

## Effects of an Instructional Model Based on Coordinated Management of Meaning and Reader’s Theater on Japanese Oral Communication Ability

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Article information	
<b>Abstract</b>	Language reflects how people think and behave in their culture. To have successful conversations, both language use and cultural awareness should be taken into consideration. Undeniably, Japanese grammar is different from Thai making it even harder for Thai learners to have fluent and appropriate conversations in the Japanese language. In the classroom, typically teachers often focus on grammar, leaving less time for students to practice conversation. Consequently, beginner learners often miss cultural details in conversations and are unable to communicate effectively. Thus, it is important for teachers to immerse students in the Japanese culture to improve their speaking skills and cultural understanding. In so doing, Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) and Reader’s Theater (RT) were integrated and used to aid beginners in understanding language contexts in order to help users grasp conversational contexts and interlocutors, and use scripted practices to simulate real-life scenarios. This study aims to investigate the impact of an instructional model based on CMM and RT on improving oral communication skills in Thai beginner-level Japanese learners. The study employed an experimental design with 11th-grade Japanese-major students from a secondary school in Bangkok, involving 48 classes over 16 weeks. Instruments included a Japanese oral communication

	skills test and video-recorded classroom observations. Descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test were used to analyze quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The results showed a significant improvement in post-test scores compared to pre-tests. Moreover, the model has raised students' phonetics awareness. Phonetic features like short and long sounds, pauses, and flapping received more attention. Interestingly, they adapted Japanese pronunciation for Thai or English words enhancing communication with native speakers and avoided using personal pronouns like "anata" opting to address interlocutors by name, adhering to Japanese cultural norms. This instructional model effectively improved both linguistic and cultural competences in Japanese language learners.
<b>Keywords</b>	Japanese as a foreign language, Coordinated Management of Meaning, Reader's Theater, Japanese oral communication skills
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## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, people around the world have the opportunity to communicate with each other yet face the challenge of different languages being spoken in different countries or regions. Many countries have foreseen the importance of teaching foreign languages in addition to English. In Thailand, the Ministry of Education (2008) realizes the importance of foreign language education as well. While there is a policy for teaching and learning foreign languages for communication, and while Thailand has many educational policies to develop Thai students' foreign language communication skills (Bunnag, 2018), students still face difficulties when trying to achieve mastery of a foreign language due to a lack of practice and ineffective classroom activities. As suggested by Ross and

Wasanasomsithi (2021), there is the need to create more authentic oral communication experiences in the classroom.

One of the ongoing problems is the fact that Thai learners of Japanese have developed language abilities in terms of vocabulary and grammar but are often unable to communicate effectively in various situations. As Leung (2005) has pointed out, the key to successfully communicate with Japanese people lies in an understanding of the ingenuity of the Japanese people and the cultural patterns or concepts existing in the Japanese language. Unfortunately, Japanese language classrooms in Thailand may not provide enough communication practices with various authentic classroom situational activities. Together with the differences between Thai and Japanese cultures, Thai learners of Japanese may not be able to effectively develop Japanese language abilities necessary to communicate in the language. Thus, learners' understanding of culture embedded in the language should be developed at the beginning level. As stated in Charoenphol (2012), teachers should, from the beginning, explain and highlight the use of Japanese in various cultural contexts to prevent learners from using the wrong language when they move on to higher levels of study. This will enable the learners to communicate successfully in Japanese in the future.

Recent studies have focused on methods for developing the Japanese language proficiency of beginners, such as using project-based learning (Chongthanakorn, 2014), cooperative Learning with team game tournament techniques (Wangsaithong, 2017), etc. However, there has been little research that aimed at helping learners develop their ability to converse in Japanese based on understanding of Japanese cultures. According to Neancharoensuk and Kaewkitsadang (2017) and Noda (2013), it is important to teach language skills needed for various situations; however, few studies have looked into learning activities that provide learners with appropriate opportunities to practice speaking Japanese in different Japanese cultural contexts. Still, it is believed that such an approach should be implemented in class from the beginning level to familiarize

learners with the knowledge that can be further developed in higher levels of language proficiency.

Pearce and Cronen's (1980) Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) is a communication process tool that can be used to develop relationships among people from different cultural backgrounds and life experiences as it raises mutual understanding, focusing on analysis of meaning from conversations in five dimensions (A Hierarchy Model of Actor's Meanings), which are 1) words, 2) characteristics, 3) relationships, 4) situation, and 5) social and cultural backgrounds.

The concept of Reader's Theater (RT) enables learners to speak correctly, fluently, and naturally. According to Adams (2003) and Sloyer (1982), the underlying principle of the concept of RT is that when learners use, practice, and reproduce language through a group process of role-playing, shared learning, and reflection, it will enable them to speak more effectively in conversation.

With an integration of CMM and RT in Japanese language classrooms, it is believed that Japanese language learners can interact and communicate with native Japanese speakers with the greater cultural awareness and better oral communication ability. For this reason, this research aimed to investigate the effects of an instructional model based on Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) and Reader's Theater (RT) to enhance Japanese oral communication skills of Thai beginners.

## **2. Literature Review**

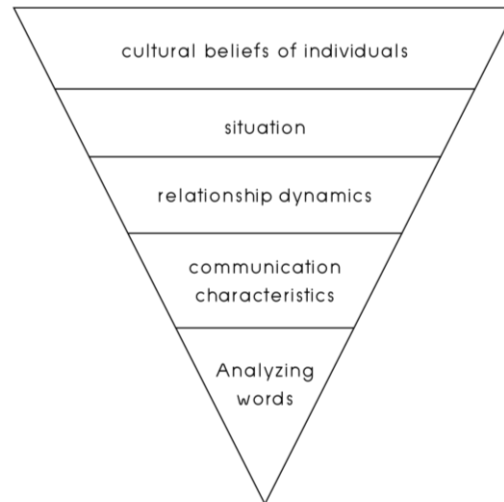
### **2.1 Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)**

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) relies on the major impact of a tool like communication in relation to relationship-building between people with different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Based on a 5-level Hierarchy Model of Actor's Meanings, CMM posits that people accurately understand the

meaning of communication by analyzing words, communication characteristics, relationship dynamics, situations, and cultural beliefs of individuals (Figure 1).

### Figure 1

*Hierarchy of Meaning* (Adapted from Pearce and Cronen, 1980)



By understanding the cultural background, social values, and norms that individuals hold, including the factors leading them to use certain words or speaking styles, individuals should understand the necessity to refrain from judging other people and should be able to choose effective strategies to achieve their communication objectives by following three pillars: 1) understanding the differences between individuals to reduce prejudice and increase diversity acceptance; 2) understanding the cultural experiences and conversational contexts to better understand the message and intentions of the speakers; and 3) choosing appropriate conveyance strategies towards the context and conversation to help alleviate communication difficulties and create effective communication.

The principle of CMM can raise learners' awareness of differences between cultures, as well as their ability to consider the context and the culture of their interlocutors. They may have to use various strategies during the conversation to ensure effective communication.

## **2.2 Reader's Theater (RT)**

Reader's Theater (RT) is a teaching concept that allows learners to experience the use of language from play dialogues and to bring those theatrical conversations to life by playing roles. Adams (2003) and Sloyers (1982) have suggested that RT can help learners enhance communication skills. For instance, context comprehension, fluency, appropriate pronunciation, intonation, stress, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure can all be improved by the use of this teaching technique. Learners also improve their reading competency, becoming more natural with facial expressions and emotions. RT consists of four principles: 1) role playing, which helps the actors get into the character and familiarize themselves with the language used in plays, which are based on real life situations; 2) group rehearsals, which allows actors to practice acting skills more effectively; 3) performing the entire script with connection of a character believably, which helps the play succeed; and 4) feedback and idea sharing, which allows actors to learn and further develop their language skills.

These four principles can be applied to teaching the Japanese language by providing learners an opportunity to practice pronunciation and intonation, and by creating Japanese sentences to express each speaker's intentions accurately.

## **2.3 Communication Skills in Japanese**

According to Japanese linguistics studies (e.g., Nakagawa, 2002; Saito, 2022), accent, intonation, auxiliary verbs, and unique grammatical structure are things that set the Japanese language and Thai language usages apart. Furthermore, Japanese language usage is, in part, the result of a strong desire for societal acceptance leading to high levels of uniformity in the social context and culture of Japan. Consequently, Japanese language adopters emphasize conversation, periphrasis, and implications; thus, it is crucial for a Japanese speaker to interpret the context. The ability to communicate in Japanese is the ability to create the co-meaning of the message between two or more communicators using the Japanese language to communicate grammatically

correctly and appropriately in the social and cultural context of Japan. The abilities to communicate in Japanese consists of two factors.

1) The ability to communicate in proper grammar allows one to communicate the intended message to the interlocutor without losing underlying messages. This includes:

1.1) The ability to distinguish tones in the Japanese language; that is, being able to distinguish tonal differences in words and ending the syllables with the appropriate open syllable.

1.2) The ability to distinguish intonation in the Japanese language; that is, being able to distinguish intonation to properly notice underlying feeling/intention of the speaker.

1.3) The ability to use auxiliary words in the Japanese language; that is, being able to properly add auxiliary words into the sentence to imply the relationship between the subject and predicate. This also helps the receptor to understand the underlying intention of the speaker.

1.4) The ability to use proper grammar in the Japanese language; that is, sorting the sentence in a “(Subject+) Predicate (V./Adj./N.)” and using sentence structures to convey the intention of the speaker. In Japanese, predicates can lead to subject implication.

2) The ability to communicate successfully in Japanese is the ability to use speech strategies during the conversation to successfully convey intended messages. The speaker must be aware of the context and interlocutor in Japanese cultural contexts. This can be categorized into four parts:

2.1) The ability to use the proper pronouns and suffixes of the interlocutor; that is, being able to use a suffix fitting to the interlocutor’s social status such as “surname + san (さん),” personal pronouns, and a name of position.

2.2) The ability to use a proper starting phrase; that is, to grab an interlocutor's attention and notify that person what the speaker will talk about.

2.3) The ability to use a phrase in a specific context; that is, using ambiguous words/phrases to indirectly convey the true intentions in the sentence, which is unique to the Japanese culture.

2.4) The ability to participate fully in a conversation in the Japanese culture by, for example, using a phrase/gesture to encourage the speaker to continue, i.e., nodding the head/using a phrase to express the feeling of the speaker to the interlocutor.

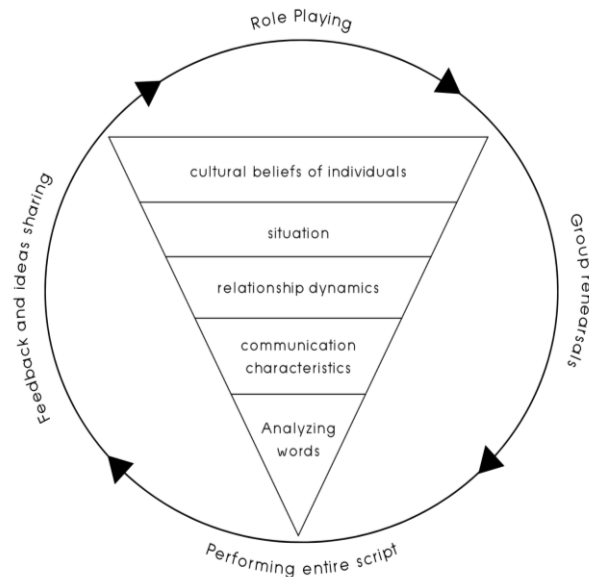
Due to the unique features of communication in Japanese, non-native learners, especially those who come from very different cultures, find it difficult to master Japanese, and they often cannot find a way to communicate in Japanese like natives (Laohaburanakit et al., 2015). Hence, this research highlighted the internal thoughts of Japanese that led to unique behaviors in conversation and helped highlight to beginner learners the importance of those behaviors in Japanese.

In order to implement CMM and RT in Japanese classrooms to help Thai learners develop oral communication ability, the two theories were conceptualized as illustrated in Figure 2.



## Figure 2

### *Conceptual Framework of an Instructional Model Based on CMM and RT*



The instructional model aimed to enhance Japanese oral communication skills of beginner-level Japanese learners hoping to provide learners more opportunities to cultivate cultural awareness and use Japanese more appropriately regarding various cultural contexts and with different interlocutors. Additionally, it provided them with opportunities to practice pronunciation, intonation, and the creation of Japanese sentences to express the speaker's intentions accurately.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that collected both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions.

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants were 11 Japanese-major learners studying in Grade 11 at a secondary school in Bangkok, Thailand. They constituted an intact group. The participants' Japanese language proficiency was A1 of the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education, or N5 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).

### 3.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument in this study was an instructional model based on CMM and RT, consisting of four principles: 1) to learn language and culture effectively, students had to understand the meaning and the connection between authentic word language style and culture through the use of scripts, 2) peer learning based on exchanging comments and ideas helped learners learn more effectively, 3) practicing language through theater encouraged learners to speak correctly and properly in various situations, and 4) reflecting on what learners learned and exchanging feedback with classmates could effectively promote improvement. The instructional procedures are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Instructional Procedures of the Instructional Model based on CMM and RT*

<b>Steps</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Principle</b>
1. Analyze stories	- Observing Japanese conversation from short video clips, such as <i>anime</i> and <i>manga</i> - Analyzing the meaning of the dialogue and comparing the similarities and differences between Japanese conversation	Principle 1 Principle 2
2. Study script	- Learn from a script with classmates: meaning, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and sentence structure - Practice through the medium of games: Kahoot and Quizlet	Principle 1 Principle 2
3. Reader's Theater presentation	- Practice conversation, comprehend the story and characters, and creatively expand dialogues based on a script	Principle 2 Principle 3

Steps	Activities	Principle
	- Search for authentic voices as a learning resource	
4. Reflection	- Self-reflection	Principle 2
	- Peer-reflection/assessment	Principle 4
	- Teacher's feedback	

The instructional model was presented to six qualified examiners for validation using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). The IOC results showed that all items had scores ranging from 0.5 to 0.8, thus indicating that the developed instructional model was effective for use in the experiment. Additionally, the model was piloted with a group of ten students and was adjusted according to the feedback and the practicality of the implementation. This process allowed for the development and application of an effective instructional model prior to data collection.

The implementation of the instructional model took 16 weeks, totaling 48 periods. The experiment used a one-group pretest-posttest design, with data collected through qualitative recordings of motion images before and after the experiment. The experiment was conducted across four cycles in the first semester of the 2021 academic year, with each cycle consisting of one Japanese language learning unit. Each period/class lasted 40 minutes.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Two data collection instruments were used as follows:

1) The Japanese oral communication skills test and a rubric.

1.1) The test consisted of two parts as follows: 1) proficiency in accurate use of the Japanese language in conversation and 2) proficiency in effective communication in Japanese conversation. Each test was worth 20 points; the two tests totaled 40 points.

1.2) The rubric was divided into two sections: 1) proficiency in accurate use of the Japanese language in conversation and 2) proficiency in effective communication in Japanese conversation. The scale ranged from 0 to 5 points (see Appendix A).

The test and the rubric were validated by six experts, and, according to the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), all items had scores ranging from 0.5 to 0.8, indicating that the developed tests and rubric were effective for use in the experiment. Additionally, the instruments were tested to ensure interrater reliability between the researcher and a language expert with over ten years of experience teaching Japanese in Thailand. The interrater scores ranged from 0.0 to 1.0. This process allowed for the development and application of effective research instruments for data collection.

2) The Japanese oral communication skills improvement observation

2.1) Observation involved recording videos during classroom activities over a span of 16 weeks, comprising 48 periods (three per week). Data were collected for each period and subsequently divided into two sections for comparison of Japanese oral communication skills, i.e., Weeks 1-6 and Weeks 11-16.

2.2) A narrative format was adopted for the data transcription to ensure accurate representation.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The quantitative data, including test scores, were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, while the qualitative data, including the transcription of the video-recorded classroom activities, were transcribed and analyzed using typological analysis to explain learners' development. The analysis details were as follows:

#### 1) Analyzing data from the pre-test and post-test

Data analysis of comparative results of Japanese oral communication skills for beginners in the sample group before and after the experiment was done by comparing both overall (holistic) and component-based (analytic) assessments. The process involved utilizing the results of the Japanese oral communication skills pre- and post-tests. Inter-rater reliability was assessed between two evaluators, and the aggregated data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric statistical method suitable for paired-sample comparisons, was employed to compare Japanese oral communication skills before and after the experiment, both holistically and analytically, with a predetermined significance level of .05.

#### 2) Analyzing data from an observation

A narrative format was adopted for data transcription of the recorded videos to ensure accurate representation. The process involved utilizing typological analysis. The data underwent categorization to elucidate the nuances and changes in learners' Japanese oral communication skills. A validation process was undertaken, involving consultation with a Japanese Teacher with ten years of experience teaching Japanese in Thailand. This step aimed to authenticate and enhance the reliability of the collected data. To ensure data integrity, a rechecking process was implemented, specifically examining data points related to conclusion drawn from the Japanese oral communication skills test.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

In order to answer the research question, the study compared the overall ability of a sample group in Japanese language communication, based on components, before and after learning with the instructional model. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed the average scores and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores. The post-test mean score ( $M = 32.32$ ;  $SD = 3.14$ ) was higher than the pre-test mean score ( $M = 24.36$ ;  $SD = 6.17$ ) at a significance level ( $z = 2.940$ ,  $p$ -value = .003).

**Table 2**

*The Results of the Comparison Regarding Thai Learners' Japanese Oral Communication Skill before and after the Implementation*

	Total score	Pre-test		Post-test		z	p-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Japanese oral communication Skills	40 100%	24.36 60.91%	3.14	32.32 80.80%	6.71	2.940	0.003*
Component 1: Proficiency in accurate use of Japanese	20 100%	13.55 67.73%	2.57	15.86 79.32%	1.79	2.940	0.003*
1) Word pronunciation	5 100%	3.50 70.00%	0.59	3.91 78.18%	0.58	2.460	0.014*
2) Sentence pronunciation	5 100%	3.64 72.73%	0.45	3.95 79.09%	0.52	2.646	0.008*
3) The use of Japanese particles	5 100%	3.59 71.82%	0.66	4.00 80.00%	0.50	2.460	0.014*
4) The use of Japanese grammar	5 100%	3.05 61.91%	1.21	4.23 84.55%	0.75	2.820	0.005*
Component 2: Proficiency in having an effective Japanese conversation	20 100%	10.82 54.09%	4.58	16.45 82.27%	2.14	2.936	0.003*
1) The use of self- and partner (pronouns)	5 100%	4.45 89.09%	0.82	5.00 100%	0.00	1.857	0.630
2) The use of introductory phrases	5 100%	2.86 57.27%	1.72	4.23 84.55%	1.17	2.527	0.012*
3) The use of indirect expressions	5 100%	2.27 45.45%	1.59	3.95 79.09%	0.96	2.814	0.005*
4) The use of response phrases (cue)	5 100%	0.64 12.73%	1.43	3.27 65.45%	0.65	3.127	0.002*

\*p < .05

Table 2 displays the results of the comparison of Thai learners' Japanese oral communication ability before and after learning with the instructional model based on CMM and RT in the classroom. It shows that the learners' communication ability increased after the implementation, both overall and with respect to different components, indicating that the instructional model could effectively promote Japanese communication ability. In the overall analysis, it was found that after learning with the developed instructional model, the mean score significantly increased to 32.32 (80.80%) compared to the pre-learning mean of 24.36 (60.91%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 2.940$ ,  $p$ -value =

.003). The analysis of each component also indicated that after learning with the developed instructional model, the mean score significantly increased compared to the pre-test mean score, with statistical significance at the .05 level. The increase in each component of oral communication proficiency can be detailed as follows.

### **Component 1: Proficiency in accurate use of Japanese**

Proficiency in accurate use of Japanese Conversation refers to the ability to speak the Japanese language accurately in response to the intended meaning during communication between conversational partners. The details are as follows:

1) Japanese word pronunciation: It was found that after learning with the developed instructional model, the mean score significantly increased to 3.91 (78.18%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 3.50 (70.00%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 2.640$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .014$ ).

The observational results further underscored the learners' enhanced pronunciation of Japanese words following their engagement with the developed instructional model. During the initial phase of the experiment, it became apparent that learners encountered challenges, particularly with respect to fundamental aspects of Japanese word pronunciation such as short vowels and long sounds. For instance, in a communicative exchange between learners, a mispronunciation occurred when expressing the desire to go shopping. Instead of saying '*hoshii*' (meaning 'want to'), Learner A mistakenly pronounced the word '*hoshi*' (meaning 'a star'), demonstrating difficulties in distinguishing between similar-sounding syllables.

Moreover, learners faced challenges when incorporating foreign words into Japanese speech. Japanese syllables typically follow consonant-vowel compounds, but learners tended to omit the final consonants, making it

challenging for native Japanese speakers to comprehend. For example, Learner C pronounced the word ‘badminton’ as ‘bad-min-ton’ (CV-N-CV-N-CV-N), adhering to a non-Japanese accent, while the correct Japanese pronunciation is ‘*ba-do-mi-n-to-n*’ (CV-CV-CV-CV-N-CV-N).

However, after learning through the developed instructional model, learners became familiar with short and long sounds in Japanese words, and when it came to Thai or English words, they tried to pronounce them according to the principles of Japanese pronunciation. For example, Learner D pronounced the Thai word “*tom yum kung*” naturally in Japanese accent as “*to mu ya mu kun,*” (CV-CV-CV-CV-CV-N), and Learner E pronounced the Thai word “*som tam*” naturally in Japanese accent as “*so mu ta mu*” (CV-CV-CV-CV).

The notable enhancement in learners’ word pronunciation can be attributed to the effectiveness of the developed instructional model. Commencing with Step 1, where learners immersed themselves in Japanese conversation scripts from *anime* movies, the model provided an engaging experience with a language they find enjoyable and interesting. This approach not only fostered a natural learning process but also supported the accurate memorization and pronunciation of words. In Step 3, learners engaged in intense drama performances, narrating stories through the reading of drama scripts. During these steps, learning resources incorporated a standard Japanese language pronunciation model akin to the speech patterns of Japanese *anime* characters, aligning with the learners’ preferences. This approach instilled a curiosity in students to discover the word’s Japanese pronunciation on the website. The iterative process of listening to and practicing the pronunciation leads to the ability to memorize the pronunciation accurately.

This result aligns with a previous study undertaken by Methapisit (2011) stating that practicing listening and speaking skills through immersive learning



media, such as Japanese dramas and *anime*, helps learners remember how to pronounce words through the practice of listening and speaking skills.

2) Japanese Sentence pronunciation: The results showed that after learning with the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score significantly increased to 3.95 (79.09%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 3.64 (72.73%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 2.646$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .008$ ).

The observational results underscore a notable enhancement in learners' Japanese sentence pronunciation following their interaction with the developed instructional model. In the initial phase of the experiment, it was found that learners exhibited improvement in pronouncing Japanese sentences. However, challenges emerged, particularly concerning the natural pauses and intonations at the end of sentences.

For example, learners mistakenly placed a pause in the wrong position in the sentence, saying "*amaride/kimasen/deshita*," which altered the intended meaning from "I can't do the test that well" to "I didn't come that well." Additionally, Learner G struggled with the correct intonation at the end of sentences. For example, he said, "*Hitori de sakkaa suru no wa sabishii*" with a rising intonation instead of a falling intonation, resulting in confusion as to whether he was asking a question or stating that playing football alone was lonely.

But after learning through the developed instructional model, learners were more familiar with how to pause in the right position in the sentence. For instance, one learner said that when he knew that he had a problem with pausing, he listened the original Japanese sounds and practiced reading aloud from the script ten times or more, which helped him pause in the right position. He added that he was also able to speak more fluently and more naturally. The notable enhancement in learners' sentence pronunciation could be attributed to the effectiveness of the

developed instructional model. Commencing with Step 3, in which the plays that learners listened to were demonstrated on the original soundtrack from the drama or used the source of learning from the prototype soundtrack. Furthermore, learners practiced repetitive reading, resulting in their being able to speak with pauses correctly and clearly, giving accurate meaning to communication. Reflections on the learning activities at the end of the class indicated that students who previously struggled with pausing experienced clear and remarkable development. For instance, Student A believed the improvement was a result of having listened to the original sound clip more than ten times and having practiced speaking in a continuous conversation. In addition to being able to speak with the correct pauses, Student A was also able to speak more fluently and naturally. Moreover, from the activities in Step 4 that reflected learning, learners raised the issue of confusion about how to use the end-of-sentence sound that connected with the end-of-sentence auxiliary words, indicating their intention. This created an exchange of information in class, where the teacher had the opportunity to give an example of a conversation using the end-of-sentence auxiliary words, encouraging learners to learn and practice more. This led to further improvement in pronunciation that extended beyond the lesson, resulting in learners being more careful with rising and falling tones of voice, and learners carefully considering the intended communication and the type of sentence, i.e., whether it was a question, affirmative, or introductory sentence. A similar conclusion was reached by Fukushima and Methapisit (2018) who found that learners who had knowledge and understanding and who practiced rising and falling tones of voice were able to pronounce sentences better than other learners.

3) The use of Japanese particles: It was discovered that after learning through the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score for this component significantly increased to 4.00 (80.00%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 3.59 (71.82%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 2.640$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .014$ ).

It was found that learners were often confused with using a Japanese particle to indicate the relationship between a noun preceding the particle and clause and were further confused about using an additional sentence-ending particle, leading to miscommunication. For example, learners mistakenly said *'tai ga nani ga suki desu ka.'* In this case, learners did not use the particle *'wa,'* but, instead, used the particle *'ga'* twice, which caused confusion to the listeners about the topic of the conversation.

Additionally, learners struggled with correct particle usage at the end of sentences. For example, learners wanted confirmation in the conversation, but instead of using the sentence-ending *'ka'* in *'soudesuka,'* learners used the sentence-ending particle *'yo'* in *'soudesuyo,'* which expressed affirmation or emphasized a statement with conviction. However, after learning with the developed instructional model, learners were more aware of the importance of learning Japanese particles and tried to use them appropriately in conversation. The notable enhancement in learners' use of Japanese particles could be attributed to the effectiveness of the developed instructional model. Step 2, for example, involved practicing vocabulary, verb conjugation, adding particles, and forming sentences using various learning media games. These activities promoted learners' understanding and enabled them to correctly use Japanese particles to indicate the relationship between a noun preceding a particle and the clause. Additionally, the learning activities in step 4 reflected learners' thinking towards learning, giving them the opportunity to ask their teacher about using additional particles from the lesson. This provided teachers with the chance to explain the methods of selecting and using the appropriate particles to represent the speaker's intention and to provide examples, which helped learners to better understand how to use these particles. Moreover, Step 3 included a learning activity in which learners narrated and role-played from dramas, providing them with opportunities to practice sentence formation by using particles with their classmates. The learning activity at level 4 reflected learners' roles in various situations, summarizing all learning through hypothetical role-playing. This gave

learners the opportunity to practice and to create conversation in Japanese using particles to convey their intentions effectively. The researcher found that previously, learners had used particles based on their prior experience, without understanding whether they were using them correctly or not. However, after working through these learning activities, they were able to use the particles more accurately. Such findings yield support to a previous study by Tomita and Maeno (2009) who found that when teachers consistently provided opportunities for learners to immerse themselves in the Japanese language, offering various examples of Japanese sentences beyond the textbook and encouraging continuous language practice, learners were able to use Japanese language particles more effectively.

4) The use of grammar: It was found that after learning with the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score significantly increased to 4.23 (84.55%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 3.05 (61.91%), with statistical significance at the .05 level ( $z = 2.820$ ,  $p$ -value = .005).

The observational results underscored a notable enhancement in learners' use of Japanese grammar following their interaction with the developed instructional model. In the initial phase of the experiment, it was found that learners exhibited improvement in the use of Japanese grammar. However, challenges emerged, particularly concerning the Japanese basic form of the verb and Japanese modality. For example, learners mistakenly changed the form of the verb saying, "*mizu wo kaite kudasai*," which altered the intended meaning from "please buy some water" to "please write the word 'water.'" Additionally, learners used "*kudasai desuka*" if they wanted to request or ask the question or recheck, which listeners found difficult to understand. After learning through the developed instructional model, however, learners practiced changing the form of the verbs and tried to use Japanese modality in the conversation more accurately.

One plausible explanation is that the notable enhancement in the use of Japanese grammar by learners was due to the effectiveness of the developed instructional model. In Step 2, the learners engaged in verb conjugation through various learning activities, and they had the opportunity to repeatedly practice verb conjugation in various sentence structures. As a result, they were able to conjugate verbs correctly. In Step 3, a passionate drama took place in which learners told stories from a drama. This allowed the learners to experience the Japanese language and become familiar with conjugated verbs in different conversational sentences. In the Step 4 of learning activity, the learners reflected on the role-play scenarios they had presented, which provided them with opportunities to use various sentence patterns and to practice speaking with confidence. Afterward, when the learners engaged in reflection and feedback in a safe environment, the learners consistently used vocabulary and various sentence patterns they found in Japanese songs, cartoons, and dramas to practice speaking more in class. For example, they made use of the sentence pattern to express expectation by using “*-mitai,*”, which meant “looks like,” and the sentence pattern to express uncertainty using “*kanaa,*” which meant “I wonder.” It was evident from the average improvement of learners’ scores that, not only had their use of Japanese grammar improved after learning with the developed model, but they also had more confidence in their abilities to engage in Japanese conversation. Similarly, a previous study by Neancharoensuk (2008) revealed that an activity that provided opportunity to students to observe, learn collaboratively, and promote self-directed learning enabled them to reduce the frequency of errors in the use of Japanese grammar.

## **Component 2: Proficiency in having an effective Japanese conversation**

Proficiency in having an effective Japanese conversation refers to the ability to speak the Japanese language properly during communication between conversational partners and contexts. The details are as follows:

1) The use of Japanese pronouns: The findings indicated that after learning with the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score significantly increased to 5.00 (100.00%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 4.45 (89.09%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 1.857$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .630$ ).

The qualitative findings from the observation reflected a notable enhancement in learners' ability to use Japanese pronouns following their interaction with the developed instructional model. In the initial phase of the experiment, it was found that learners exhibited improvement in using Japanese pronouns. For instance, initially, learners mistakenly called their classmates by using the term "*anata*," which means "you. However, "*anata*" is often used to address someone in casual conversation or between close acquaintances; between friends, it is more common to use the friend's name.

After implementation of the developed instructional model, learners became more cautious about their use of pronouns due to increased awareness of situational contexts. The notable enhancement in using Japanese pronouns by learners was probably due to the effectiveness of the developed instructional model. In Step 1, learners analyzed various conversations and scripts in a way that allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of differences between forms of self- and partner-referencing in Japanese conversations compared to the Thai language. For example, it is common in Japanese to avoid calling an individual with personal pronouns, especially "*anata*" which means "you." Instead, others are referred to by name. From the point at which learners became aware of the difference in self- and partner-references in Japanese conversations, they tried to avoid using the term "*anata*." In addition, during the Step 3 learning activity, an enthusiastic play was performed, allowing learners to tell stories through various scripts. This, of course, provided learners with a good example and immersion in the appropriate use of Japanese conversation. However, on average, there was no significant difference in the use of Japanese self- and partner-terms in

conversation before and after the lesson. One of the reasons is that most learners were able to use appropriate Japanese individual references. Only a few learners were still not able to use them appropriately. This result was in congruence with a previous study by Seenphesatchakul (2010) which reported that pronouns were often explained at the vocabulary level and lacked contextual usage explanations in real-life situations, leading learners to use them incorrectly in practical scenarios. To enable learners to use pronouns appropriately during conversations, therefore, it is essential to practice using pronouns in a communication context.

2) The use of introductory phrases: According to the study findings, after learning with the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score significantly increased to 4.23 (84.55%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 2.86 (57.27%). This statistical significance was observed at the .05 level ( $z = 2.527$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .012$ ).

The qualitative observational data reflected an enhancement in learners' use of introductory phrases following their interaction with the developed instructional model. In the initial phase of the experiment, it was found that learners exhibited improvement in using introductory phrases. For example, a small number of learners were able to engage in conversation by starting with Japanese conversational phrases using the word "*anou*." Additionally, most of the students were able to use Japanese conversational phrases like "*sumimasen*," meaning "Excuse me," to initiate conversations in a fixed conversational pattern in situations where they needed information from unfamiliar people. However, in general conversation situations, it was found that learners were unable to initiate conversations in Japanese with polite introductory or transition phrases. Instead, they began conversations with direct questions or statements of intent, or by using the word "*er*" in Thai to indicate that they were unsure how to start the conversation.

But after learning with the developed instructional model, learners understood the importance of Japanese introductory phrases and tried to use them in conversation because of the effectiveness of the developed instructional model. In Step 1, they learned to analyze the cultural background that influenced the use of the Japanese language. Moreover, they were able to link the cultural influence on introductory phrases used in Japanese conversations with the importance of using them as signals to alert a conversational partner in advance that the conversation was about to begin, or as signals to indicate the start of a new topic. From the learning activity Step 3, where learners enthusiastically performed role plays by reading drama scripts, they were able to see various examples of the use of these introductory or transition phrases in Japanese conversation, and they got to practice this element of communication until they became aware of correct use of such phrases. Step 4 also promoted the development of such awareness where the learners played character roles in various hypothetical situations. This provided the learners with tangible involvement and opportunities to practice appropriate introductions before entering a conversation by using culturally appropriate Japanese manners. Observing their performance proved that the learners kept putting effort into applying the phrases they had learned in and out of the classroom in various contexts. For example, in the context of business, learners used the phrase “*anou,*” which means “um,” and the phrase “*…taindesuga*” or “*…taindesukedo,*” which meant “I’d like to…” They used these phrases as an introduction to warmly welcome a partner to conversation. With informal conversation, they used the word “*nee, nee*” which meant “hey, hey” to call their friends and/or to start the conversation. The finding was also similar to the study of Wang (2021) which indicated that although there were numerous introductory phrases to start conversation mentioned in textbooks, there was a lack of explanations on how to use them effectively. As a result, learners were unable to apply them appropriately. If they could learn to understand their meanings and comprehend how to use them in suitable contexts, it would encourage the learners to apply these phrases effectively in real-life conversations.



3) The use of Japanese indirect expression: It was found that after learning through the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score significantly increased to 3.95 (79.09%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 2.27 (45.45%), with statistical significance at the .05 level ( $z = 2.814$ ,  $p$ -value = .005).

In the initial phase of the experiment, it could be seen that learners exhibited improvement in using Japanese indirect expressions. For example, initially, learners were unable to select appropriate expressions in line with the Japanese communicative style, including expressing intention or refusal, or choosing appropriate levels of formality in language use based on the context. This may have led to misunderstandings, such as assuming negative intentions from the speaker, like not wanting to engage in conversation or insincerity, which may have adversely affected the relationship between conversational partners. By way of example, when learners met for the first time and got to know each other and asked their friends what sports they liked, many learners responded that they did not particularly enjoy sports. In this context, such a straightforward response might discourage further conversation. In Japanese culture and language, when expressing rejection, it was often advisable to do so indirectly. For instance, they could have responded with "*supootsu wa chotto...*," meaning "Sports are a bit..." and then followed up with something they did like, such as "*anime nara sukidesu,*" which translated as "I like *anime*."

However, after learning with the developed instructional model, commencing with Step 1, in which learners identified and analyzed different patterns of Japanese language use and related them to Japanese culture, they became more aware of appropriate language use based on differences in status between their conversational partner and themselves. This resulted in the use of different language patterns, depending on social status and interpersonal relationships. This also led to increased awareness of empathy. Japanese are typically considerate and thoughtful to others, which needs to be reflected in Japanese communication strategies. Step 4 involved self-reflection about the

learning activities, during which learners wrote down their points of view on the lessons and key takeaways, such as “The Japanese seem very considerate to others, so when in a conversation, we have to be more aware of our conversation partner.” Furthermore, in the learning activities in Step 3, learners gained experience about the nature of the Japanese language with the examples of Japanese sentence patterns and communication strategies through reading stories, which enabled them to choose sentence patterns that were formal and unique, and, thus, to use the language appropriately, based on their conversational partner’s status. From observations of the reflective learning activities in Step 4, it was found that learners avoided direct refusal of a partner’s request in a conversation and instead used other strategies. For example, when the other offered to eat *ramen* with them, but it was not possible to accept the invitation, the learners apologized and provided reasons for their unavailability. They also used the strategy of asking their partners if they were available the following week. Tadokoro (2015) has pointed out that what is more important than learning communication strategies is learning to view the world positively, refraining from judgment and trying to understand others. When learners were aware of the origins of Japanese speaking styles and were receptive to appropriate Japanese conversation methods, it enabled them to genuinely immerse themselves in learning the Japanese language.

4) The use of verbal and non-verbal cues: The findings showed that after learning with the developed instructional model, the post-test mean score increased to 3.27 (65.45%) compared to the pre-test mean score of 0.64 (12.73%). This difference was statistically significant at the .05 level ( $z = 3.127$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .002$ ).

In the initial phase of the experiment, learners exhibited improvement in using verbal and non-verbal cues. However, challenges emerged, and learners were unable to respond appropriately to Japanese-style conversations. While some learners listened to their conversation partners by silently observing, others could

only respond with short phrases like “*e*” or “*hee*” when they felt surprised by what they heard. However, researchers did not observe any signals indicating active listening from the students during conversations. This might make Japanese conversation partners uncomfortable, especially Japanese individuals who expect signals of active listening during conversations. Misunderstandings could arise, leading to the assumption that the listener does not understand the intended message.

However, after learning through the developed instructional model, commencing with Step 1, where learners learned Japanese through watching Japanese *anime* and TV shows, they were able to understand how to appropriately reply to the partner in Japanese conversations. This had a great impact on the learners during learning activity 3, where they acted out dramatic plays with an opportunity to improvise and create realistic conversations. Similarly, the learners tried to provide more diverse feedback during the activity. For example, they made use of responses to show agreement by using the phrase “*soudesune*,” which meant “That’s right” or “I agree,” and “*soudesuka*,” which meant “Is that so?” or “Really?” Responses that indicated interest included “*un*,” which meant “uh-huh,” or “yes” and “*hai*,” which meant “Yes, sir/ma’am.” Responses that expressed doubt or confusion included “*hai?*,” which meant “Excuse me?” or “What was that?” Responses that expressed surprise included “*majide!*,” which meant “For real?” or “Are you serious?,” and “*sugoi!*,” which meant “Wow” or “Amazing!” Moreover, the word “*waa*” was used to express excitement or admiration. Responses that expressed sympathy included “*taihen desu ne*,” which meant “That’s tough” or “I’m sorry to hear that.” On the other hand, it was apparent that some learners were still unable to respond smoothly and naturally with the rhythm of a speaker, making errors such as pausing at the wrong time or using inappropriate responses. This may have potentially led to the misconception that learners were trying to hurry to end conversation, which could negatively affect message interpretation. As a result, it is necessary to have further training. This result supported a previous study by Kubota (1994) which reported that using short responses or gestures,

which can be challenging for foreigners, is essential in Japanese cultural conversations. It is necessary to continuously practice until one becomes accustomed to these communication patterns.

In summary, the development in the learners' oral Japanese language abilities based on the above categories showed that the developed instructional model could promote oral communication skills in the Japanese language.

## **5. Implications of the Findings**

### **1) Preparation of Learning Materials**

Prior to the experiment, Japanese media such as *manga* and *anime* were expected to be appealing to students. At the beginning of the experiment learners showed high excitement about the learning materials; however, some of them proved to be too difficult. Therefore, teachers should review and analyze the level of Japanese language proficiency, interests, and preferences of learners before applying the teaching model.

### **2) The Drama Analysis**

Some learners may not be familiar with analyzing language and culture from learning materials, which may cause them difficulty in reviewing and understanding key learning concepts on the specific topic within the expected time. Accordingly, in the drama analysis activity, teachers should clearly explain the steps in analysis, provide clear examples of the analysis results, and, if necessary, simplify the format of the analysis.

### **3) Roleplaying from Reading**

Some learners were shy about reading the play with theatrical methods. Thus, the teacher should provide encouragement and create an environment for learners to become more assertive in their performance and prepare learning resources such as websites that show Japanese texts being read aloud. Another possibility could be using the text-to-speech technology to support learners in

becoming familiar with the nature of the language. Additionally, teachers can start with reading with peers before moving on to reading in a group to alleviate nervousness or embarrassment. The teacher should also make sure that every learner has an equal number of speaking lines, or, if a student is given a role with only a few sentences, the teacher should suggest that individual take on additional roles and imitate different characters' voices to show difference among roles.

#### 4) Learning Reflection and Feedback

It was found that, initially, learners were hesitant to express their opinions and give feedback to their classmates, especially those who believed their Japanese language abilities were inferior. It is suggested that teachers should create a safe zone where learners feel free to express themselves and where they can be open to learning and development without fear of being judged. This can be achieved by encouraging learners to speak up and ask questions, and by providing feedback anonymously.

## **6. Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings regarding the use of a teaching and learning model integrating the Theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning and the concept of Reading Drama to promote Japanese language communication skills for elementary level learners, the following recommendations that might prove an important area the future studies.

1) This research aimed to develop the ability of Japanese language communication for elementary level students. Despite that, it is also crucial to study teaching methods for development of communication skills for those who are in intermediate and advanced levels. In these cases, the scope of Japanese language communication abilities and the definition of various components will differ. For instance, the ability to use different types of questions to carry on a conversation will clearly be quite different for higher level learners.

2) This research studied changes in Japanese language communication abilities among Thai learners only. Future research should examine strategically whether, after learning with the developed teaching approach, learners are able to improve their communication abilities with Japanese people, and how. Future research should be undertaken to test the learning model in the context of learners from other cultures and those who speak other first languages.

3) This research was conducted in the context of online learning. Therefore, future research should be conducted in the context of onsite classrooms to identify whether differences exist in teaching and learning management from online classroom, and how.

## **7. Conclusion**

This mixed-methods research aimed to study the effects of an instructional model based on the theory of Communication Management of Meaning and the concept of Reader's Theater to enhance Japanese oral communication skills of Thai beginners. The findings revealed that the post-test mean scores of Japanese oral communication skills were significantly higher than the pre-test at the .05 level. In addition, there were positive changes in the students' Japanese oral communication skills as observed during the implementation of the developed instructional model. Therefore, it could be concluded that the developed model was effective to enhance Thai beginners' Japanese oral communication ability.

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