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Enhancing Listening Skills through Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in Chokai 5 Class for JLPT N2 Preparation: A Classroom Action Research

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in the Chokai 5 (listening) class. It is designed for those who wish to pass the JLPT N2. This research involved sixth-semester students of the Japanese Literature Study Program in Language and Culture Faculty of Maranatha Christian University. Using classroom action research (CAR), this study gathered the data using observations in pre-cycle, cycle 1, and cycle 2. In addition, this study also collected data through the simulation exam of JLPT N2 and the questionnaires on the students' perceptions of the PjBL model. The results of the study confirmed a substantial increase of 26.7% in the number of students achieving a minimum score after participating in the JLPT N2 listening simulation, compared to a pre-cycle frequency. The difference was statistically significant (P <.05). The questionnaire results showed positive perceptions of learning using PjBL. Thus, it can be understood that the PjBL method can make students enthusiastic about independent learning to improve JLPT N2 listening score results.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, Chokai 5, JLPT N2, CAR

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N2 is an essential milestone for Japanese language learners, marking a high level of proficiency (Nishizawa et al., 2022). Among its various components, the listening section poses considerable challenges for students, especially when understanding conversational texts and monologues in real-life contexts. Students often

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struggle with these tasks due to limited vocabulary, infrequent exposure to authentic listening materials, and difficulty understanding the conversation's context and underlying meaning. As students approach this level, it becomes clear that mastering the linguistic and cognitive aspects of listening is essential for success.

Therefore, effective learning strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world language use are essential. Quality learning must involve all students in the class actively. Therefore teaching method is needed that can stimulate this (Stovia et al., 2024). One potential solution to this challenge lies in the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). PjBL, as an active learning approach, emphasizes the importance of engaging students in solving real-world problems and producing tangible outputs. This model promotes student-centered learning, which encourages higher-order thinking, collaboration, and independent problem-solving.

Harini (2021) stated that the project-based learning model is a learning model that provides opportunities for educators to manage learning in the classroom by involving project work. Project work is a form of work that contains complex tasks based on highly challenging questions and problems. It leads students to design, solve problems, and make decisions. With PjBL, students conduct investigative activities and get opportunities to work independently.

The characteristics of the Project-Based Learning model include students facing concrete problems, finding solutions, and working on projects in teams to solve these problems. In the PjBL model, students understand the content and develop skills to play a role in society. Skills developed in PjBl include communication and presentation, organizational and time management, research and inquiry, self-assessment and reflection, group participation and leadership, and critical thinking (Loyens et al., 2023).

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Based on the characteristics of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) learning model mentioned above, learning activities emphasize problem investigations and finding solutions (Al-Tabany, 2014). The following are the stages of implementing PjBL in the classroom: (1) Define the topics and subtopics to be discussed by creating a group; (2) Plan project work rules; (3) Create an activity schedule; (4) Presentation planning; (5) Conduct an evaluation presentation; and (6) Evaluation.

Previous research on PjBL in Japanese language learning has focused on other skills, such as grammar (*Bunpo*) (Amril et al., 2022) or speaking skills (Angelina, 2020). Listening skills (chokai) are an important aspect in learning a foreign language, especially Japanese. However, students often have difficulty understanding what they hear (Zia & Karnawati, 2022). This research specifically uses PjBL in the Chokai 5 course, an advanced listening skills course in the Japanese Literature Study Program, Maranatha Christian University.

This course aims to improve the students' listening skills to achieve JLPT N2 graduation, which has not been studied much in previous research. The PjBL method has been applied in various studies (Ashraf et al., 2025), with results showing an increase in student activity, problem-solving, and creativity. However, its implementation in learning to listen to Japanese (*Chokai*) at the advanced level, with a focus on passing JLPT N2, is a new contribution to the field of Japanese language education. Previous studies have not explicitly linked the PjBL method to internationally certified Japanese exam preparation.

Focusing on the type of JLPT N2 listening questions, the compulsory book used in this course is *the Nihongo Noryokushiken Supiido Masuta Mondaishu N2 book*. The book is directly related to the needs of students to pass the JLPT N2 exam. In JLPT N2, the grammar and words used in listening

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questions are everyday conversations (Nguyen Ngoc Nguyen, 2022).This study discusses in detail the types of questions in the JLPT N2 exam (*kadai rikai, pointo rikai, gaiyou rikai, sokuji outou, tougou rikai*) and how PjBL can help students understand each type of question. Previous studies have more generally addressed the improvement of overall skills without specifically targeting subtypes of questions in certification exams.

The purpose of this study is to describe the students' responses to the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model for Chokai 5 courses. This study focuses on the improvement of students' listening skills through the Project-Based Learning model.

The hypotheses in this study are: (1) The implementation of the project-based learning (PjBL) method can increase students' learning activity in the Chokai 5 course, and (2) The implementation of the project-based learning (PjBL) method can increase points on the JLPT N2 listening simulation exam.

METHODS

Using Classroom Action Research (CAR), this study focused on changing the current real conditions into expected conditions. This study used mixed methods that combined qualitative and quantitative research elements. It aimed to obtain a broader understanding of current and future phenomena. With each element of numerical and narrative data integrated, this methodology provides a more in-depth and holistic analysis (Takona, 2024).

The quantitative analysis calculated the increase in average scores from pre-cycle, cycle 1, and cycle 2. The percentage increase in the number of students reached the minimum score (15.5 points). A simple statistical analysis was employed to see the improvement in learning outcomes. The qualitative analysis evaluated the questionnaire results to understand the

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students' perceptions and experiences. The interpretation of reflection and observations were also conducted to see the effectiveness of the PjBL method.

Based on the research design, this study used the classroom action research model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014). Each cycle included the following: 1. Planning: formulating the problem before conducting research, determining objectives and making an action plan, including creating research instruments, namely observation sheets and interview guidelines. 2. Implementation and observation (Action and Observation): actions taken to build an understanding of the concept, namely the implementation of the project-based learning model (PjBL), as well as observing the results of the implementation of the PjBL learning model. 3. Reflection: the act of reviewing or analyzing, seeing, and considering the results of actions based on an observation sheet filled out by an observer. This reflection stage was decisive. It determined what actions must be taken next and whether to continue the implementation of learning in the next cycle or stop it because it has achieved the predetermined target, as shown in the indicators of learning success. 4. Revision Plan: a plan designed by the researcher based on the results of reflection from observers in a certain cycle to be implemented in the next cycle.

The type of data used was primary data. In this study, the primary data were collected directly from primary sources. The data were in the form of the results of the JLPT N2 listening exam simulation and the results of student questionnaires.

This research was conducted in the language laboratory, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Maranatha Christian University, Jl Surya Sumantri no 65 Bandung. The number of subjects studied was 15 students in the 2020 class who took Chokai 5. The research began at the 5th meeting on March 15, 2023, and ended on May 17, 2023.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Cycle Description

Conventional approaches were used to carry out the pre-cycle learning process. The instructor played audio along with the questions. Each form of *kadai rikai*, *pointo rikai*, *gaiyourikai*, *sokuji outou*, and *tougou rikai* had one question. The teacher then gave each student a specific amount of time to work on the problem. By giving a lecture in front of the class and holding class discussions to go over the right responses, the instructor employed a teaching strategy. Each challenge in this learning process included a discussion of topics pertaining to Japanese sentence structure and patterns.

The observation data at this pre-cycle stage indicated that students were typically passive throughout learning activities. Many students sat and listened to the teacher's explanations during the learning process and talked to their friends. They failed to take notes on the topic and did not actively demonstrate curiosity. They were reluctant to ask the teacher questions when they were unsure.

Additionally, a JLPT N2 listening exam simulation was administered using the traditional technique. The simulation outcomes were then contrasted with the outcomes of the project-based learning teaching paradigm.

Table 1. Pre-cycle simulation results

Respondent number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Pretest	13	17	13	14	10	12	11	16	15	10	12	17	16	15	14

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Table 1 shows the results of the pre-cycle JLPT N2 simulation exam. According to the jlpt.jp website, the JLPT N2 pass rate is 50%. So it can be understood that the minimum point to pass the exam is 15.5 from 31 JLPT N2 listening simulation questions. The results of the pre-cycle showed that the number of students who passed JLPT N2 was 4 students or 26.6%.

Cycle 1 Description

Using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model, this research was carried out in two cycles. Each cycle had four stages: planning, the implementation of actions, observation and evaluation, and reflection. The cycle consisted of two meetings (100 min each). Cycle one: 5th and 6th meetings were held on Wednesday, 15 March 2023 and Wednesday 22 March 2023.

Cycle 1 was carried out by explaining the research process and introducing students to the PjBL method, describing the stages to be carried out in two meetings in each cycle. Each group had to create a PowerPoint presentation to present their project to solve predetermined JLPT N2 questions. Students had to justify their thinking for each answer choice. After each presentation, the lecturer would offer feedback explaining mistakes in the presentation and giving the class a chance to correct them.

Stages of PjBL Implementation

The stages carried out in the PjBL method are as follows;

Planning

Researchers prepared learning tools such as lesson plans, JLPT N2 listening, and audio materials. They also prepared the simulation test

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questions and a questionnaire about student impressions of the PjBL learning model.

Implementation of Action

In carrying out the implementation of the action, the steps of teaching using the PjBL model are as follows: (1) Students were divided into small groups. Each group consisted of 3 students. Each group carried out a real project (connecting the problem). (2) Each group has explained the tasks and responsibilities (setting the structure) that must be carried out by their group in practice. (3) Each group of students was given 1 set of different sample questions containing 5 types of questions on JLPT N2. Each type of problem was given 2 questions, including the types of questions *kadai rikai, pointo rikai, gaiyou rikai, sokuji outo* and *tougou rikai* along with different audio. Each group tried their best to identify the problem faced according to their knowledge. (4) Students in each group sought information from various sources (books, guidelines, and other sources) or asked the accompanying experts to gain an understanding of the problem. (5) With the information obtained, students worked together and discussed how to understand the problem and find solutions (produce the product) to the problem, which were immediately applied. (6) Each group presented the results. Explain the answer to the problem, and explained why the answer was chosen and considered correct. (7) If the answer was wrong, a class discussion was held to find out the correct answer. The teacher gave specific tricks and tips for solving the 5 types of problems.

Observation and Evaluation

After cycle 1 was carried out, the teacher gave JLPT N2 simulation exam questions with 5 types of questions.

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Table 2. Simulation exam results cycle

Respondent's number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Cycle 1	15	21	14	16	13	15	14	15	16	13	14	21	18	16	15

The results in table 2 provided evidence of the program impact. Students showed better performance in the post-cycle than the pre-cycle. Only 26.7% (4 students) achieved at least 50% (15.5 points out of 31) during the pre-cycle. This slight percentage reduction increased up to 40% (six students) after Cycle 1 as input-the result. There was an improvement of the sudents' listening comprehension.

From the results of the interviews after cycle 1, the students still found it difficult to solve the problems because the audio was too fast. According to the students, the types of questions *sokuji outou* and *tougou rikai* were the most difficult. The second type of question was multiple-choice. It was not written on the question sheet, so students had to concentrate more on listening to multiple-choice questions. Then the type of question *tougou rikai* was a long conversation question. Students were required to concentrate on listening and then understand the contents of the conversation carefully. Students must understand the content of the whole story and the speaker's intention then chose the right answer. In addition, unlike other types of questions where the answer choices were written, in this type of question, the answer choices were not written but expressed in the audio. Therefore, it required strong concentration and understanding.

Cycle 2 Description

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First, the second cycle was planned which focused precisely on the improvement of the students' understanding that had been identified based on the evaluation of cycle 1. The second cycle consisted of two meetings: that took place on Wednesday, May 11, 2023, and Wednesday, May 17, 2023, with a duration of 100 minutes each.

In Cycle 2, the planning included some improvements to increase engagement and student performance. This added the motivation of giving affirmation to students, reaffirming strategies when answering questions, especially for *sokuji outou* and *tougou rikai*, which within the class students found most difficult. Each student group completed three questions on all five of the question types found in the JLPT N2 exam. It was in line with (Qi et al., 2023) which stated that learning in a group increases confidence.

Observation and Evaluation

At this point, a simulation test of JLPT N2 listening was carried out to measure student performance improvements and whether the minimum target score (15.5) was achieved. Table 3 shows the results of the simulation.

Table 3. Cycle 2 test simulation results

Respondent's number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Cycle 2	16	25	15	18	15	17	15	16	16	14	15	17	19	15	15

The results of the JLPT N2 listening simulation test after cycle 2 was carried out, showed a slight increase compared to cycle 1 with 8 students (53.3%) who managed to exceed 15.5 points from 31 JLPT N2 questions. Although the increase was not too high compared to the simulation results after cycle 1, which was 40%, there was an increase in the correct question answer points for each student. JLPT N2 questions, especially listening, are difficult questions for students who do not have experience living in Japan.

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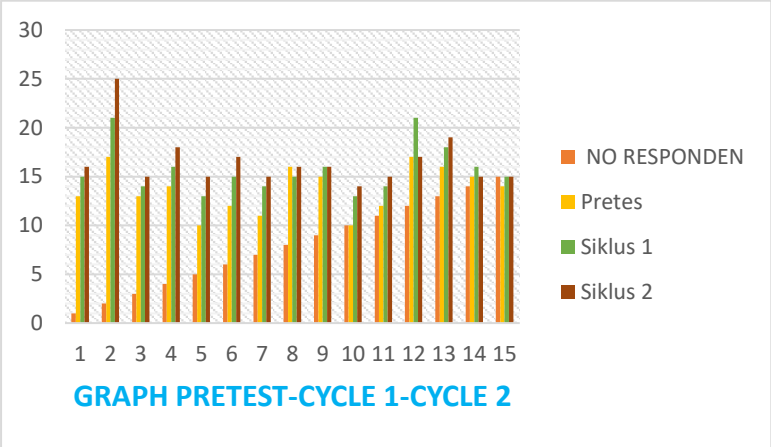

Figure 1. Results of JLPT N2 simulation

Figure 1 is the result of JLPT N2 simulation test points pre-cycle, cycle 1, and cycle 2. In the figure, it can be seen that the points of students' abilities in the pre-cycle, cycle 1, and cycle 2 taken from JLPT N2 questions have increased. Although the increase in students who got at least 15.5 points after the project-based learning method in cycle 1 and cycle 2 was not too high, there was an increase in correct answer points in cycle 1 and cycle 2.

From pre-cycle to cycle 1, 14 students (93%) experienced an increase in correct answers. In cycle 2, 12 students (80%) experienced an increase in correct answers compared to cycle 1. 2 students (13.35) had the same correct answers in cycle 1 and cycle 2. While 1 student (6.6%) the correct answer points in cycle 1 and cycle 2 decreased by 1 point.

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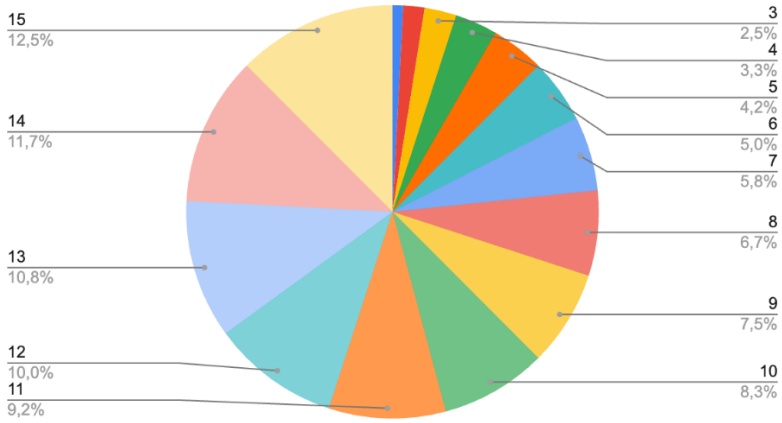

Figure 2. Questionnaire results

During the pre-cycle and cycle 1, 14 students (93%) showed an improvement in the number of correct answers. In cycle 2, 12 students (80%) showed an increase in the number of correct answers as compared to cycle 1. Two students (13.35%) had the same score in both cycles, while only one student (6.6%) experienced a decrease of 1 point in the number of correct answers between cycle 1 and cycle 2.

Based on the questionnaire results, most students initially did not like the PjBL method. It was because the method required them to think actively, look for references, engage in group discussions, and try to create PowerPoint presentations. However, after cycle 1, they started to like the PjBL method because it was easier to understand the JLPT N2 listening questions. Even though the questions in the JLPT N2 simulation were different, since they were trained together, students became more critical in solving the questions. This is in accordance with the results of the research by Setiawan, Dedi, and Nurmala (2022) and Loyens et al. (2023) that showed an increase in students' positive perceptions of project-based learning because it provided direct

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experience relevant to the world of work, increased learning motivation, and strengthened analytical and problem-solving abilities.

CONCLUSION

Project-based learning method in teaching Chokai 5 courses effectively improves the ability to do JLPT N2 Listening questions. Based on the pre-cycle simulation test results, 26.6% of students achieved a minimum passing score of 15.5, which increased to 40% in cycle 1. Then in cycle 2, the percentage of students who reached a minimum of 15.5 points increased by 13.3% to 53.3%. This score difference was statistically significant with $p < 0.05$. Although there is an increase, the types of *sokuji outou* and *tougou rikai* questions need further attention. According to the students, those types are the most difficult. The right learning strategy is needed so that the students can overcome the difficulty of understanding these two types of questions. The questionnaire results showed the students' positive perception of learning using PjBL. Initially, the students had difficulty with the learning method, which required them to be more proactive. However, after going through cycle 1 and cycle 2, they could feel the benefits. Thus, the project-based learning method can make students enthusiastic about independent learning to increase the results of JLPT N2 listening scores.

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