Chapter V Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The present study was an exploratory study in the field of Japanese language education in India. It was the first ever experimentation of training in Learning Strategies and skill specific strategies for Japanese language learners.

As specified in the first chapter of the present thesis, the following objectives were set for the present study.

1. To investigate the JFL learners’ beliefs about and readiness for autonomous learning
2. To develop a programme for training in ‘Japanese conversation and learning strategies’
3. To test the effectiveness of the programme in ‘Japanese conversation and learning strategies’
4. To develop a programme for training in ‘Japanese reading and learning strategies’
5. To test the effectiveness of the programme in ‘Japanese reading and learning strategies’

The study was conducted in the following sequence for both the skills; conversation and reading.

Points 1,2 and 3 specify the stage of research and respective products for each component.

1. Survey of needs and beliefs: Development of the survey instrument, data collection and analysis
2. Product development based on data: Training programme (syllabus + teaching materials+ teaching method + test) , pilot study, improvisation
3. Experimentation of the training programme, Data collection, and analysis
From the findings presented and analysis conducted in the fourth chapter, all the objectives can be said to be achieved. This chapter further elaborates on the outcome of the study, i.e. the ‘Framework for Strategy Training” and also gives suggestions for further research.

5.2 Outcome of the Study: A Framework for Strategy Training

Both the training programmes involved in the present study were an outcome in terms of products answering the needs of JFL learners in conversation and reading respectively. Both the models were experimented with a pre-test - treatment - post-test model. The following points were considered while concluding on the basis of data collected and analysed during the study.

The Training Programme in Japanese Conversation and Learning Strategies experimented the product of a long-term strategy training on 13 learners for 12 weeks. The study required assured the attendance of the participants. Therefore, participants only from Pune were selected by purposive sampling. The proposed framework of the training needs to be experimented for a larger and a more heterogeneous group. The Training Programme in Japanese Conversation and Learning Strategies experimented the product of a short-term intensive strategy training. The training was conducted over a weekend for 10 hours in total. 18 participants from Pune and Mumbai participated in the training. The proposed framework for the intensive training in reading also needs an experiment for a larger and a more heterogeneous group. Secondly, since the findings and the learners’ feedback assert the need for a long-term training with more practice, such experimentation should also be undertaken.

The findings and the overall process of incorporating the findings in the next step of the product development are represented in two diagrams for respective training programmes as further.
Fig. 5.1 The Training in Japanese Conversation and Learning Strategies

Findings of the Initial Survey of beliefs about and readiness for Autonomy: Learners open to peer learning, and ready for self-monitoring and self-evaluation

Findings of survey on Needs, beliefs and Background regarding Japanese Conversation:

- Training in conversation skills and strategies highly needed: there has been no opportunity for conversation practice in regular classrooms
- Learners more willing to work in small groups, and practice than in front of the class
- Learners consider communication more important than native-like pronunciation/grammar

Findings of Pilot study:

1) Self-review forms need a guideline
2) Comics and teaching materials are effective, but need a better sequencing
3) Both, peer and self-review need to be recorded
4) Assessment needs a Rubric
5) Goals and assessment criteria should be shared with the students

Weak areas identified in the Pre-test: Learners cannot use:

1. Proper intonation
2. Set expressions
3. Suitable discourse for specific language functions
4. Complete absence of Honorific Language

Final Product of Training in Conversation and learning strategies:

- Shared goals with learners, each session wrapped with discussion on the day’s learning and ‘3 wrappers’
- Focus on weak areas: Separate sessions on set expressions, honorific language and intonation. Awareness built for discourse. Review forms included all the above factors to remind learners of assessment criteria and make reviews more comprehensive.
- Designed concrete self-review forms with specific questions, marking and open comments.
- Improvised assessment: development of a rubric, shared with students as a part of self-review form.
- Improvised variety and sequence of available materials, supplementary hand-outs created
- Peer learning facilitated in Small groups
Fig. 5.2 The Training in Japanese Reading and Learning Strategies

Findings of the Initial Survey of beliefs about and readiness for Autonomy: Learners open to peer learning, and ready for self-monitoring and self-evaluation

Findings of survey on Needs, Background, beliefs about Japanese Reading:
- The learners want to use Japanese for career, find reading difficult and mostly want to be able to read business communication, secondly newspapers and novels
- However, read mainly for preparation of examination/ improvement in vocabulary and the mostly read text types are textbooks and test papers
- They are preoccupied with smaller units of language such as unknown Kanji, Vocabulary and Grammar patterns, thereby leading solely to bottom-up strategies
- Current class activities are not answering the learners’ needs
- Technology is not being used strategically to improve learning, but only to refer dictionaries

Findings of Pilot study: Learners are weak in 1. referents, conjunctions, getting the central idea of the text and differentiating between the author’s opinion and someone else's opinion /facts 2. have very less exposure to skills training such as scanning and skimming, inference and predicting
3. The materials needed to be supplemented with own materials suited to the needs.

Weak areas identified in the Pre-test in addition to pilot study findings: Learners are weak in overall strategic reading. 1. They are unaware of techniques of Prediction, rising to the level of whole text through interrelations between sentences and paragraphs, thereby leading to top-down strategies. They cannot 2. catch the gist of the text and grasp the structure of text, 3. determine the writer’s perspective and 4. understand the structure of sentence with long noun clauses

Final Product of Intensive Training in Reading and learning strategies: Application of all findings
- No new kanji/grammar introduced, complete focus on reading skills and strategies
- Focused treatment for weak areas: materials and practice for Identifying the basic structure of the sentence, Decoding the long noun clauses, defining scope of referents, prediction based on conjunctions, judging the writer’s perspective and differentiating that with quotes, Identifying key sentence in each paragraph, identifying the structure of the text, summarising the whole text.
- Pre-test and post-test contents refined, Supplementary materials developed
- Peer learning facilitated in Small groups, strategy-awareness including better usage of internet
5.3 Towards Building a theory through Qualitative data and Observations

The outcome of the present study; as explained in the earlier section, was the ‘Framework for Strategy Training’ for two language skills, conversation and reading. The quantitative data helped in establishing a model and proving the hypotheses of experiments, whereas the qualitative data facilitated some insights into the needs, beliefs, and readiness of JFL learners, as well as their response to the changed approach of teaching-learning. It also gave an opportunity to observe and record the change in JFL classroom dynamics. The present study can be seen as a step towards the long-term objective of Autonomy; i.e., to establish that ‘learning strategies may motivate and equip learners to handle tasks independently and interdependently instead of relying entirely on teachers’.

The findings of and the observations made during the study will help from the viewpoint of implementing strategies and principles of peer learning and autonomy in a JFL classroom.

At the outset, it was found in the initial survey that the learners are open to accommodate the principles of autonomy. If given an opportunity, the learners do not want to depend solely on teachers and are ready to explore various ways of learning. During the trainings, it was found that they are comfortable with and make a positive use of small-group work. Co-operative learning can be said to imbibe the spirit of interdependence, which is an essential step towards independence and Autonomous Learning. Peers create opportunities for conversation in pairs and groups. Peer-review gives leverage to look at one’s own performance more objectively. It can be identified as ‘scaffolding’ for learning the skill of self-evaluation. In case of pair and group work for reading tasks, discussion about the reading comprehension and sharing the thinking process behind arriving at a particular answer bring an important technique to look at the same text from a different angle.
Secondly, if made aware, the learners make positive use of language skill specific strategies including compensation strategies in both, conversation and reading. If trained, they also use global strategies successfully instead of solely depending on decoding each and every unit of text for comprehension. The Top-Down model of reading and global strategies give them a technique to approach any new text and thereby boost their confidence.

At present, the learners are not trained on meta-level, i.e., planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning. However, they respond and perform very well when trained. The learners need training in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, and the standardized course/homework designed for a general purpose should be supplemented by the learners' self-directed learning which is the objective of autonomous learning.

The conclusion of the study can be stated from the viewpoint of implementation of autonomy principles. In terms of implementing Autonomy as per the Levels of Implementation (Nunan, 1997), it can be said that JFL learners are ready for and seem to participate positively at level 1) Awareness and 2) Involvement. They may further be able to adapt themselves to undertake tasks for achieving further levels (Intervention, Creation, and Transcendence) steadily under guidance.

Learners are not aware of Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies (experimented only for Speaking and Reading in this study).

The developed framework has taken into consideration the findings at all levels of product development and puts forward as suggestion for developing a framework for training in other skills.
5.4 Suggestions from the Viewpoint of Strategy Training

Direct strategies related to language skills can be taught (compensation and cognitive were more focused on in the present study than memory strategies). There is a recognizable amount of improvement in the performance of the learners after strategy training. The direct strategies give learners a sense of achievement and confidence as they are of immediate help while dealing with language tasks. The learners themselves observe the immediate change in their performance after strategy training. In case of conversation, they observe an improvement in fluency during conversation and naturalness of their expressions, eventually giving a boost to their confidence. Whereas in case of reading strategies, learners have a greater sense of achievement as the training speeds up their reading, and can be immediately used in language tasks. As a natural result, it gives them a new perspective to look at reading various texts. All these factors also support them in examinations which have been their focus for a long time.

Both, the Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies are very new to Indian JFL learners, and hence they need to be addressed more extensively. In long-term training, the learners can learn as well as apply the targeted skills and strategies in practice sessions. Instead of short-term intensive training, if trained for a long-term, the results will be sustainable.

Indirect strategies such as social and meta-cognitive strategies can also be taught. Many times they are perceived to be an innate capacity which is either present or absent in an individual. However, it may not be necessarily so. The present study proved to be a successful attempt to establish that if the learners are made aware of and given sufficient training and opportunities to exercise them, it is also an attainable skill. We can say that the learners can be guided, and self-evaluation technique can be taught in a classroom which can be developed to a certain level.
Explicit training in strategies is effective and shows considerable progress in performance. It can be said that skill specific strategies (reading/conversation/writing and listening), and even indirect learning strategies need a long-term practice. One time training is not sufficient. Comparatively, indirect strategies are more difficult to be internalized in a short time, and the success also depends on the individual learners’ capacity. However, irrespective of the degree of their usage, the raised awareness level may help the learners to have a clearer perception of their problems and more importantly, to identify the ways of active learning that suit them.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Strategy Training in Foreign Language Classrooms

1. Before designing a strategy training course, the needs of the learners should be investigated in detail. The training models developed in the present study may not be applicable for all types of learners as they have varied needs.

2. Secondly, it is important to cross check through a diagnostic test whether they rightly perceive their problems or there is an error in their perception.

3. Thirdly, the strategy training models can be developed in long-term or short-term, inclusive or exclusive manner. However, as explained before, the present study showed that a long-term model is effective. Exclusive training is recommended in order to build awareness among learners and make the strategy use their conscious choice.

4. The strategy training model should not be merely an explanation of theory but should begin with hands-on experience of its use in various language tasks. It should incorporate a sufficient amount of practice so that learners readily use newly learnt strategies and see the difference in their own performance. The materials can involve both, handouts on simple queues for strategies and practice sheets.
5. In order to make the effect of the strategy use not only ‘felt’ by learners but also validated, self-reviews of learners play a significant role. Questions to initiate such thinking should be prompted during the course. *Open discussions and brainstorming may significantly change the receptivity of learners. It makes the training explicit but has the advantage of transferability to language tasks beyond the classroom* and in real life situations.

6. There is an excellent potential in the strategy training programme if it is conducted in a *‘remedial class’*. Learners weak in certain skills can be assisted through training that addresses specific needs.

7. Basic awareness programme on Language Learning Strategies can be introduced at basic level class. Intermediate and advanced learners can be provided with guidance and practice for higher skills and strategies.

8. A working model of strategy training for all four skills should be designed which can be accommodated in Japanese language schools. The training of direct strategies for specific language skills can be conducted as an intensive short-term training, and the practice sessions should be at regular intervals.

9. Activities facilitating self-monitoring and self-evaluation should not be limited to strategy training but be incorporated in regular courses. A long-term indirect strategy training can be very effective if conducted as a part of a regular course.
5.5 Suggestions for Improving Japanese Language Teaching-Learning Processes

The surveys, tests and class performance revealed some classroom dynamics and a few problem areas (other than lack of strategy training), which can be addressed in Japanese language courses.

From the beliefs survey and the needs survey conducted during before both the training programmes, it can be said that the JFL learners have been more focused on ‘Language knowledge’ and not ‘Language Usage/Performance’. The perception and understanding of the learners regarding the difficulties in learning/language tasks is limited and in almost all cases dependent on biases or external information. E.g., learners attribute the difficulty in reading to commonly emphasised factors such as unknown kanji characters or unknown vocabulary which can be classified as “language knowledge”. At the same time, they acknowledge the importance of ‘Language Usage’, but are not aware of the variety of means to achieve proficiency in it. The present focus of ‘Language Knowledge’ is a result of their learning experience till date and also the high importance attached to the certification examinations which are implemented in a specific format. Consequently, learners are relatively more aware and inclined to use memory strategies. The memory strategies too are not expanded for all the four language skills/the learning as a whole but are specific areas in language knowledge like Kanji/vocabulary.

The data collected by peer-feedback sheets and self-review sheets during Conversation Training reveals that learners were more focused on newly learnt vocabulary and expressions because many new expressions were introduced from the functional (pragmatic) point of view. Here, a note should be taken that such feedback occurred because *no new grammar was*
introduced. Since the vocabulary and the expressions needed no grammatical explanation, the learners could focus on the functional aspect of language. This calls for more attention to the orientation of teaching content and class activities in regular courses.

When the learners are not compelled to speak in Japanese but are encouraged to do so in groups through interesting materials and activities, they initially rely on their common language other than Japanese and later, with some individual variations, they change over to Japanese as a medium of discussion. It gradually transits from short Japanese expressions and small phrases to whole sentences. The same phenomenon reflected in the self-review forms of later sessions which contain more Japanese comments than English even though the teacher had not instructed to do so.

The readiness for group work/peer learning can be systematically used as an effective learning strategy and a means to sustain communication with feedback which is otherwise lacking in a large numbered class. Peer feedback was accepted openly and served as a significant contributor to self-evaluation. It can be further encouraged for developing the meta-cognitive ability of self-evaluation. It will help the learners become less dependent on teachers.

Though not experienced earlier, with some assistance from the teacher, the learners could manage to conduct self-evaluation. Learners have on their own compared their own performance in the current session with the earlier sessions. Self-evaluation activity served as a step towards the habit of self-monitoring during the performance. Though the learners’ self-assessment (marking) was not same as the assessment done by the teacher evaluators, the activity holds value in terms of building awareness among learners on the evaluation criteria, and it can be improved with training.
5.6 Connecting with Earlier Research and the Possibilities for Further Research

5.6.1 Connecting with the Earlier Research

As described in the second chapter of Literature Review, there are many studies which report the benefits of providing students with opportunities to give feedback to, and receive it from, their fellow students. Particularly, the present study corresponds with the studies (E.g. Liu and Carless, 2006 and Kurt and Atay, 2007) stating that peer feedback helps learners to take an active role in managing their learning and that it can be quicker and more accessible sometimes than the feedback provided by a tutor. The present study also asserts their finding that learners experience significantly less anxiety in small groups/pairs while undertaking language tasks.

Further, it is noted in several studies that there is a difficulty in having students self-assess. The scores were not accurate. Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling (1997) report that students many times misjudged their assessments. Generally poor students over-marked their work and the good students under-marked their own work. The findings of the present study supports their argument. However, the author also agrees with Sadler (1989) who emphasises the need for a teacher to hand over the responsibility of assessment to the students and states that a teacher should guide the students in critical evaluation of their own learning.

With reference to the two views on Strategy Training (the one showing positive results and another one stating that it does not necessarily improve the learning or language performance of the learners), both the training models of the present study shows good results. However, as summarised in Oxford & Crookall (1989), some trainings were effective in certain skill
areas but were not so for other skills within the same study. The above said fact was more evident in case of the ‘Training in Japanese Reading and Learning Strategies’. Learners were quicker to apply bottom-up strategies related to conjunctions and referents. However, they seemed to need more time and practice for certain top-down strategies such as identifying the central idea of each paragraph or the gist of the whole text.

5.6.2 Limitations and Areas for Improvement

Firstly, the sample for the present study was purposive due to the nature and fixed period of both the trainings, a small group design was selected. Therefore, the conclusions of the study cannot be generalized for all the JFL learners in India. It is suggested that the training programme developed for the present study be experimented for larger and more heterogeneous groups.

Secondly, it was found that there is a need for interaction between the teacher and the student on an individual basis regarding the learning that occurs through self and peer-review. It will ensure the outcome as well as give more insight into the learners’ thought processes. A provision for teacher’s comments on self-review sheets can be provided for this purpose, which can also be linked with a follow-up or counselling. These sheets can be kept in a common place so that they are accessible even to learners and thereby help to improve interaction.

Thirdly, it would be a more comprehensive study if the survey of beliefs is carried out even at the end of such a training and check whether there is any change in the learner beliefs.
5.6.3 Possibilities for Further Research

Direct Strategies can be taught, and the difference can be measured more easily compared to the Indirect Strategy training and measurement of its results. More of qualitative data may ease and support the further research in Indirect Strategy training. For example, in the case of reading, Think Aloud Protocols can be of great help to gain insight into the learner’s thinking process and check the usage of strategies.

The following areas are suggested for further research.

1. To conduct beliefs survey of teachers: The author believes that it is of utmost importance to investigate teachers’ beliefs and their readiness for autonomous learning, by modifying their traditional roles and experiment with a new role in order to support Autonomous Learning.


3. Training (of skills and strategies) and Experimentation considering the aspects stated in point no. 1 and 2 at the beginning of this section (5.3.6) and improvisation through feedback.

5.7 Summary

The present chapter reported the observations about the JFL learners made during the study and summarised the conclusions of the present exploratory study based on the findings and analysis conducted in chapter IV. The chapter also summarised the development of the ‘Framework for Strategy Training’ which was successfully experimented for two language skills namely;
Conversation and Reading. It further gave suggestions for Japanese language courses in order to improve the teaching-learning processes and put forth some recommendations for conducting strategy training programme in foreign language classrooms. It also restated the areas for improvement and the possibilities of further research.