CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Finding enough opportunities to practice is crucial to mastering a foreign language. Storing a linguistic knowledge of a certain foreign language does not suffice for speaking, listening, reading and writing in everyday usages. To activate the stored knowledge and to be able to communicate in the target language, it is important to practice in various situations. It gives learners opportunities to apply their knowledge and also to develop their communication strategies to overcome the difficulties in real situations. In addition to that, they can get information on various registers such as formal and informal speeches. Further, through these real applications and trials, learners can find motivation to continue studying the language.

Students who study Japanese as a foreign language in Japan can easily find opportunities to practice since they live in an environment where the target language is used in everyday life. However, Japanese as a foreign language learners outside of Japan have difficulties in finding such opportunities, which is one of the major obstacles for them in their language learning endeavour. Studies have shown that most of the Japanese as a foreign language learners in Malaysia don't have enough chances to practice Japanese outside of their classrooms (National Institute of Japanese Language, 2005; Suzana Ismail, 2004). The National Institute of Japanese Language reported that, in Malaysia, about 70 % of the students studying Japanese in secondary schools, colleges and universities have no chance of practicing the language outside of their classrooms.

However, these days opportunities for learners outside of Japan to practice Japanese are numerous due to the developments of computer and internet technologies. Internet technologies have made it much easier for learners to get reading materials, such as news articles, and also listening materials such as audio and video material. As for opportunities to converse in the target language, video chat systems have played a major role. In short, recent technological developments have increased opportunities for language learners to practice the target language outside of their classrooms.

1.2   Background of the study

The rising prevalence and convenience of digital tools such as the internet and DVDs have made it easier for both language teachers and learners to get video materials such as dramas, movies and news as their aids for teaching and learning languages respectively.

In accordance to the above mentioned digital development, researchers have looked into the use of video in the instruction of Japanese language. Takahashi (2006) reported on classroom activities using TV dramas in an intermediate Japanese language course. The purpose of this course was to enable the students to understand and enjoy dramas in Japanese and to improve their abilities to speak out what they have understood and thought while watching the videos. She used four video materials and each material had a specific objective, such as describing the scenes, imagining the characters' feelings, learning the colloquial spoken forms, and noticing the differences of expressions used among different age groups. She designed various activities and prepared additional materials such as handouts and reading materials based on the each specific goal.

Sugiyama (2005) analyzed the students' comprehension of TV news used as materials in his class. The aims of this class were not only limited to understanding the particular news' contents but also to develop listening strategies. He intentionally didn't conduct the warming-up session before the students listened to the TV news so that the students could develop their listening strategies such as guessing the unknown words and the meaning of the content from the information they collected while viewing.

Learners' use of video materials was reported by the National Institute of Japanese Language. The National Institute of Japanese Language (2005) studied the learning resources used by Malaysian learners of Japanese. The study reported the ranking of study materials they frequently used outside their classrooms. The top three were as follows; the most frequently used category was Video, VCD and DVD; TV was ranked as the second; comic books and animations were ranked as the third. This study also reported the reasons for using these materials. The top six were as follows; "It is enjoyable" was ranked the highest; "To expose myself to Japanese", "To see how much I can understand", "To improve and keep my proficiency level", "To get various information", "To know about Japan and Japanese people" were equally ranked as the second reasons.

To summarize the previous studies above, the merits of using video materials can be condensed into the below three points. First, video materials can be used to enhance listening skills, especially the informal colloquial conversation styles, which are considered to be difficult to get used to. Informal colloquial conversation styles are hard to acquire even for learners living in Japan, because those styles are used only among people whose relationships are close. Also, learners in Japan tend to be more exposed to Japanese in formal settings such as in classes, where people use formal Japanese. These restrictions make it difficult even for them to get used to informal colloquial speech style. Considering this circumstance, video materials, especially

dramas and movies, are valuable resources for learners living outside of Japan to learn these styles.

Second, video materials can be used to promote speaking and eventually to improve learners' speaking abilities. In classrooms, learners can exchange their ideas and opinions in pairs/groups based on what they have watched.

Third, video materials can be used to acquire social and cultural knowledge of Japan. They provide learners with rich resources full of updated information and vivid images of many aspects of Japanese life, including everyday life in Japan, which learners outside of Japan often have difficulties in getting to know.

In addition to these studies on classroom activities using videos, there are studies about the effect of different types of subtitles in videos (Danan, 1992; Markham et al., 2001). There are also other types of studies looking at the effect of other factors on learners' comprehension such as captions in videos (Taylor, 2005) and advance organizer (Herron et al., 1995). However, unlike others, this study looks at cognitive processes while watching videos by using think aloud protocols.

1.3   Statement of the problem

The following two issues are important to consider when videos are used as teaching and studying materials. First is how to choose appropriate videos. These days a large amount of videos are available for class use, such as animations, dramas and films. However, it is difficult and takes a lot of time to choose an appropriate video for the course objectives. With some kind of criteria for guidelines, we can make this process much easier and more efficient.

Second, since videos can be used for various purposes, e.g., focusing on specific expressions and speech styles, based on the content to discuss social and cultural issue, it is important for teachers to decide on how to make use of them to meet the course objectives. Teachers have many points to consider and decide before they start their courses; What is the course objective? What kind of task is needed to achieve it? How do learners use audio and visual information in videos to complete the task? To make such decisions it is necessary to have a systematic way to design the course.

To answer these questions, the researcher would like to introduce Instructional Design, which is a "systematic and reflective process of translating principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials, activities, information resources, and evaluation."(Smith & Ragan, 2005, p.4). In short, Instructional Design is a way to organize effective learning, incorporating systematically various aspects of learning and teaching into one.

Based on the framework of Smith and Reagan Instructional Design has three phases. The first phase is the analysis phase that includes needs analysis, goal setting and test construction. In needs analysis, learning context, learners and targeted tasks are examined and then objectives that meet learners' needs are set up. Then the tests that examine whether learners achieve the objectives will be constructed. Learners' needs, learning objectives and test construction are treated as relevant in this process.

The second phase is the strategy phase that includes developing materials and activities. In this phase, teachers or material developers try to make teaching and learning materials that enable learners to achieve the objectives described in the previous needs analysis.

The third phase is the evaluation phase that includes formative evaluation and revising. Instructional Design puts emphasis on clarifying objectives that meet the learners' needs and on constructing tests relevant to the objectives set previously.

Following Instructional Design, teachers and material developers must be consistent throughout the whole process from the goal setting to the evaluation phase to achieve the designated goals.

If teachers use videos in their classrooms for entertainment or leisure, they do not have to think about its effectiveness. However, if videos are used as aids to meet the course objectives, Instructional Design plays an important role in materials and activities preparation, which are related to the reason why the researcher applies it to course designing. At the beginning of the first phase of Instructional Design, teachers need to know their learners. Equipped with adequate understanding about the learners, the researcher will be able to apply Instructional Design in the instruction.

1.4   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and determine the differences in the cognitive processes in understanding videos between proficient learners and less proficient learners of Japanese language. This is expected to contribute to learner-analysis and task-analysis in accordance with the needs-analysis phase in Instructional Design. This will help teachers to identify the specific language skills that learners with various proficient levels need to improve, and to determine the more specific objectives for them to achieve in classroom activities.

The objective of this study is to differentiate the link between cognitive processes, comprehension and strategies used by learners to comprehend the learning materials. The following section provides the research questions of this study.

1.5   Research questions

Three research questions will be examined in this study.

1)   What kind of comprehension strategies are used to understand the videos of Japanese language by proficient and less proficient Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) learners?

2)   What kind of difficulties do proficient and less proficient JFL learners encounter in understanding these videos?

3)   What are elements of the videos that assist proficient and less proficient JFL learners in comprehending the content of these videos?

1.6   Significance of the study

The findings will help teachers in two ways. First, they will help teachers to make an informed choice in selecting appropriate audio and visual materials to assist learners in fulfilling their learning objectives, improving listening skills and comprehending content of videos. Choosing appropriate videos among a number of available ones in the market is a time consuming task for teachers. However, we can make the process efficient if we come up with some clear criteria for this. As a result, teachers can focus and spend more time on preparing for classroom activities.

Second, the findings of this study will also help teachers to design effective teaching and learning materials and classroom activities using videos. The findings will provide information on learners' differences in their use of strategies and understanding of videos. It will also provide information on factors that facilitate or distract understanding of the videos. Such information will help teachers to clarify their course objectives. By incorporating the three phases of Instructional Design, teachers also can design and organize the classes systematically in order to help learners to achieve the

course objectives.

1.7   Limitation of the study

The limitation of this study is that it has only eight subjects and examines only students of intermediate level and advanced level. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to Japanese Foreign Language (JFL) learners in other contexts.

The materials in this study are limited to only an animation and a drama, although other video materials are available for language education, such as advertisements, documentary programs and news. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to other types of video materials.

1.8   Conclusion

Using video materials to teach languages is getting increasingly popular in language classes. Using video materials as an aid for instruction has several merits, i.e., it helps in developing listening skills, promoting speaking and acquiring social and cultural knowledge, especially in the area where the target language is not used as a common language. However, there are two issues to be considered when using video materials, i.e., how to choose appropriate videos and to design learning materials and classroom activities which are effective in aiding the learning and teaching process. This research intends to help language teachers to have a better understanding of learners' thinking processes while watching videos, i.e., learners' strategy use while watching videos and distracting and facilitating factors in videos. This would help in the selection of appropriate videos and design of effective materials and activities for classroom use.

The rest of this dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 includes a review of related studies on individual learner differences, learning strategy, listening strategy, and distracting and facilitating factors in listening tasks. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in the present study. Chapter 4 reports on the data analyses and findings. Chapter 5 discusses implications, suggestions for further research and conclusion.