



## Factors influencing the learning of Japanese Kanji at the beginner-intermediate level of university students

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### Abstract

When learning Japanese, we have to study six skills including reading comprehension, listening comprehension, conversation, kanji, vocabulary, and grammar. Among them, Kanji or Chinese characters can be said to be the most complicated. The cause is that there are many strokes in the structure, and it is difficult to remember how to write. Therefore, if the learner continues to study in an inappropriate way, situations such as failure or lack of motivation may occur. Therefore, it is expected that university students will be able to answer questions such as what are the beginner-intermediate and intermediate-level Kanji learning methods, how long it takes, and whether there are any special external factors. The paper focuses on finding and confirming appropriate improvement methods for the mentioned issue.

**Keywords:** Japanese, kanji, skills, methods

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### Introduction

According to Oxford *et al.*, (1993)<sup>[1]</sup>, Chinese character education is not teaching Japanese characters, but is aimed at developing learning language skills that are integrated with cognitive development. Early childhood children between the ages of one and a half to six will be interested in writing and will be able to read most hiragana in a short period of time. This is called preliteracy. Therefore, those who study Japanese as their first language will be less complicated if they continue to study in sequence. However, Japanese language education for adults learning Japanese as a second language is not the same. Because what children can learn depends on their age. Therefore, those who study Japanese need to control matters and self-study in order to achieve their goals based on future plans. In order for the author to be able to speak Japanese, learning Japanese as a second language must form the basis of linguistic competence formed in the mother tongue. It is important to note that one-character kanji such as sounds that change depending on many readings and meanings is a difficult task not only for non-kanji area learning but also for kanji area learning (Mori & Shimizu, 2007)<sup>[2]</sup>.

### Literature review

Besides, according to Ogawa (2013), it is difficult for children who learn Chinese characters in the Japanese language department of elementary school to learn Chinese characters composed of complicated morphological elements. In elementary school, the Kanji distribution table for each grade includes 80 first graders, 160-second graders, 200 third-graders, 200 fourth graders, 185 fifth graders, and 181 sixth graders, for a total of 1006 characters. This is because the number of Chinese characters in N2 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test is almost the same. In other words, Japanese Kanji not only has a complicated morphological structure composed of multiple visual elements, but also remembers radicals in order, which makes the learner's problem difficult. However, the two studies of the two authors are Japanese learners as a second language when foreigners who use hieroglyphs such as China and South Korea and foreigners who use the Latin alphabet are studying Chinese characters. Did not mention the impact on the specific study of (Yamazaki *et al.*, 1997)<sup>[3]</sup>. With Kandrac (2020), learners usually tend to be saturated after studying 1000 Chinese characters and have to go back to the beginning to find other Chinese character strategies. Therefore, it is difficult for people who use Latin letters to learn Chinese characters. Similarly, Vietnamese was created based on Latin letters, so even today's Vietnamese have a hard time studying Chinese characters. Moreover, as mentioned in the author's research reference above, only the problem of studying Chinese characters was mentioned, but the factors and causes of the influence of learning Chinese characters were not mentioned. Therefore, this study reveals that question. Moreover, since Vietnamese currently use the Latin alphabet, learning Chinese characters is similar to that of non-Kanji-speaking Japanese learners. According to Yamazaki *et al.*, 1997)<sup>[3]</sup>, this is a difficult learning process for non-kanji-speaking Japanese learners. In particular, many learners find it difficult in the early intermediate stages when the number of characters increases and the glyphs become complicated.

In addition, Kandrac's research was analyzed by comparing and analyzing Chinese character textbooks used overseas. The author mentioned a new learning method along with "Kanji in Context", which I think the distribution of kanji was appropriate. What is the efficient and systematic way to rearrange the levels of Chinese

characters based on multiple criteria? The new Chinese character level table has been rearranged to help learners learn 1,000 Chinese characters quickly and effectively. However, the efficiency of this method was not confirmed in the actual learning results. Moreover, according to Paxton & Svetanant (2014) <sup>[4]</sup>, the difficulty of learning Chinese characters is the complexity of Chinese characters. It is conceivable that the Kanji writing system uses very complicated characters compared to the alphabet. Speaking of the author's hypothesis, each learner has various ways of understanding complicated Chinese characters. Especially for beginners learning Chinese characters. In this study, a reform plan for learning methods was raised. Similarly, for beginners, the experiment was done for a long time. The author's goal is to improve the learning of Chinese character strategies and devise self-study of Chinese characters in the near future. Therefore, this method of learning Chinese characters requires that each learner analyze the Chinese characters as radicals. As a result, although the number of Chinese characters remembered by the research participants increased, they did not create a unified Chinese character strategy. Furthermore, according to a study by (Mori & Shimizu, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup>, for intermediate learners, a long-term method of learning Chinese characters was mentioned. When it comes to learning Chinese characters, the image of individual learning often comes to mind, and some say that "autonomous learning" should be promoted. However, the current situation is that it is left to the learners without giving sufficient information on the specific method of learning Chinese characters and the path of learning. Then the problem was not mentioned as the most efficient learning method. In addition, (Yamazaki *et al.*, 1997) <sup>[3]</sup> showed that the current learning of Chinese characters reflects the differences in their learning objectives. The author finds trends and goals based on the learning method preferred by intermediate students.

### **Status of Japanese Learners and Ways to Access Kanji**

Since Japanese is a difficult language to specialize in, learners have a hard time learning it. The reason is that the Japanese writing system includes various formats such as hiragana, katakana, romaji, and kanji, as well as various grammar. In particular, Chinese characters are seen as annoying to learners. The reason for this difficulty is that the complexity of the number of strokes, the reading, and the difficulty of memorizing and writing letters have caused many obstacles to the learning of Japanese for learners. With (Yamazaki *et al.*, 1997) <sup>[3]</sup>, complexity, opaque sound form correspondence, multiple readings, and a large number of Chinese characters all add to the difficulty of learning Chinese characters for Latin alphabet learners. Foreigners in the west must face many difficulties in being able to fluent in Chinese characters (Mori & Shimizu, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup>.

However, Japanese people are also having a hard time learning Chinese characters. In Japan, there is a Japanese language course that teaches Chinese characters to children from elementary school to high school, and children after elementary school can learn about 1000 Chinese characters. However, even if you grow up, you need to continue to improve your Chinese characters. Since the surrounding environment looks like all Chinese characters, the Japanese can learn Chinese characters faster than foreigners. Also, even if they are exposed to Chinese characters, Japanese people make mistakes in recognizing Chinese characters after hearing homonyms. According to Yamazaki *et al.*, (1997) <sup>[3]</sup>, a common mistake at this time is a misconversion that selects homonyms. The mistake of mistakenly selecting homonyms does not only occur during conversion on a personal computer or word processor. Then, the problem with this error is that the learner does not understand the exact meaning of the Chinese characters and does not clearly remember the details of the Chinese characters. According to Maruyama's research, the most commonly used methods for studying Japanese kanji are "learn the overall shape of the kanji" and "practice writing many times." However, Japanese sometimes cannot understand the meaning of Chinese characters. This leads the Japanese to easily miss the homonyms of Chinese characters (Tanji *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>.

In countries that belong to the Kanji cultural sphere such as Japan, China, South Korea, and Vietnam, many Japanese learners can quickly reach an intermediate level. Especially Korean and Chinese. As Koreans learn the Chinese language system, both Chinese and Koreans face similar difficulties when learning Japanese. Koreans have been taught Chinese since junior high school and high school. The average number of Chinese characters is 1800. However, the learned Chinese characters have the meaning of Chinese Chinese. Also, according to Paxton & Svetanant (2014) <sup>[4]</sup>, this kanji has different character types and fonts from the Japanese common kanji, and the meaning and usage are also different, so great care must be taken in Japanese kanji education. Therefore, in order to understand the Japanese way of thinking and life, it is necessary to master the language of that country well. In Korea today, the frequency of using Chinese is reduced for young people, and there is a tendency to use only Hangeul characters. After studying Chinese, I don't use it many times, which reduces the ability of young people to use Chinese characters. This adds to the reason why Koreans have difficulty learning Chinese characters. Also, the main reason for the difficulty is that it is difficult to understand the meaning of Chinese characters, and I can't remember how to pronounce them.

There are two cases for students learning Chinese characters who use the Latin alphabet: beginners and intermediates. There is a clear difference in the tendency of students in these two cases to think about the problem of learning Chinese characters. Since there is a big difference between Chinese characters and the Latin alphabet for beginners in non-Kanji cultural spheres, it is a problem that learning Chinese characters is difficult. Beginners must become accustomed to the overall shape of the Chinese character and learn its meaning. One of the problems that arise with (Mori & Shimizu, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup> is the need to explicitly instruct JFL learners from the background of the alphabet about the fundamental differences between Chinese characters and the alphabet. Widely applied mnemonics are methods of analyzing Chinese characters into radicals or studying according to

the pronunciation of the placed Chinese characters. Therefore, the "write many times" method supplements the mnemonic method. Beginners learn Chinese characters first, so most people choose this learning method to understand the complexity of Chinese characters. Other methods of learning Chinese characters, such as "look up a dictionary," "write notes," and "read a lot of text," are often used. According to Oxford *et al.*, (1993)<sup>[1]</sup>, one of the criticisms of learning Chinese characters is that not only teachers, but students themselves tend to study carefully how to "write many times". According to the materials of the Gamage survey, 116 university students were asked about the frequency of application of the Chinese character acquisition method of "writing many times", "learning the meaning of Chinese characters by radicals", and "learning the meaning while writing Chinese characters". Non-Kanji cultural spheres use much more than Kanji cultural spheres. Then, this method is said to be very effective and tends to be continued by many learners even after reaching intermediate level. When studying Chinese characters at home, you need to have a Chinese character textbook outside of class hours. There are several kanji textbooks that are common to foreigners, such as "Remembering the kanji," "Guide to remember kanji," and "Basic kanji book." In the book, the characters of Chinese characters are analyzed by the radicals and the meanings are supplied in English.

### **Recommendation of Kanji Practice Book for University Students**

The content of the teaching materials includes reading, writing, meaning-making, and vocabulary based on sections and topics for beginners. According to Richmond (2005), at the basic level, there is a balance of lessons and practice in both reading and writing kanji. It is important to give an oriental explanation of Chinese characters during the introductory period. In particular, we will carefully teach non-Kanji-speaking learners how to write, but it is necessary to make Kanji-speaking learners pay attention to how to read Chinese characters and their differences from their mother tongue, and to emphasize reading practice. In addition, this teaching material has abundant homework for learners' practice.

In the beginner's class, learners teach every Chinese character, but in the intermediate level, the number of Chinese characters increases so much that students have to discover their habits. Each word often combines two or more Chinese characters. Therefore, students must discover how to learn the meaning and reading of Chinese characters. This material focuses on intermediate students. While learning Chinese characters, the goal is to organize the knowledge of the Chinese character vocabulary in terms of glyphs, readings, meanings, and usages, make each learner aware of their weaknesses, and discover the optimal learning method. In the Japanese language course at the University of Tsukuba, learners participate in the "Transition from Beginner to Intermediate" class after completing the beginner's class. This class aims to familiarize students with intermediate vocabulary and lay the foundation for student self-study (Paxton & Svetanant (2014)<sup>[4]</sup>.

The course is divided into two semesters, a spring semester and an autumn semester, each lasting 10-15 weeks. In the spring semester, lectures will continue to hold vocabulary usage and reviews. Activities can be broadly divided into "introduction section", "practice section" and "summary section". The professor will be divided into pairs of Kanji-speaking and non-Kanji-speaking students, hold discussions, give presentations on topics, and give homework. There is a number of test in the semester. However, instead of listing the student's results, the professor discusses improving his kanji proficiency with the learner. Each student receives a "review sheet". The "Reflection Sheet" records the results and reasons for each lesson, as well as future plans based on the challenges and ways to overcome them that were considered after this test. After the spring semester, it took learners a long time to understand the Lesson. I'm gradually getting used to the learning Chinese character sheet, but the amount of vocabulary I can get is not so much compared to my desire. In the next fall semester, lessons will be lesson earlier because the professor will assume that the learner has become accustomed to the Chinese vocabulary. However, the results in terms of points are not as expected. In addition, the result of "Initiation of autonomous Kanji sac learning" was achieved. In the final "Reflection Sheet", more than 80% of learners agreed that they needed to recognize and improve their weaknesses. From the results of classes that apply the "Intermediate kanji book", learners must clearly understand their learning ability from beginner to intermediate level. What's more, you don't have to rush to improve your kanji skills slowly and robustly (Toyoda *et al.*, 2013)<sup>[6]</sup>.

According to Yamazaki *et al.*, (1997)<sup>[3]</sup>, this study was based on 13 Kanji-speaking students and 23 non-Kanji-speaking students. The course lasts 12 weeks and has 1 hour of instruction and 1.5 hours of homework each week. There are two tests in the Kanji course, the first at the beginning of the study and the second in the end. In the test, Kanji-speaking and non-Kanji-speaking students determine the number of kanji they know, which is the goal of the course. During the lesson, the number of Chinese characters will be decided. Teachers provide students with homework to improve their Chinese character learning strategies. The two groups have an independent scholarship, and can improve their knowledge of kanji and study vocabulary. The students decided to study together in the course on Chinese characters. I think that non-Chinese students often have difficulty learning Chinese characters and spend time and ingenuity because they have never touched Chinese characters and do not feel familiar with them. On the other hand, it is easy to take the Chinese character test, and when taking the test, it is likely to use a method that can judge better Chinese characters. However, students outside the Kanji system were able to correctly memorize up to 56.5% of Kanji. The cause of the ratio was not yet understood by the author. Students in both groups made progress during the semester and improved their learning of Chinese characters. Therefore, non-Chinese-speaking students have no experience of recognizing meanings and pronunciations by looking at letters and letters or reading sounds, and if they read Chinese

characters over and over again in order to improve their learning of Chinese characters, It is necessary to be able to hear (Mori, 1998) <sup>[5]</sup>.

According to Paxton & Svetanant (2014) <sup>[4]</sup>, in the spring semester of 2013, various students who belong to the Japanese Language and Culture Training International Student Course and the Short-term Study Abroad Japanese Culture Special Program in the "Kanji Study" class at the Center for Japanese Language and Culture Education, Osaka University. I had the opportunity to teach kanji to 16 students with nationalities and backgrounds in learning kanji (Japanese / Japanese culture training international students: 12 students from Korea, Turkey, India, Romania, Sweden, Thailand, Bulgaria, Hungary, etc., short-term Study abroad Japanese Japanese culture special program students: China, Canada, Thailand (3 people)). Considering only the test measures, it is not necessary to practice writing Chinese characters, but considering the importance of students outputting information in Japanese in various situations in the future, we are also incorporating exercises in writing Chinese characters. In addition to experiencing how common kanji are actually used in sentences and checking the reading of kanji, various topics include politics and cooking so that you can feel the recent situation in Japan., Buzzwords, education, travel, etc. are taken care of. At the beginning of each lesson, a review test of the Chinese characters learned last time was conducted to check what kind of wrong answers were common, to draw attention to the person himself, and to make use of it in the subsequent lessons. The results show that Kanji-speaking students have a lower percentage of Kanji mistakes, especially when homonym errors and simplified Chinese structural disorders account for the highest percentage. In contrast, non-Kanji students who can use general Kanji well belong to the group that does not confuse Kanji and the group that understands the structure of Kanji well. Using specialized Chinese vocabulary in different areas can be difficult to remember, but it can help you understand and learn many new vocabularies as well as general knowledge.

According to Mori, 1998) <sup>[5]</sup> a study from the Japanese language class at Suansunandha Rajabhat University shows that students used mind mapping methods to learn Chinese characters. According to the author's research, the students at this school showed a positive attitude toward the mind mapping method. This method shows a positive attitude toward the mind mapping method, which divides the human brain into two parts and performs various tasks. The left side is mainly in charge of logic, words, analysis, enumeration, etc., and the right side is in charge of multidimensional space, imagination, shapes, etc. This is clearly demonstrated by helping learners identify their knowledge and memorization of Chinese characters. It helps students organize their research time on the subject matter and stimulates their imagination. In addition, it shows that students are limited to learning on various platforms and media, categorizing meanings, memorizing Chinese characters, and helping improve the interaction between students and teachers. By applying the mind mapping method to the teaching of Chinese characters, it is possible to systematize the number of learned words, create a unique mind map, and increase learning motivation. To learn Chinese, students have a positive and happy attitude when learning Chinese. However, the article argues that in order for students to use this method fluently, it is necessary to plan the number of Chinese characters at some point during the semester, and it will take time to absorb the entire amount. When applying to university, the Japanese language learning program needs to be extended to allow students to adapt to new learning methods and spend more time practicing Chinese characters. This can make it difficult to link the program with the content of each layer (Oxford *et al.*, 1993)<sup>[1]</sup>.

Yatabe (2009) offers 90-minute classes per week, 15 times each for the first and second semesters, for international students (graduate school doctoral students, master's students, research students) from non-Kanji-speaking countries. In class, we will focus on basic Chinese characters and Chinese character idioms in the specialized vocabulary necessary for research activities. Specifically, each time, the reading and meaning of a new kanji, the reading and meaning of a kanji compound word that is a component of it, the confirmation of the compound word group and compound word composition using a common kanji, and the short sentence 2) containing the term. Practice reading comprehension. In that case, learn idioms with high familiarity, connect with the students' existing concepts, and when you see the kanji notation, "understand the meaning" and "aim to acquire the processing skills that can be pronounced, the same kanji vocabulary and Kanji compound word components may be submitted repeatedly to connect to memory and retention. When confirming a group of compound words whose components are common Chinese characters, the spread of the network is shown in the figure and visually conscious. The emphasis is on expanding the network. By narrowing down the Chinese characters to be learned, it is possible to connect with existing concepts, reduce the burden of understanding the meaning and content, establish by repeating, and take the initiative of students who match their specialty. It is expected that the learning effect will be improved in terms of taking (Yamazaki *et al.*, 1997) <sup>[3]</sup>.

For Chinese students, Kobayashi (1994) is in charge of Kanji supplementary lessons for learners who do not know Kanji at the International Student Center of Hokkaido University, but half of the students have already learned Kanji. have. Providing declarative knowledge of Chinese characters in class, practicing reading and writing within that range, and testing, that is, it is not always possible to search for that knowledge in real life. When studying Hanning, it is essential to provide the basic knowledge to organically build Hanyu's knowledge. However, at the same time, it is also necessary to have classroom activities so that learners can practically use the knowledge of Kanji The purpose of the lesson is to increase the accumulation of learners' knowledge of Chinese characters, and there seems to be an implicit premise that the accumulated knowledge can be placed in actual usage situations and searched. The purpose of this method is to improve the knowledge of Chinese characters, and the accumulated knowledge can be examined in actual use cases. Since then, home-study

Chinese characters not only memorize, but also apply to many disciplines of jargon to absorb new words and distinguish reading sounds (Mori, 1998) <sup>[5]</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The situation of Vietnamese university students learning Chinese characters is still worrisome. First, there is a great demand for learners to learn Chinese characters at university. This includes learning methods such as professor class hours, direct self-study at university, group study, and a combination of support facilities. The improvement plan will be based on the professor's evaluation and student suggestions for the degree of the student. Apart from improving the university, students must do things such as managing their time, planning self-study, and learning methods. In addition to learning Chinese characters in class, in order to practice your Chinese characters and Japanese proficiency, look for a short-term translation/interpretation job, join a group that learns Japanese outside of the university, and interact with friends about our learning experience. The desire for innovation is important to be able to propose an education plan that suits the modern trends in student-centric teaching methods, in order to create a special case.

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