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The Use of Mazii in Learning Kanji Writing to Enhance Japanese Language Skills of Intermediate-Level Students



Abstract: - The study explores the application of the Mazii app in enhancing kanji writing skills among intermediate-level Japanese language students. Given the challenges of mastering kanji, which is crucial for achieving proficiency in Japanese, this research investigates how Mazii's innovative features can support learners in improving their writing abilities. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys and performance assessments, the study evaluates the effectiveness of Mazii in facilitating kanji recognition, retention, and application. Results indicate a significant improvement in students' writing skills and overall language confidence when utilizing the app. The findings suggest that integrating Mazii into Japanese language curricula could be a valuable strategy for educators aiming to enhance students' proficiency and engagement in learning. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on technology-enhanced language learning and offers practical implications for future instructional practices.

Keywords: Japanese language, kanji, students

1. Introduction

Mastering the ability to write Kanji is one of the greatest challenges for students learning Japanese, particularly for those at the intermediate level. Kanji plays a crucial role in understanding and using the Japanese language and significantly impacts learners' communication and reading comprehension skills [1]. In the context of modern education, technology has opened up new opportunities for learning and teaching, helping students overcome the difficulties in accessing knowledge. Mazii, a prominent learning application, has been designed to assist learners in improving their language skills, especially in writing Kanji [2]. With features such as a dictionary, vocabulary practice, and Kanji writing exercises, Mazii not only makes it easier for students to recognize and memorize these characters, but it also creates an interactive and engaging learning environment [3]. This study aims to explore how the Mazii application can be utilized as an effective tool in the process of learning to write Kanji, thereby enhancing the Japanese language proficiency of intermediate-level students [4]. By analyzing the effectiveness of the application in learning activities, this research hopes to provide insights into the potential of technology in improving language education. Through this study, there is an intention to contribute to the development of more effective teaching and learning methods for the Japanese language, helping students feel more confident in using this language in real-life situations [5].

2. Literature reviews

The integration of technology in language education has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of learning foreign languages such as Japanese [6]. The study of Japanese kanji poses considerable challenges for learners due to its complex writing system and the necessity for memorization and practice. Various studies have highlighted the critical role of effective learning tools in enhancing students' writing skills and overall language proficiency [7].

Numerous researchers have addressed the inherent difficulties in learning kanji. According to Watanabe (2015), the sheer volume of kanji characters and their multiple readings can overwhelm students, leading to frustration and demotivation [8]. Trends in second language acquisition suggest that learners benefit from multisensory methods that engage different modes of learning (Zhang, 2017). Moreover, studies indicate that the ability to write kanji effectively is linked to improved reading comprehension and communication skills (Mochizuki, 2016) [9].

The rise of digital learning resources has revolutionized language education. Various applications and software have been developed to support language learners, providing interactive and adaptive learning experiences (Chin, 2018). The use of mobile apps, in particular, has become increasingly popular due to their accessibility and convenience, allowing students to engage with content anytime and anywhere (Tsuji, 2019). Research by Wang

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and Chen (2020) demonstrates that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) can lead to significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition and retention [1].

Mazii is among the applications designed to facilitate Japanese language learning. Its features include a comprehensive dictionary, kanji stroke order visuals, and practice quizzes. Studies investigating the effectiveness of Mazii and similar applications suggest that they can enhance learners' engagement and motivation (Nguyen, 2021). Specifically, Xu (2022) found that using Mazii led to improved kanji writing skills among students, as they could practice writing with immediate feedback and progressive learning tasks [2].

For intermediate-level students, the focus often shifts from basic understanding to more advanced application of language skills. Research indicates that tools like Mazii can support this transition by providing targeted practice that addresses individual weaknesses in kanji writing (Saito & Ohta, 2020). By utilizing such technological resources, learners can develop personalized study plans that cater to their specific needs, ultimately leading to greater language proficiency [3].

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach to investigate the effectiveness of the Mazii application in enhancing the Kanji writing skills of intermediate-level students learning Japanese. The participants included 100 students selected from a university, divided into two groups: an experimental group using the Mazii application and a control group relying solely on traditional learning methods. The research utilized an experimental design, with Kanji writing tests conducted before and after an 8-week period to assess improvements in students' writing abilities. Data collection comprised writing test results, surveys evaluating the learning experience, and semi-structured interviews with a subset of students from the experimental group. Quantitative data from the tests were analyzed using statistical methods to identify significant differences, while qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. Ethical guidelines were adhered to, including maintaining confidentiality and protecting the participants' identities. Although the study might encounter some limitations, such as convenience sampling methods, it is expected to provide a comprehensive insight into the potential of the Mazii application in supporting students in enhancing their Kanji writing skills and improving their Japanese language proficiency.

4. Content of the research

4.1 The importance of kanji in developing students' language skills

Chinese characters (kanji) are an essential part of learning Japanese and significantly influence language proficiency while also reflecting the culture and history of the country. Unlike other languages, Japanese utilizes three writing systems: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Among these, kanji comprises over 2,000 commonly used characters, making understanding them crucial for anyone aiming to master the language [4].

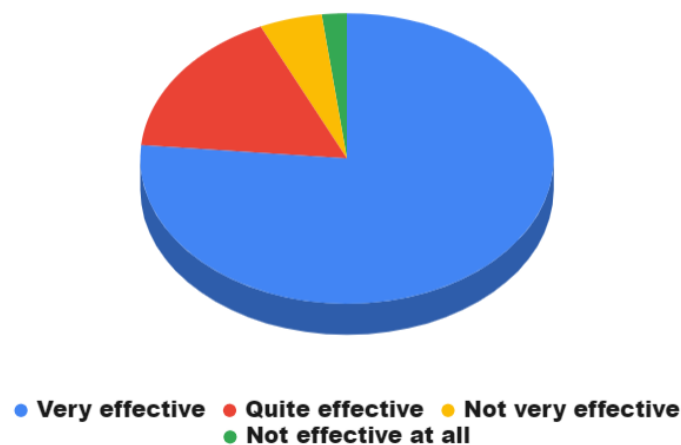


Figure 1. The effectiveness of learning kanji with Mazii compared to traditional methods

Firstly, kanji represents not merely characters but rich ideas, images, and stories within each symbol. For example, the character "山" (yama) signifies "mountain" and is formed by strokes that depict the shape of a mountain. Learning these characters enhances students' reading comprehension and opens up a new world filled with imagery and meaning. When students grasp these characters, they find it easier to understand various texts, from books to signs, thus facilitating their daily learning and living experiences [5].

Secondly, studying kanji aids learners in building and expanding their vocabulary. Some kanji can combine to create new words, enriching the language and helping students recognize words in different contexts [6]. For instance, the two characters "食" (shoku, meaning "to eat") and "事" (goto, meaning "thing" or "matter") combine to form the word "食事" (shokuji, meaning "meal"). Understanding how these characters interact helps learners memorize words more effectively while deepening their understanding of nuanced meanings in various situations [7].

Moreover, studying kanji provides students with opportunities to explore and engage with Japanese culture. Each character has its own history and origin, reflecting the Japanese worldview and lifestyle [8]. By learning kanji, students gain deeper insights into cultural values such as living philosophy, customs, and traditional arts. This understanding creates a profound connection between them and Japan, while also encouraging them to become globally aware citizens who appreciate cultural diversity [9].

Lastly, the journey of learning kanji presents challenges that foster the development of essential skills such as patience, self-directed learning, and time management. Memorizing and writing hundreds of kanji requires students to adopt a well-structured study approach and maintain high levels of determination [1]. Throughout this learning process, they may encounter difficulties, but these challenges serve as reminders of the value of hard work and perseverance. The rewards achieved after such efforts encompass not only the ability to use kanji but also personal growth in thinking and action [2].

Kanji functions as more than just a component of the Japanese language; it serves as a bridge among language, culture, and cognitive development. Learning kanji offers vast benefits, contributing to holistic development in both language skills and life competencies, which encourages students to actively engage with their communities and society. This journey represents not only the acquisition of knowledge but also a path of self-discovery and exploration of the world around them [3].

4.2 The challenges intermediate-level students face in learning kanji

Learning kanji in Japanese poses significant challenges for intermediate students. Firstly, the sheer volume of kanji characters is overwhelming, with over 2,000 commonly used characters that students need to memorize [4]. Each kanji not only has multiple pronunciations but also different meanings depending on the context, which complicates the process of remembering and using them correctly. Additionally, many students struggle with the different readings of the same character, such as on'yomi (Chinese readings) and kun'yomi (Japanese readings), which require familiarity with various rules [5].

Another challenge lies in the skill of writing. When learning kanji, students must not only memorize the shapes of the characters but also practice writing them accurately. This can be particularly difficult for those who are not accustomed to handwriting or have become reliant on technology for writing. The time required for practicing writing kanji may impede their progress in other skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading [6].

Moreover, the lack of appropriate learning materials and effective teaching methods can leave intermediate students feeling confused. Some instructors may not emphasize the connection between kanji and practical usage, which can prevent students from seeing the relevance of theory to real-world applications. This disconnect may decrease their motivation to learn, especially when they do not perceive clear progress [7].

Finally, the pressure and stress associated with exams contribute significantly to the difficulties of learning kanji. Students often feel anxious about preparing for tests that require them to write kanji accurately or understand their meanings within a limited timeframe [8]. This stress can negatively affect their ability to absorb knowledge and make the learning process more challenging. Thus, overcoming these obstacles demands persistence, a well-structured study approach, and sometimes support from teachers and peers [9].

4.3 An overview of the Mazii application

Mazii is a versatile Japanese learning application designed to help learners master not only grammar and pronunciation but also focus on writing and memorizing kanji. The interface of Mazii is user-friendly and easy to navigate, featuring soft colors and a clear layout that allows users to effortlessly access the various features the app offers. From the first use, learners can experience the convenience of navigating through sections such as the dictionary, writing practice, and vocabulary learning [1].

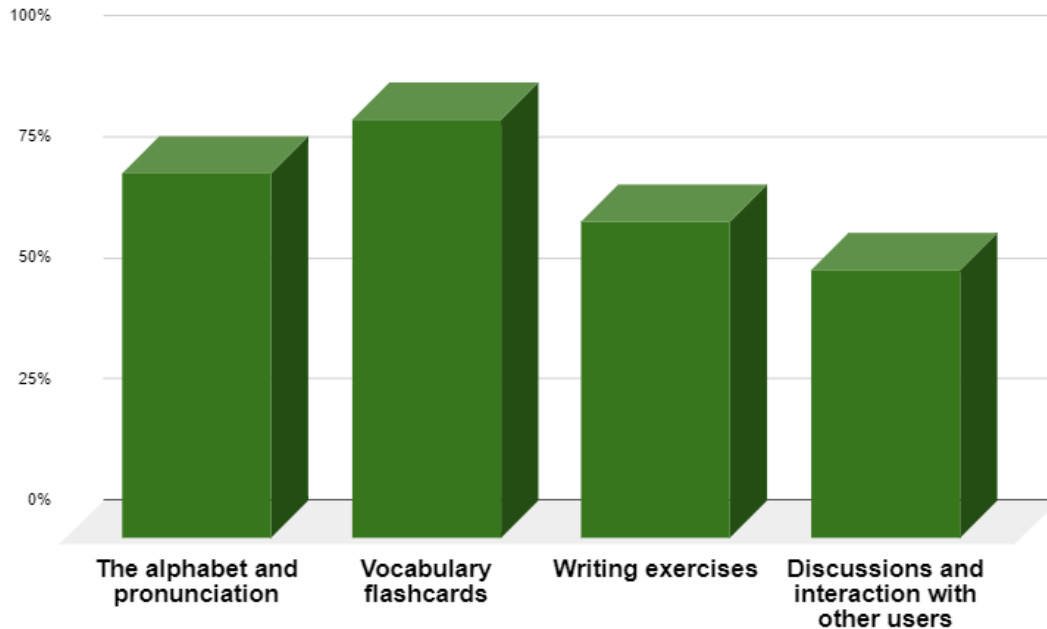


Figure 2. The extent of feature usage in the Mazii application for learning kanji

One of the standout features of Mazii is its kanji writing practice functionality. This feature enables learners to observe the detailed writing strokes of each character while allowing them to practice directly on the screen [2]. Users can utilize their finger or a stylus to draw each stroke, effectively simulating the traditional process of writing kanji. The system provides immediate feedback, indicating whether the strokes were written in the correct order, which is essential for mastering accurate kanji writing. These exercises are often arranged by difficulty level, creating a clear and logical learning path for users [3].

Mazii also excels with its powerful dictionary function. Users can simply input the word or character they wish to find and the app will instantly provide meanings, pronunciations, and relevant information related to that kanji [4]. The system categorizes each character according to reading rules, including on'yomi (Chinese readings) and kun'yomi (Japanese readings), while providing contextual examples and usage scenarios. This approach not only aids learners in understanding the meanings of individual characters but also helps them recognize how kanji are used in different sentences [5].

The application supports vocabulary expansion through thematic learning features. Users can choose to study various topics, such as travel, daily conversation, or specialized vocabulary. Learning by theme helps students memorize new words more easily and encourages them to apply these words in real-life contexts. Mazii also offers vocabulary exercises to reinforce memory through the use of flashcards, which enables learners to quickly recognize and retain words [6].

Additionally, the application integrates quizzes and learning games to create a fun and dynamic learning environment. These quizzes allow learners to assess their understanding and track their learning progress [7]. The app frequently updates with new games featuring different difficulty levels, ensuring that learners do not become bored during their revision. Engaging in these games can also improve their reflexes and the ability to apply vocabulary immediately [8].

Furthermore, the community of learners within the Mazii app is noteworthy. Users can interact, share learning experiences, and support each other in their language learning journey. The forums and discussion groups within the app create opportunities for learners to ask questions and exchange knowledge, fostering motivation among peers. Such activities not only help learners resolve challenges but also encourage a spirit of inquiry and self-improvement [9].

Lastly, Mazii provides a wealth of learning resources, such as tutorial videos, in-depth articles, and useful reference materials, enabling learners to access additional resources to enhance their language skills [1]. With all these features and tools, Mazii stands out as an application that not only assists in learning kanji but also provides comprehensive support for learning Japanese [2].

Mazii transcends being merely a language learning app. It offers users a holistic learning experience, from writing practice and dictionary use to vocabulary acquisition and community interaction. With its user-friendly design, diverse functions, and positive learning environment, Mazii serves as a valuable resource for anyone looking to improve their Japanese language skills effectively and enjoyably [3].

4.4 The benefits of using the Mazii application for learning kanji

The use of the Mazii application for learning kanji offers many practical benefits, especially for students and enthusiasts of the Japanese language. One of the standout advantages of Mazii is its ability to motivate learners and create interest in studying. This application integrates various innovative learning methods, from thematic lessons to engaging quizzes and fun games. These elements not only help learners access knowledge in an intuitive way but also spark curiosity and encourage individuals to challenge themselves to conquer each kanji character [4]. When users can see their progress through quizzes and receive immediate feedback from the app, they often feel uplifted and eager to continue their exploration. This enthusiasm plays a crucial role, as it helps students maintain their motivation while making learning more enjoyable, thus improving their overall performance [5].

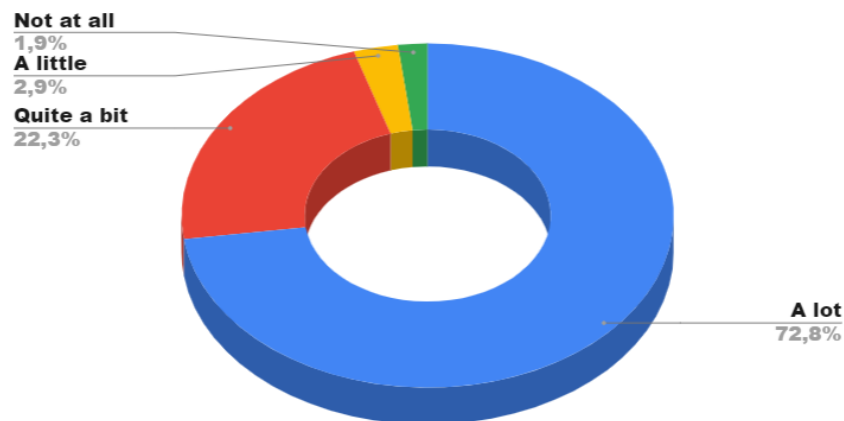


Figure 3. The improvement in kanji writing skills using Mazii

Additionally, the flexibility in learning offered by Mazii is another significant factor. The application allows users to access lessons and study materials anytime and anywhere [6]. This means that students can utilize their spare time throughout the day such as waiting for a bus or taking a break between classes to review and practice kanji. Such flexibility proves crucial in today's busy lifestyle, where time has become a valuable resource [7]. Learners no longer have to rely solely on traditional classroom settings but can take charge of their own study plans, creating a tailored learning path that fits their personal pace and abilities. This autonomy helps reduce stress and fosters a more comfortable environment for acquiring knowledge [8].

Moreover, the interactive features within Mazii significantly enhance learners' memorization and practical application skills. The ability to practice writing kanji directly on the screen allows users to familiarize themselves with each character while simultaneously honing their memory through repeated practice [9]. By drawing each character in the correct stroke order, students not only remember the shapes of kanji but also gain a deeper

understanding of their structure and usage in everyday communication. In addition, the app provides specific example sentences for each character, which helps learners visualize how to use kanji in real-life contexts. These skills become essential, particularly when learners begin to communicate in Japanese or participate in language-related exams [1].

Furthermore, Mazii cultivates a supportive community where learners can exchange knowledge and experiences with one another. This interaction not only provides students with additional motivation but also creates opportunities for them to learn from their peers [2]. The articles, questions, and insights shared within the community encourage users to view challenges from different perspectives and find the learning methods that work best for them [3].

Mazii transcends being merely an application for kanji learning; it serves as a comprehensive tool that helps students generate motivation, promote flexibility in their studies, and improve their memorization and practical application skills for each character. With these outstanding features, Mazii undoubtedly becomes an essential companion in the journey of mastering the Japanese language for anyone [4].

4.5 Recommendations

Integrating the Mazii application into Japanese language teaching programs presents a unique and innovative opportunity to enhance the educational experience for students. In today's world, where technology continually shapes learning and interaction, incorporating such tools into the curriculum holds the potential to significantly boost student engagement and motivation [5]. Mazii offers a wide array of features that align with the needs of contemporary learners, including interactive exercises, instant feedback on writing, and thematic vocabulary lessons. These functionalities contribute to a more dynamic and participatory classroom environment, allowing students to become active participants in their own learning journeys rather than passive recipients of knowledge [6].

The use of Mazii in language courses promotes a blended learning approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with mobile learning flexibility. This hybrid model allows students to review materials outside the classroom, practice kanji writing on their devices, and engage with gamified content that reinforces their understanding of both language mechanics and cultural nuances [7]. The app's ability to track progress and identify areas for improvement fosters a sense of ownership over learning, helping students cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the language as they work through challenging materials at their own pace.

Moreover, Mazii facilitates interaction with a digital community, enriching students' learning experiences. The platform supports discussions, collaboration, and resource sharing among learners, fostering camaraderie and peer support [6]. Such interactions can be particularly beneficial for language acquisition, as they provide students with opportunities to practice Japanese in a relaxed and informal setting, potentially increasing their confidence in speaking and writing abilities. The incorporation of social learning opportunities through technology contributes to a more holistic educational environment that reflects real-world communication scenarios [7].

Future research could benefit from examining the broader implications of technology on language learning, extending beyond the specific features of applications like Mazii. Studies might analyze how various digital tools contribute to the development of specific language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For instance, investigations into the effectiveness of apps in promoting vocabulary retention or enhancing grammatical understanding could offer valuable insights for educators [1]. Additionally, exploring the impact of technology on student motivation and engagement would provide a deeper understanding of long-term language proficiency outcomes [2].

Another important area for exploration involves the role of community interaction within educational apps. Research into how peer collaboration, feedback, and social interaction through platforms like Mazii influence learner outcomes could yield critical insights into the dynamics of language acquisition. Understanding how students support one another in their learning journeys through digital forums may uncover effective strategies for fostering positive learning environments [3].

As technology continues to play a significant role in educational practices, the integration of applications like Mazii into language programs creates opportunities for innovative teaching methodologies that encourage

creativity, interactivity, and deeper learning [4]. Comprehensive studies on the efficacy of these tools can inform educators and researchers, facilitating the development of best practices that enhance language acquisition and better prepare students for a globalized world where multilingual communication is essential. Ultimately, bridging the gap between technology and language learning stands to enrich educational experiences, equipping students with the skills necessary for success in their personal and professional lives [5].

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that the use of Mazii for learning kanji writing positively impacts the Japanese language skills of intermediate-level students. The features of Mazii, such as interactive exercises, instant feedback, and thematic vocabulary lessons, create a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Learners not only improve their kanji writing abilities but also develop confidence and communication skills in the Japanese language. By combining traditional learning with technology, the research indicates that a blended learning approach can optimize the language acquisition process. Students have the opportunity to review materials, practice writing, and engage with gamified content, leading to a deeper understanding of the language and culture. Additionally, the ability to connect with a learning community through Mazii fosters a supportive and collaborative atmosphere, helping students enhance their communication skills in a comfortable setting. However, the study also opens up many directions for future development. Further research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of technology on language learning, not only limited to Mazii but also encompassing various other digital tools. Exploring how social interaction and peer support through platforms like Mazii can provide valuable insights into the language acquisition process.

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