.7%, and the percentage of students who got A- increased by 33.9%. An improvement as also shown in the percentage of students who got B+ which increased by 21.28%. In this semester, no student got B and B- for their Dokkai course.

3.3 Students Respond toward the Teaching Method Innovation

The application of small group discussion in the Dokkai course had a positive response from the students. The students were more active during the classes and less dependent on their lecturer. The small group discussions improved student confidence in delivering their arguments as well as improving their Japanese language capability.

The use of *nama kyouzai* also proved successful. The students selected their own reading materials, so they could choose the text based on their interests and consequently fluently present the content of the text in front of the class more easily. During Dokkai class they not only learnt how to present their ideas for the first time, but also discuss as they learnt to clarify misunderstandings using the Japanese language. In addition, students also learnt how to promote products in Japanese language.

At first, the presentation only consisted of one written text, but over the next few weeks the amount of reading material was increased, and the level became more complex.

IV Conclusion

Small group discussion is learning method that is based on a Student Centered Learning approach. During the process, one or more topics will be discussed in group of 3 to 4 students. During the discussion, each member will discuss the topic. As the method was applied in the Dokkai course, it showed significant success in terms of students' grades as well as students' response.

Even though Dokkai is provided as an elective course, it has a primary role in Japanese language curriculum system. It is considered as a main aspect of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. As the number of students with higher Japanese language proficiency level increases, stakeholders demands for

competency in Japanese language graduates of Andalas University will also increase. Dokkai has the highest point in determining student level in Japanese language, so the course should be prepared comprehensively.

The application of small group discussion succeeded in fulfilling the entire course aims and purposes. The course gave each student an opportunity to look for their own Japanese language reading materials (*nama kyouzai*) based on their interests usually from the internet. Most commonly they were

- Japanese restaurant menus
- Advertisements about tourist destinations in Japan
- Advertisements about amusement parks in Japan
- Advertisements about tour packages in Japan
- Product Advertisements
- Advertisements selling Japanese food

Small group discussion fulfils each level of language learning aspects that have been designed including understanding of Kanji, word, and Japanese language structure. *Nama kyouzai* is presented in front of the class by using their own words to make them easily understood by other participants. As the result, students can deliver their ideas in Japanese while improving their language skill.

Each group is also required to formulate 3 to 5 questions that should be answered by other class members. The answer should be written in Japanese which is then collected and marked by the presentation group. It fulfils the element of language learning about improving the ability to write in Japanese.

Students not only work in group but also individually, as each member must present their own part. It will fulfill the learning outcomes of improving soft skill in both inter and intrapersonal, since each student learns how to take responsibility of their own action.

4 CONCLUSION

The result shows an increasing percentage on student who got A for 7,7%, 33,9% for student who got A-, and 21,28% on student who get B+ which are a lot better than the previous semester.

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