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Bridging Cultures Through Language: Manga as an Inclusive Medium for Diverse Learners

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ABSTRACT

Ikigai is a Japanese concept that gives a person a sense of purpose and a reason for living. In the existing multilingual classes, fostering inclusivity and engagement among diverse learners remains a significant challenge. The research paper explores the potential of manga, a popular form of Japanese visual storytelling, as an effective medium to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in diverse learning environments. Manga offers rich narratives and culturally diverse learning environments. Manga offers rich narratives and culturally diverse themes that resonate with students from varied backgrounds, making it a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity and language acquisition.

The current generation of learners is known for their cultural and linguistic diversity; educators face the challenge of promoting inclusive and engaging instruction. This research paper explores how manga can be a powerful medium for bridging language culture using manga as a medium for language teaching. Exploring concepts such as acculturation and pop culture, as well as the Japanese principle of ikigai (a sense of purpose), the study demonstrates how manga's rich narratives and visual elements can resonate with learners from varied backgrounds. Thereby analysing manga's depiction of empathy, community, sustainable habits, and emotional well-being, the research paper illustrates how these themes cultivate cultural competence and linguistic growth.

Keywords: Ikigai, Comics, Animation, popular culture, Inclusivity, Linguistic competence.

INTRODUCTION

Manga is a well-known version of the comic; according to Amanda, "Manga is an umbrella term for a wide variety of comic books and graphic novels originally produced and published in Japan" (Pagan 2018). Manga has been popular with people since the 1970s. The emergence of pop culture among people has created increased awareness of Manga in people. "Popular culture is the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. It includes media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions, among other things" (kidd 2017). Popular culture has influenced people to a greater extent, making them aware of the cuisines from multiple cultures, dressing, music, and life hacks Pagan, Amanda. 2018. "A Beginner's Guide to Manga." Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (blog), December. https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/12/27/beginners-guide-manga.

Kidd, Dustin. 2017. "Popular Culture." Oxford Bibliographies, February. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0193.xml

In this rapidly evolving, acculturated, and technology-driven world, learners from different cultural backgrounds in a classroom are becoming a common view. In this type of diverse classroom, it is important to analyse learners' cultural tolerance and awareness to ensure empathy and acceptance among learners. Popular culture might have created an acculturated society. "Acculturation is the process by which a culture adopts the customs and ideas of another culture. It is a process of learning and adopting the values, behaviours, and traditions of another group or society" (Nickerson 2024). Due to early exposure to multifaceted cultures via technologies, learners are already understanding and appreciating the culture without even their awareness

Popular culture has enabled people to follow their desired cultural practices without any restriction; the emergence of technology in popular culture has also created everyone to follow the trending and desired aspects of pop culture. Technology might have provided a comfortable zone for people from different backgrounds to acculturate; the emergence of technology has also enhanced learner autonomy, but learners have become more independent than ever. This elevation in learners' academics has a minimal contribution to empathising with peer learners, collaboration, communication, sustainability, and acceptance

Manga has also evolved its way from comical strips since its emergence into animated versions this animated version of manga and the characters portrayed in manga, the background of Japan, sustainable habits followed by the Japanese, and their cultural habit known as 'Ikigai' are portrayed, which not only gives viewers a pleasant effect, but the concept of ikigai emphasises more into EQ (Emotional Quotient), sustainable habits, and emotional well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Japanese is one of the more sophisticated languages, and it has a rich and refined culture. The current generation of learners is more into fitness, sustainable habits, and DIY (Do It Yourself) has become normalised among the young population. This habit of experiential learning is necessary to keep this generation of learners engaged and keeping their attention span in consideration, the content delivered should be interactive irrespective of their primary field.

The content delivered to this particular generation of learners should be more interactive and appealing. Manga comics and animated versions of such comics have attractive and interactive properties; these properties make manga more sustainable in popular culture. [1]"Vygotsky believed cognitive development is influenced by cultural and social factors. He emphasized the role of social interaction in the development of mental abilities" (McLeod 2024). In the current generation of learners, there is an elevation in diverse levels of learners who have popular culture as their commonality. As Vygotsky states, learners' cognition can be developed through social factors, and it can contribute to learners in language learning.

As a comic and animation, manga can contribute to learners with its combination of comical strips and text, which learners find more visually appealing and interactive. [2]"Manga's mix of storytelling and art makes it a powerful tool for learning. As more educators see the benefits of using manga" (Cho 2024). Properties such as visual appeal and critical thinking provided by manga contribute to learners' critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

Manga and perspective of the consumers

Manga in both animated and comical forms represents the background and societal norms. For the current generation of learners, it is necessary to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of their peers, especially among the current generation who are ready to accept popular culture with welcoming hands; it is important to bring awareness to other cultures to foster empathy in the emerging diverse population.

Manga is not the only form of animation; there are several forms of animation in the media. For example, animation such as 'Family Guy' represents and mocks Westernised families, and the characters in the animation itself do not have empathy and sympathy among themselves.

The characters in Japanese animations have sustainable and reliable characteristics, such as empathy and sympathy for peers, value of family relationships, and sustainable habits. For example, the characters in the animation '*Naruto*' revolve around the character called Naruto, where the character does not become an antagonist because of his empathy towards friends, family, and kindness towards this world, which brings him to achieve what he believes, becoming a Hokage.

In a classroom with a diverse background, learners need to have empathy among learners. [3]"Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations."(Denboba 1993) Learners need to maintain and practice cultural tolerance and understanding among themselves to foster cultural competence to provide themselves with an effective academic atmosphere.

Manga as an interactive tool for language learning

Manga is a comic for Japanese reading enthusiasts, while other parts of the world have their comics and animations for young consumers; the manga in magazines are consumed by all age categories in episodes, triggering curiosity among readers regardless of their age category. The story is also not specifically for an age category; the emergence of popular culture brought manga to other parts of the world.

The language used in manga and animated versions ranges from casual, conversational Japanese to more formal expressions. Manga with the assistance of Western media, has English-dubbed and translated versions, making it a valuable resource for teaching English in context. The inclusion of slang, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references can enhance learners' ability to understand and use English in real-world situations.

Manga in Cognitive Development

The influence of Western media in manga and manga-based animation has contributed to the English version of manga and

[1] McLeod, Saul. 2024. "Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development." Simply Psychology, August. https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html.

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animation, which can be used as interactive material for learners for closed reading and listening. [4]"Story-based learning will develop learners' ability to use higher-order thinking skills to enhance creative thinking and analysing skills." (Wegerbauer 2023) In a language learning class, learners might have different needs depending on their future goals; different work cultures demand a different set of vocabulary in their work culture; using manga through multiple interactive activities contributes to the learners' cognitive development and language.

Encouraging Creative Expression

Manga as a tool for visual storytelling helps learners enhance learners' narrating skills and linguistic creativity. In animations such as 'Demon Slayer,' the narration of the protagonist's father as folklore has appreciation from the fans on the internet, using such famous and interactive content among learners as a tool for engagement can foster the skill of storytelling and reinforce language use in a meaningful and enjoyable manner, while nurturing their story telling skills integration of manga into their curriculum helps learners to improve their confidence level.

Challenges

Manga has influenced Western media and the animation industry to partner up with every other highly accessed streaming partner, such as '*Netflix*', '*Amazon Prime*', and '*Hotstar*', not only making them accessible and suitable for learners but also contributing the media to bring English versions of such animations. The English version of the animation is not common for every manga-based animation; teachers must select animations inclined towards the English language, contributing to learners' proficiency.

The influence of Western media in manga and animation can contribute to the accessibility and feasibility of the content in a diverse classroom; inappropriate errors in the translation of such content might trigger insecurities among learners, which might not contribute to the inclusivity among learners. Teachers should provide context and facilitate addressing these challenges.

3. CONCLUSION

In English language teaching, properties such as visuals and combinations of texts, cultural richness, and engagement among learners make it an invaluable tool for diverse learners. In a diverse classroom, learners are ready to collaborate with other learners for tasks or other interactive activities; they already have the innate quality of understanding and appreciating diverse cultures, due to the influence of pop culture in their everyday lives.

Technology has been constantly developing in this increasingly globalised world. [5]"Globalization refers to the growing interconnection of nations' economies. It represents the flow of financial products, goods, technology, information, and jobs across national borders and cultures" (Fernando 2024) Thus increase in globalisation has also created growth and impact in education, where interactive technology and materials reach learners in an instant, contributing to their development in IQ (Intelligence Quotient), and globalisation not only has contributed to the technological advancement, it has also contributed to the diversion of classrooms from homogeneous to diverse.

Globalisation has made a significant contribution to the emergence of pop culture [6]"globalization has also led to the spread of Western culture, including popular music, movies, and fashion" (Ziyan 2023); pop culture has globalisation as one of its major contributors, and it has also contributed to acculturation. This has led to the consumption of global content for learners, which includes manga and animation. Manga and Japanese animation have global influence not only because of their appealing looks and storylines but also because of their portrayal of characters, and their sustainable qualities have an equal role.

Manga and animation are not mere entertainment shows; due to the influence of Western media and fans all over the world, manga and Japanese animation got their English versions and dubbed versions because of this, they can be used as collaborative tools for learners of language proficiency and an acquisition tool, [7]"comics are considered an inclusive medium, capable of addressing diverse learning styles and accommodating learners with varying abilities" (Belda-Medina 2024) which can also foster inclusivity among learners.

The influence of manga and animation might have a significant role in the acquisition of language, inclusivity and other advantages. It has its disadvantages too. Academicians and teachers should be careful about the rated content which they provide to the learners from different levels, and it is also important to know that, the content provided to the learners with the usage of animation and Manga might not have a proper translation. Teachers need to review the content which they

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deliver to learners before consumption of such media.
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