

Educational Manga: An Effective Medium for English Learning

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This preliminary study into the use of educational manga in English language classrooms in a Japanese university indicates learning and motivational benefits. Interest in overcoming the difficulties of teaching business content in English and teaching reading-based language acquisition to reluctant readers led to the development of educational manga materials covering job-hunting and work-related content and colloquial spoken English language skills specifically for 12 trial lessons in each of four 2nd-year classes. A postcourse survey revealed positive overall responses from students with regard to both language and content learning. In addition, comments from respondents indicated a possible positive correlation between the use of educational manga and improved study attitudes. Put simply, educational manga can make English (particularly Business English) relevant, accessible, and enjoyable.

日本のある大学での英語の授業で教育漫画を利用することについての予備調査は、学習上および学習動機の上で効果があることを示している。英語でビジネスを教えることの困難さ、文章主体の言語学習を読書が苦手な学生に教えることの困難さを克服することに対する興味が、就職活動および仕事に関連した内容と日常会話の口語英語の技量の向上を網羅し、2年生の4クラスに対して12回ずつのトライアル授業での使用を意図した、教育漫画教材の共同開発にいたった。授業で本漫画教材を使用した後で実施された調査では、言語と学習内容の両方に関して学生からの全体的に肯定的な反応が明らかになった。さらに、回答者からのコメントは教育漫画の使用と学習態度の改善の間に正の相関関係が見込まれることを示している。つまり、教育漫画は英語「特にビジネス英語」を自分に関連のある、わかりやすく、かつ楽しいものにすることができる。

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS can find Business English studies remote, demotivating, and puzzlingly unrelated to their own experiences. This paper reports on research conducted on classroom use of an English educational manga designed to teach students how to write an English resume, prepare for an interview in English, and prepare other job-hunting documents in English. It also discusses issues related to work and provides a context of an English working business environment. Although this particular educational manga has a business focus, it is hoped that this research could be applied to both general and other content English language teaching in Japan—and perhaps abroad. Throughout this paper, the term *educational manga* is used to describe manga or comics that have been designed with education, rather than entertainment, as the primary goal. Drawings are used to provide context and improve understanding, while the characters' conversations form part of the educational material itself.



Why use manga in the classroom? Three possible reasons are as follows. First, manga can provide an emotional intimacy. This is significant since emotion leads to attention, which leads to learning (Cary, 2004). Second, manga provides a visual representation of conversation. There is no mystery to the appeal of the visual stimuli of manga when we realize that 70% of the body's sensory receptors are in the eyes (Wolfe, 2010). This visual stimulation can be harnessed to support language learning. Third, and perhaps more specifically applicable to Business English, manga can provide a believable social context for students' own identities as future workers. Such contextualized material in language learning is crucial when we consider that a learner is a person with a social identity in a particular context (Riley, 2003) and that many Japanese university students do not have experience working in business contexts, let alone English working environments.

The effectiveness of storytelling and visual presentation in learning, and the use of comics, educational manga, or graphic novels in business education specifically, have attracted attention from a number of researchers. The use of such learning and teaching materials "has been successful in a number of academic settings that suggest this format may translate well to business communication and education" (Short & Reeves, 2009, p. 415). One of the reasons for this is that, through manga, students can create identities as successful workers in the business world. Without the scaffolding of manga, it is difficult for students with little or no working experience to imagine themselves as players in the business environment. According to Chen (2006), "the distinguishing features of *manga* characters and stories . . . trigger a desirable image of self—seeing oneself reflected and experienced by the story's characters" (p. 2).

Research projects have been conducted both inside and outside Japan on the use of manga in educational materials. A report on one such project using a manga-inspired tool, by Lee

and Morrall of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2006), stated that "the aim of Manga [interactive virtual learning tool] is to provide a contextualized and immersive environment for learning English as a foreign language" (p. 1). Of the limited number of academic papers regarding the use of educational manga in Japan, most are written in Japanese. One example is Uchida, Orita, Kunigami, Terano, and Yoshikawa (2012), who explained how the visual scaffolding of "manga textbooks" (p. 1) promotes improved student understanding, which leads to improved classroom discussion activities. Therefore, this paper is written in English and is intended to make a small contribution on applications for educational manga in the university language classrooms of Japan.

In this preliminary study, Business English was chosen as the content area for development of educational manga material due to the challenges I felt that many Japanese university students of Business English faced. In my Business English classes, I realized that encouraging productive language despite unfamiliar content and context was an uphill battle. I was also concerned that many of my students were aware of the increasing need to participate in an English-speaking business environment in Japan, yet did not seem to be able to identify with such an environment. Educational manga can bring this unfamiliar business world closer as the emotional intimacy and believable social context of manga encourage students to develop their own identities as working adults. I believe that incorporating students' emerging identities into learning encourages student engagement. This engagement with a believable, small-scale, peer-oriented social context for the business world also strengthens links to students' own learning targets.

My research partner recognized that non-business major students also needed Business English to succeed in the TOEIC examination. She also noted that simple resumes and interviews

in English are required for working holidays and study abroad programs. However, an investigation into the textbooks available on writing English resumes revealed few books available on the market in Japan for students with only moderate English skills, who needed more support than a sample resume or two to follow. Students with poor study skills, poor reading comprehension skills, poor English decoding skills, and limited English vocabularies find the unfamiliar and abstract content of university-level English demotivating. There had to be a way to help these students move closer to being able to use English for real-life tasks such as resume building.

The visual representation of conversation and the emotional intimacy provided by manga build a strongly scaffolded, social context environment for productive language. Thus, the idea of trialing a narrative educational manga on the topic of job-hunting skills was born, and a collaborative project began. This paper reports on the first step in this project as first-stage materials were developed and trialed. While these materials continue to be developed and trialed, what follows is an explanation of a preliminary study into the adoption of educational manga in English language classrooms in one university in Japan.

Methodology

The respondents for this preliminary research study were 2nd-year university students in four classes (each of about 35-40 students) in the business administration and law faculties of a major university in central Tokyo. This trial was conducted during the autumn semester of 2011 when we created educational manga teaching materials (see Appendix A) to use in these trial classes. These particular materials teach students the basics of resume writing and interview preparation, covering content in both formal written and casual spoken English. In addition to the English language skills and job-hunting hints, they also provide cultural learning in the form of Western culture in the

storyline and international business culture, such as developing a signature. Twelve class periods were devoted to these materials for each class group. Due to the amount of time required to create such materials, we wished to trial the materials in the classroom as they were prepared, in order to make improvements as we progressed with materials creation. For this and other reasons, it was not possible to develop a curriculum based solely on educational manga.

Following the use of the above materials in class, a survey (see Appendix B) was conducted of willing respondents ($N = 109$). This was in the form of a questionnaire with Likert-type questions (frequency analysis), followed by a request for comments about what they had learnt through the materials (grouping analysis). Please note that some questions were not answered by all of the respondents, so the total number of responses differs from question to question. Not all of the questions asked in the questionnaire are included in this study as some were specific to the materials used and therefore irrelevant to the focus of this paper.

Results

English Study Indicators

Table 1 below indicates the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements about using educational manga to study English. As is evident in this table, the majority of the responses were positive for every question related to English study. Regarding the question, *Kyoiku* [Educational] *manga* is a good way to study English, 80 respondents indicated a positive response of either *strongly agree* or *agree*. This number equates to roughly 73% of respondents and corresponds to only four respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Likewise, 53 responses were positive for the question on whether the educational manga used in class is a good way to learn general

English skills. Ten responses were negative. A related question asking if the materials used are a good way to use (as opposed to learn) English drew similar responses. A majority of 56 responses were positive versus a mere 13 negative responses.

Table 1. Survey Responses to Statements About English Study Indicators (N = 109)

Survey statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither / nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Good way to study English	21	59	25	3	1
Good way to learn general English skills	8	45	39	6	4
Good way to use English	10	46	34	12	1
English improved	7	53	30	11	2
Like English	10	43	41	11	1
Wish more classes used kyoiku manga	13	46	35	12	1

Note. Some questions were not answered by all respondents.

A further three English study indicator questions also showed positive results. 60 respondents indicated that their English had improved using the materials, whereas 13 did not think so. Exactly half (53) of those who responded (106) agreed (either strongly or otherwise) that they “like English more” after using the educational manga materials in class. Only 12 respondents disagreed, and only one strongly. Responses to the question *I wish more English classes used kyoiku manga* were also favorable,

with 59 *strongly agree* or *agree* responses—as opposed to 13 *disagree* or *strongly disagree* responses.

Content Study Indicators

Questions related to content study also brought largely positive results. The table below indicates the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements about using educational manga to study content, in this case job-hunting skills.

Table 2. Survey Responses to Statements About Content Study Indicators (N = 109)

Survey statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither / nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Good way to learn resume skills	7	47	30	8	2
Good way to learn interview skills	8	53	36	7	2
Good way to use resume skills	10	43	38	10	2
Good way to use interview skills	16	41	38	12	2
Wish series with more topics	5	45	43	10	3

Note. Some questions were not answered by all respondents.

More than half of the respondents committed to a positive response when asked if the educational manga used in class was a good way to learn resume skills. Fifty-four responses were positive; while 10 responses were negative. Similarly, 61 agreed

that it was a good way to learn interview skills, as opposed to only 9 respondents who disagreed.

Two further questions related to whether or not students thought that the educational manga learning materials which they had used in class were a good way to use resume and interview skills they already had in Japanese. Regarding the use of already acquired resume skills, 53 agreed that the materials helped them to use resume skills they already had in Japanese, while 12 disagreed. Similar figures resulted for the question regarding the use of previously acquired interview skills. Fifty-seven responses indicated that students could use interview skills they already had in Japanese through studying the educational manga materials provided, while 14 indicated that they could not. Please see the discussion and conclusions section for an explanation specific to these questions.

Finally, students were asked if they wished the educational manga materials they had used in class were part of a series with more topics. Most of the responses (50) indicated agreement. Only 13 of the students disagreed.

Comments

Students were asked to write comments on the survey form in English regarding what they believed they had learnt from using the educational manga in class. These comments provide useful information about the value of using manga as an English teaching tool. Interview skills topped the list of things learnt as five students claimed the textbook helped improve their interview skills, such as learning how to reply in interviews. The four topics next frequently mentioned—by four students in each instance—were how to write a resume, how to write a cover letter, how to find a job, and conversational English skills.

From the four students who claimed that they had learnt conversational English skills, a couple of comments are particularly

enlightening: I learnt “how to combine sentences in conversational English” and it is “good to learn not only set phrases but everyday use—I want to use them when I can.” Three comments were made that the story was very interesting or that they liked the story. Two students reported that their English skills had improved. While two students wrote that they found it somewhat difficult, two others reported that it was fun.

Other comments also indicate that students learnt “new words,” that self-assertion is important, that working is very enjoyable, the importance of workmates, and the importance of connections with people around you. Although asked for comments on what they had learnt, some students commented on the effectiveness of educational manga as a textbook medium with comments to the effect that they “came to want to study more,” they “learned fun communication,” it was very easy to understand, they “learn fast using interview English,” illustrations made for great atmosphere, and that because it was a story they could study smoothly and enjoyably. Regarding the two negative comments, one of them could be applied to any all-English textbook, “I can’t understand unless you put more Japanese into explanations,” and the other could arguably not be considered a negative comment anyhow, “interesting but difficult.” One response nicely sums up the comments received: “I enjoyed study because it’s a manga.”

Discussion and Conclusions

As evident in the results above, for each of the English study indicator questions, more respondents chose the answer *agree* than any of the four other answer choices. This was without exception. This suggests that, when given the opportunity to study English with educational manga in the classroom, these Japanese university students believe that it is an effective study medium for language study. At the very least, we can conclude

that they do not feel negative about the use of educational manga for studying English.

Further, it can also be concluded that these respondents believe that educational manga is an effective study medium for content study. It should be noted that as the respondents were all in their 2nd year of university study, many of them may not have had the opportunity or reason to develop resume or interview skills in Japanese. Therefore, it may be difficult to draw clear conclusions from the two questions asking whether or not they could make use of their previously acquired resume and interview skills. However, since most of the responses were positive, we can conclude that most students in these classes did have some resume and interview skills in Japanese and that using educational manga materials in English about job hunting allowed them to use those previously acquired skills.

Comments written on the survey form by the student respondents revealed five top areas of reported learning. Of these, four are content areas: interview skills, how to write a resume, how to write a cover letter, and how to find a job. The other area most frequently mentioned was conversational English. Other comments remarked on the ease and enjoyment of studying with educational manga. Overall, the comments were positive and suggest that the use of educational manga in the language-learning classroom is both interesting and effective.

This study is not without limitations. For example, due to the positive wording of the questionnaire, acquiescence may have affected the results. Also, large numbers of *neither/nor* responses make clear conclusions difficult. One possible reason for this is simply that it is easy for students to circle the middle noncommittal answer. This is not likely to be an issue specific to this study and perhaps a revised survey design would amend this. Another possible reason is that the educational manga materials provided to the students were a work in progress and were lacking in some parts in accuracy and consistency. However, in the

case that the latter reason is the actual cause for this frequency of *neither/nor* responses, positive responses would be expected to increase with better prepared materials.

Due to the reasons mentioned in the Methodology section of this article, educational manga were only used as supplementary teaching materials. Future classes based on educational manga within a specifically designed curriculum are desirable to determine the usefulness of educational manga as a learning and teaching medium. Likewise, in order to enhance continuity, it would be desirable for these materials to be presented as a whole—perhaps as a bound textbook—instead of as separate units photocopied as they were completed. In fact, this preliminary study has allowed for ongoing research to be conducted with such improved materials and class scheduling. Further, improvements in questionnaire design are required, as discussed above.

As evident in the results, this preliminary study into the use of educational manga in the English language classroom of a Japanese university has shown a positive response from students regarding the improvement of both their language and content skills. In addition, there were signs of more favorable student attitudes towards study when educational manga were used as a learning medium. Students not only liked, but were also attuned to the manga format; presenting educational material in a manga format appeared to promote study. In other words, educational manga is fun and interesting—and yet educational.

Bio Data

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Appendix A

Sample of Educational Manga Materials Used At the Riverside Café



Appendix B

Questionnaire Used in Survey

Survey: What's Your Opinion of Riverside Café?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please circle your answer for each question:

I liked using manga in class.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I liked the story.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I liked the characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I liked participating in the story.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

- Comments on what you like and don't like about Riverside Café:

Kyoiku manga is a good way to study English.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I like English more after reading and participating in Riverside Café.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I wish more English classes used kyoiku manga.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

I wish the Riverside Café was a series with more topics.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

- Other topics you would like if there was a Riverside Café series:

Riverside Café is a good way to learn resume skills in English.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

Riverside Café is a good way to learn interview skills in English.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

Riverside Café is a good way to learn general English skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

Riverside Café is a good way to use resume skills I already have in Japanese.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

Riverside Café is a good way to use interview skills I already have in Japanese.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

Riverside Café is a good way to use English skills I already have.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

My English improved using Riverside Café.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither/Nor Disagree Strongly Disagree

- Comments on what you have learnt from Riverside Café:
- Other comments about Riverside Café:

Thank you for answering our survey!

H. Hanae and E. Ogawa