

การบูรณาการวรรณกรรมในกระบวนการเรียนการสอน ภาษาญี่ปุ่น: แนวทางการจัดการเรียนรู้โดยใช้วรรณกรรม เพื่อส่งเสริมการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์*

บทคัดย่อ

การส่งเสริมทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ของผู้เรียนได้กลายเป็นเป้าหมายทางการสอนที่สำคัญในการศึกษาภาษาญี่ปุ่น งานวิจัยก่อนหน้านี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่ากิจกรรมการอ่านช่วยพัฒนาความเข้าใจและการวิเคราะห์พื้นฐานได้ แต่ยังมีข้อจำกัดในการส่งเสริมการคิดระดับสูง งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาศักยภาพของวรรณกรรมในฐานะทรัพยากรทางการสอนในการส่งเสริม การคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่ความขัดแย้งเชิงคุณค่าและการใช้เหตุผลเชิงประเมินที่แฝงอยู่ในเนื้อเรื่อง โดยอาศัยกรอบแนวคิดการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ของ Kusumi และเกณฑ์มาตรฐานทางปัญญาของ Paul และ Elder ในการวิเคราะห์สื่อการสอนที่พัฒนาจากชุดเรื่อง *Downtown Rocket* ผลการวิเคราะห์ชี้ให้เห็นว่าวรรณกรรมสามารถช่วยให้ผู้เรียนก้าวข้ามจากความเข้าใจไปสู่การวิเคราะห์ การประเมิน และการประยุกต์ใช้ โดยส่งเสริมการเปลี่ยนมุมมอง และการตัดสินใจเชิงคุณค่า ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่าวรรณกรรมไม่เพียงทำหน้าที่เป็นสื่อการอ่านเท่านั้น แต่ยังเป็นทรัพยากรทางการสอนที่มีศักยภาพในการพัฒนาทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาญี่ปุ่น

คำ

สำคัญ

การคิดเชิงวิพากษ์, การเรียนการสอนภาษาญี่ปุ่น, สื่อการอ่านที่เป็นวรรณกรรม, กระบวนการอ่านเชิงตีความ, กระบวนการคิดเชิงประเมิน

* บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของวิทยานิพนธ์ระดับปริญญาเอก สาขาวิชาญี่ปุ่นศึกษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์

Integrating Literary Texts into Japanese Language Education: A Literature-Based Approach to Fostering Critical Thinking

Abstract

In Japanese language education, fostering learners' critical thinking skills has become an important pedagogical goal. Previous studies have shown that reading activities contribute to comprehension and basic analysis, yet offer limited opportunities for higher-order thinking. This study aims to examine the potential of literary texts as pedagogical resources for fostering critical thinking, with a particular focus on value-laden conflicts and evaluative reasoning embedded in narratives. Drawing on Kusumi's model of critical thinking and Paul and Elder's intellectual standards, the study analyzes literature-based teaching materials developed from the *Downtown Rocket* series. The analysis demonstrates how literary texts can support learners' progression from comprehension to analysis, evaluation, and application by encouraging perspective shifts and value-based judgment. These findings suggest that literary texts can function not only as reading materials but also as structured pedagogical resources that systematically support the development of higher-order thinking in Japanese language education.



words

critical thinking, Japanese language education, literary texts, interpretive reading, evaluative thinking

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Email: ykanome@rikkyo.ac.jp

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1.Introduction

Improving learners' communicative competence has long been a central goal of Japanese language education (Hashimoto & Ishida, 2009; Japan Foundation, 2020). In recent years, however, increasing attention has been paid to the need for fostering higher-order thinking skills, particularly critical thinking, in response to the uncertainty and complexity of contemporary society (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; El Aouri, 2024). In this context, Japanese language education is expected not only to develop linguistic proficiency but also to cultivate learners' ability to interpret multiple perspectives, evaluate information, and make reasoned judgments in complex social situations (Tosaku, 2017).

Previous studies have suggested that literary texts can serve as effective resources for promoting critical thinking, as they require readers to analyze narratives, interpret characters' motivations, and evaluate meanings within broader social and cultural contexts (Kusumi et al., 2012; Kusumi, 2014, 2018a, 2018b; Sakai, 2017). However, in Japanese language education, literary texts have primarily been used for extensive reading and comprehension-focused activities, and systematic pedagogical frameworks for developing critical thinking through literary materials remain underdeveloped. As a result, learners are not always explicitly guided to engage in higher-order cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and application.

To address this gap, this study proposes a shift in perspective from viewing literary texts as reading materials to positioning them as structured pedagogical resources for fostering stage-based critical thinking. In particular, this study focuses on the literary work *Downtown Rocket*, which presents realistic workplace conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and decision-making processes that are closely related to learners' future social contexts.

Building on previous studies (Kanome, in press; Kanome, 2026), which identified limitations in existing reading materials in promoting higher-order thinking, the present study proposes a structured pedagogical model for integrating literary texts into critical thinking instruction in Japanese language education. Rather than empirically measuring learner outcomes, this study aims to clarify the underlying mechanisms through which literary texts can facilitate stage-based critical thinking. This study is a conceptual and design-oriented study that develops a theoretical framework for critical thinking instruction through literary texts. It does not involve classroom implementation or empirical evaluation; *Downtown Rocket* is used as an illustrative case.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Use of Literary Texts in Japanese Language Education

This section reviews prior research on the use of literary texts in extensive and intensive reading in Japanese language education, focusing on trends and limitations related to critical thinking.

2.1.1 Literary Texts in Extensive Reading

In extensive reading instruction, literary texts are primarily used to promote reading fluency,

vocabulary acquisition, and learner motivation through exposure to large amounts of text (Sakai, 2002; Sakai & Kanda, 2005). Previous studies have emphasized learner autonomy and enjoyment in text selection, with limited attention to the role of literary texts in fostering critical thinking.

2.1.2 Literary Texts in Intensive Reading

In intensive reading instruction, literary works such as short stories, essays, and poetry are commonly used to support close reading of sentence structure, vocabulary, and expressions. Classroom discussions and teacher-led questioning provide opportunities for interpretation and analysis (Richings, 2013). However, previous studies indicate that learner activities often remain at the level of personal response or cultural understanding, with limited emphasis on the systematic development of analytical and evaluative critical thinking skills.

2.2 Theories of Critical Thinking Development

2.2.1 Definitions of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is generally defined as reflective and reasoned thinking for making judgments (Ennis, 1987; Paul & Elder, 2003; Halpern, 1998).

Synthesizing these perspectives, Kusumi (2011) conceptualizes critical thinking as comprising four interrelated dimensions: evidence-based and multifaceted thinking, reflective deliberation, goal orientation, and the integration of higher-order cognitive processes such as inference, judgment, and problem solving.

Based on this synthesis, the present study defines critical thinking as an integrative process involving understanding, multi-perspective analysis, evaluation based on explicit criteria, and application to new contexts. This definition underpins the analytical framework of the study, which adopts the hierarchical structure of “understanding → analysis → evaluation → application.”

2.2.2 Stage-Based Development of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is not acquired instantaneously but develops gradually in accordance with learners’ cognitive development, making stage-based instructional approaches essential (Kuhn, 1999). Perry’s (1970) model of intellectual development illustrates this progression, describing a shift from dualistic thinking toward multiplicity, relativism, and ultimately commitment. Learners move from seeking a single correct answer to recognizing multiple interpretations and making informed judgments based on examined values.

Subsequent studies have extended Perry’s framework to educational contexts, highlighting the role of dialogic learning and the development of reasoning based on claims and evidence (Kawai, 2019; Kuhn, 1999). These perspectives also emphasize the importance of intellectual humility and metacognitive awareness (Paul, 1992).

Literary texts support this stage-based development because they present multiple interpretations and perspectives (Sakai, 2017).

2.2.3 Critical Thinking in Language Education and Academic Literacy

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a key educational objective in EFL contexts, and numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of reading-based instruction in fostering analytical and evaluative skills beyond literal comprehension (Yang & Gamble, 2025; Bakhtiari Moghadam, Narafshan, & Tajadini, 2023; Li & Lin, 2023).

In particular, Bakhtiari Moghadam et al. (2023) propose the 3Es framework (Exposure–Exploration–Evaluation), which integrates critical thinking instruction into reading courses and has been shown to enhance learners’ critical thinking skills, reading comprehension, and learning attitudes.

Furthermore, Manalo et al. (2015) suggest that critical thinking skills can transfer across languages, highlighting the potential of foreign language education as a site for critical thinking development. In higher education, academic literacy similarly emphasizes the abilities to understand, analyze, evaluate, and apply information through critical engagement with texts (Biggs, 2003). From this perspective, engaging with literature and narratives aligns closely with critical thinking development in both language education and academic literacy (Sakai, 2017).

2.2.4 Educational Implications for Japanese Language Education

Prior research indicates that fostering critical thinking requires instructional designs that go beyond transmission-oriented reading. Effective approaches include integrating information literacy instruction, combining reading and writing activities, incorporating collaborative learning such as debate and peer critique, and providing stage-based scaffolding aligned with learners’ language proficiency (Bakhtiari Moghadam et al., 2023; Yang & Gamble, 2025).

These strategies are applicable to Japanese language education. Studies targeting Japanese language learners (Kanome, in press; Kanome, 2026) further demonstrate that staged reading tasks can effectively support the development of critical thinking, providing empirical support for the framework adopted in this study.

2.3 Previous Studies on Critical Thinking in Japanese Language Education

Empirical research on critical thinking in Japanese language education remains limited, with most studies focusing on instructional material analysis rather than classroom-based interventions or learner outcomes.

Kanome (in press) analyzes question design in JLPT N3-level reading textbooks used at Thai universities, applying Kusumi’s (2016) critical thinking process and Paul and Elder’s (2003, 2020) intellectual standards. The study examines question types, the extent to which questions promote autonomous thinking, and the use of intellectual standards. The results indicate that while the materials effectively support basic comprehension and analytical skills, they are limited in fostering higher-order critical thinking.

Kanome (2026) examines selected teaching materials based on the novel *Downtown Rocket*, developed in response to the emphasis on employability skills in Japanese language education at Thai universities, where critical thinking is regarded as a foundational competence (Kusumi,

2011, 2018). The analysis suggests that literary-based materials may contribute to raising learners' awareness of critical thinking and offer pedagogical insights. However, limitations remain regarding the restricted scope of analysis and the need to consider learner diversity.

Overall, prior studies suggest gradual progress in material-based analyses aimed at critical thinking development, while also highlighting the need for a more systematic examination of material structure and pedagogical applicability grounded in an explicit theoretical framework.

2.4 Identified Research Gaps

Previous studies indicate that existing reading materials and employability-skills-oriented textbooks can contribute to critical thinking development to a certain extent (Kanome, in press; Kanome, 2026). However, these materials remain insufficient for fostering higher-order critical thinking, particularly in terms of systematic question design and task structure.

Although the educational potential of literary texts has been suggested, their pedagogical application within a clearly defined theoretical framework remains underdeveloped. In particular, there is a lack of studies that comprehensively analyze how literary texts can make learners' thinking processes visible and support stage-based critical thinking development.

In response to these gaps, the present study builds on previous analyses (Kanome, in press; Kanome, 2026) and proposes a theoretical framework explaining how literary texts can be systematically used to support stage-based critical thinking.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section integrates the theoretical perspectives discussed below in order to construct a coherent framework for analyzing how critical thinking processes can be represented and structured in literary text-based reading activities. The following subsections are not treated as separate theories, but as interrelated components that together inform the design of stage-based critical thinking instruction in Japanese language education.

3.1 Definition and Components of Critical Thinking

Based on the diverse definitions of critical thinking reviewed in Section 2.2.1, it is necessary to clarify how critical thinking should be conceptualized in Japanese language education, particularly in the context of reading activities. In educational settings, critical thinking is generally understood as a set of higher-order cognitive processes that enable learners to analyze information, make judgments based on evidence, and reach reasoned decisions. However, when Japanese language learners engage in critical thinking through reading activities, particularly literary texts, a more concrete and stage-based framework is required to systematically capture and analyze this process.

Accordingly, this study reorganizes the key processes commonly identified in previous research—such as understanding, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and application—and redefines critical thinking in reading activities as consisting of the following four stages:

(1) Understanding

This stage involves accurately comprehending the content of the text and organizing information. Beyond vocabulary and sentence-level comprehension, learners are required to grasp contextual meanings, logical structures, and the author's intentions.

(2) Analysis

At this stage, learners examine extracted information from multiple perspectives by comparing, classifying, and relating elements within the text. This includes identifying the structure of arguments, exploring implicit assumptions, and examining underlying implications.

(3) Evaluation

This stage entails judging the validity of arguments, the credibility of information sources, and the coherence of reasoning based on explicit criteria. Learners are expected to articulate their own evaluative standards and consider multiple viewpoints when assessing the strength and limitations of conclusions.

(4) Application

In the application stage, learners transfer the outcomes of analysis and evaluation to new contexts in order to construct or reconstruct their own perspectives. This stage includes reflective activities in which learners reconsider their judgments and viewpoints while connecting the text to personal experiences or external knowledge, thereby generating original opinions or alternative solutions.

This study adopts this four-stage framework as an analytical tool for observing and visualizing learners' critical thinking processes in reading activities. Moreover, this framework is applicable to both extensive and intensive reading instruction, enabling the visualization of learners' gradual development of critical thinking.

From these perspectives, this study defines critical thinking as an integrative cognitive process involving understanding, analysis, evaluation, and application in forming reasoned judgments. This framework serves as the foundational analytical perspective for the material analysis in the subsequent chapter and for evaluating the development of critical thinking in the instructional practices discussed in Chapter 5.

The four stages are synthesized from established critical thinking frameworks (Ennis, 1987; Paul & Elder, 2003, 2020; Halpern, 1998; Kusumi, 2011).

3.2 Why Literary Texts Foster Critical Thinking

The use of literary texts for fostering critical thinking is supported by a clear theoretical foundation. According to Sakai (2017), learning through literature grounded in Paul's concept of multi-logical inquiry should be positioned not merely as literary education, but as an integral component of critical thinking education. Literary texts inherently contain ambiguity, complexity, and polysemy, requiring learners to engage in value judgments and multi-perspective reasoning.

These characteristics make literary texts particularly well suited to eliciting critical thinking processes.

Sakai (2017) conceptualizes the learning process through literary texts as follows. Learners begin with a literal understanding of the text and proceed to a stage of “reading literature,” in which they engage in inquiry through questions that emerge from the narrative. Subsequently, learners detach from the literary world and converge on more abstract, conceptual questions, linking these questions to their own lived experiences and expanding perspectives. Through dialogic interaction, learners then examine and evaluate multiple viewpoints, ultimately connecting their inquiry to reflections on society, the self, and knowledge construction. This latter process, described as “learning through literature,” represents the core of critical thinking grounded in Paul’s multi-logical inquiry.

To establish philosophical inquiry in education, Sakai (2017) identifies the following essential conditions:

1. The formulation of basic questions that allow for the expansion of diverse perspectives and frames of reference, and that require judgments supported by reasoning.
2. Dialogic interaction, through which learners engage in internal reflection, comparison with others’ perspectives, and dialogue with broader contexts, enabling rational integration through dialectical thinking.
3. The use of logical skills, including analysis, critique, and argumentation, supported by an understanding of language and logic.
4. Ethical dispositions, such as fair-mindedness and open-mindedness, which are essential for engaging in multi-logical dialogue and achieving rational integration.

Based on this theoretical background, this study positions the development of critical thinking through literary texts as a process in which learners understand the text, analyze it from multiple perspectives, evaluate it based on evidence, and apply their insights to new contexts. Drawing also on Kusumi’s (2011, 2016) conceptualization of critical thinking processes, this study organizes these stages into the four-step framework of understanding, analysis, evaluation, and application. This framework constitutes the fundamental analytical perspective for evaluating critical thinking development in the material analysis presented in the following chapter and in the instructional practices discussed in Chapter 5.

In this sense, literary texts are not treated as objects of literary interpretation alone, but as pedagogical resources that make learners’ thinking processes observable and analyzable.

Unlike traditional literary studies that focus on interpretive outcomes, this study operationalizes narrative features as instructional design elements that structure learners’ cognitive processes.

3.3 Analytical Perspectives of the Present Study

To examine the process of fostering critical thinking through literary texts, this study adopts the following three analytical perspectives:

(1) Perspective on Thinking Processes (Understanding → Analysis → Evaluation → Application)

Based on Kusumi's (2011, 2016) model of critical thinking, learners' cognitive development in reading literary texts is analyzed across four stages: understanding (literal comprehension), analysis (identification of assumptions and structural relationships), evaluation (credibility and values), and application (transfer to broader contexts).

(2) Perspective Based on Intellectual Standards

Learners' utterances and written responses are analyzed in reference to the intellectual standards proposed by Paul and Elder (2003, 2020), including clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logical consistency, significance, and fairness.

(3) Literary Perspective

This perspective examines how literary characteristics—such as value concepts, conflicts, and multiple viewpoints—as well as textual ambiguity influence learners' interpretations and discussions, with particular attention to value judgments embedded in literary conflicts.

4. Analysis of Literary Texts

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, the present study next examines how critical thinking processes become visible in literary texts. To illustrate this process, the study analyzes selected scenes from *Downtown Rocket*.

This analysis is not intended to provide empirical evidence of learner outcomes, but to illustrate how critical thinking processes can be conceptually identified in literary texts.

4.1 Rationale for Text Selection

This study selects *Downtown Rocket*, a teaching material based on Ikeido's *Shitamachi Rocket* series, to examine its potential for fostering critical thinking. The series addresses contemporary issues such as technological development, organizational conflict, ethical decision-making, and social responsibility, presented from multiple perspectives including company executives, engineers, and other stakeholders. These features provide rich material for multi-perspective reading and critical analysis. The text's clear structure, accessible language for upper-intermediate learners, and narrative driven largely by dialogue make it suitable for classroom use. Importantly, the novel's depiction of value judgments and dilemmas aligns with the study's objectives and the analytical framework based on Paul and Elder's intellectual standards.

4.2 Method of Analysis

The analysis focuses on Part 2 of Learning "Fundamental Skills for Business" through *Downtown Rocket*!, which presents twelve fundamental skills through scenes and dialogues from the original novel. Part 2 is selected because it clearly illustrates characters' judgments, conflicts, and decision-making processes, making learners' cognitive and evaluative engagement visible.

Among the twelve skills, this study emphasizes autonomy, problem-finding ability, and creativity, which correspond to critical thinking dimensions such as independent judgment, analytical capacity, and value creation (METI, 2006).

Scenes are analyzed with attention to (1) value concepts and conflict structures, (2) character thinking processes according to Kusumi's four-stage model (understanding → analysis → evaluation → application), and (3) cognitive activities related to Paul and Elder's intellectual standards, including clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and fairness. This approach systematically organizes value judgments and thinking processes in *Downtown Rocket*, particularly how value judgments embedded in literary conflicts influence learners' interpretations and discussions, thereby providing a basis for examining the text as a resource for fostering critical thinking in Japanese language education.

4.3 Analysis Results

This study analyzed selected dialogues spoken by characters in scenes from the *Downtown Rocket* series used in Part 2 of Learning “Fundamental Skills for Business” through *Downtown Rocket!* from the perspective of a critical thinking framework. Representative dialogue excerpts were selected for each skill, focusing on scenes where characters' cognitive processes are clearly expressed and align with the four stages of critical thinking—understanding, analysis, evaluation, and application.

Example of Autonomy

Kano states:

「なんなんですかね、立花さん。この雰囲気」(*“What do you think this atmosphere is about, Tachibana?”*).

Tachibana replies briefly,

「だな」(*“Yeah.”*).

Later, Tachibana says:

「福井に出張させていただきませんか。実際に見てきたいんです。我々が開発しているものが何であるのか」(*“May I be allowed to go on a business trip to Fukui? I want to see it with my own eyes—what it is that we are actually developing.”*).

(Ikeido, 2018, *Downtown Rocket: Gaudi Project*, Chapter 7, “For Whom,” pp. 265–266)

In this scene, Tachibana attempts to overcome a stagnant situation by voluntarily proposing a business trip to directly observe the field. This action exemplifies autonomy, defined as the ability to examine one's own thinking process and act based on independent judgment. Rather than remaining passive in an ambiguous atmosphere, Tachibana identifies the need for firsthand information and takes responsibility for initiating action. This self-directed decision-making illustrates how critical thinking can lead to autonomous action.

This progression reflects a shift from understanding the situation to analyzing underlying

conditions and evaluating possible actions, which leads to application in the form of self-initiated decision-making.

Example of Problem Identification

Tachibana states:

「いまオレたちが向き合っているのは、バルブではなくお客さん、つまりギアゴーストなんじゃないかな」 (“What we are really facing right now is not the valve itself, but our customer—Gear Ghost.”).

He continues:

「オレたちはハイスペックのバルブを追求してきたけど、本当にそれがギアゴーストのトランスミッションに必要なんだろうか。実はそれって、ウチのエンジンがハイスペックすぎてニーズを掴み損ねていたのと同じことなんじゃない？」 (“We have been pursuing high-spec valves, but were they really necessary for Gear Ghost’s transmission? In fact, isn’t this the same as when our engines were too high-spec and failed to meet actual needs?”).

(Ikeido, 2021a, Downtown Rocket: Ghost, Chapter 4, “Gaudi Project,” pp. 145–146)

Here, Tachibana questions the underlying assumptions guiding product development and recognizes the limitations of a technology-first approach. By reconsidering whether technical excellence alone meets customer needs, he shifts focus from the product itself to the broader context of its use. This reflective process demonstrates problem identification, defined as the ability to analyze the current situation and clarify the core issue.

Example of Creativity

Shimazu states:

「ほら、この前、畔を塗り直したでしょう……」 (“You remember when we repainted the ridge the other day...”).

He continues:

「無人運用にこだわって作業機がお留守になっていたんです」 (“Because we were so focused on unmanned operation, the work machines were left unused.”).

(Ikeido, 2021b, Downtown Rocket: Yatagarasu, Chapter 6, “Political Maneuvering Surrounding Unmanned Agricultural Robots,” pp. 251–252)

In this scene, Shimazu connects multiple events and reassesses existing assumptions to envision a new solution. By reconsidering the consequences of overemphasis on unmanned operation, he reframes the situation and generates an alternative perspective that opens the possibility for new value creation. This exemplifies creativity, defined as the ability to generate new value by drawing on existing knowledge and experience. Moreover, this process aligns closely with Koyasu (2011) “accelerator” function of critical thinking—the capacity to create value through imagination.

Based on the above analyses, this study demonstrates that a critical thinking framework

provides a useful lens for interpreting how cognitive processes are represented through characters' utterances in literary texts.

5. A Framework for Integrating Literary Texts into Critical Thinking Instruction

5.1 How Literary Texts Can Support Critical Thinking Development

The analysis suggests that literary texts have the potential to support engagement with different stages of critical thinking, including understanding, analysis, evaluation, and application. In this framework, learners are positioned as active agents who engage with narrative conflicts through staged tasks, thereby progressively developing critical thinking processes. This study conceptualizes how narrative structures—such as conflicts, value tensions, and decision-making processes—can be used to design tasks that facilitate higher-order thinking.

5.2 A Pedagogical Framework for Critical Thinking Development

Building on the conceptual analysis presented above, this study proposes a pedagogical framework for integrating literary texts into critical thinking instruction in Japanese language education. The framework outlines how literary texts can be used to design learning activities that correspond to different stages of critical thinking.

The framework consists of three interrelated instructional principles as follows.

First, comparison of judgments encourages learners to examine characters' decisions and statements across different contexts, thereby highlighting differences in values and reasoning criteria. This principle supports the transition from understanding to analytical thinking.

Second, value mapping provides a structured way to visualize relationships among conflicts, decisions, and consequences within the narrative. By organizing these elements, learners can more systematically engage with complex reasoning processes, facilitating deeper analysis and evaluation.

Third, proposing alternatives invites learners to critically assess the validity of decisions and to consider possible alternative outcomes. This principle is intended to extend thinking beyond the text and to support the application of critical thinking to new or real-world contexts.

In addition, the framework suggests that literary texts suitable for this approach typically include clear conflict structures, multiple perspectives, and themes related to social, ethical, or organizational issues. These features make it possible to design tasks that align with stage-based critical thinking development.

5.3 Contribution of the Present Study in Relation to Previous Research

Previous studies (Kanome, in press; Kanome, 2026) have shown that conventional reading materials in Japanese language education tend to focus on comprehension and basic analysis, providing limited opportunities for higher-order thinking such as value judgment, perspective comparison, and application.

While literary texts have been recognized as potentially rich resources for interpretive

engagement, previous research has not sufficiently clarified how these texts can be systematically integrated into instructional design for critical thinking development.

In contrast, the present study does not simply highlight the potential of literary texts, but proposes a structured pedagogical framework that links specific narrative features—such as conflicting values, multiple perspectives, and decision-making processes—to stage-based critical thinking activities. In this sense, the contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing the process through which learners can be guided from comprehension to analysis, evaluation, and application through carefully designed instructional tasks.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Overall Summary

This study has examined how literary texts can be conceptualized as pedagogical resources for fostering stage-based critical thinking in Japanese language education. Grounded in Paul and Elder's (2003, 2020) intellectual standards and Kusumi's (2016) critical thinking model, the study has sought to clarify how literary texts can be systematically positioned within reading instruction to address the limitations of comprehension-oriented materials.

By integrating prior research with a text-based analysis of *Downtown Rocket*, this study proposes a structured pedagogical model that connects narrative features—such as value-laden conflicts, multiple perspectives, and decision-making processes—with stage-based critical thinking activities (understanding, analysis, evaluation, and application). The contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing how literary texts can be systematically utilized to support higher-order thinking development in reading instruction.

6.2 Implications for Educational Practice

Based on the proposed model, this study identifies three interrelated dimensions for designing critical thinking-oriented reading instruction in Japanese language education.

(1) Material Selection

Literary texts that include conflicts, multiple perspectives, and implicit value judgments are particularly suitable, as they provide opportunities for learners to compare interpretations and examine decision-making processes.

(2) Question and Task Design

Instructional tasks should be systematically aligned with stages of critical thinking (understanding → analysis → evaluation → application), enabling learners to gradually engage in increasingly complex cognitive processes.

(3) Classroom Facilitation

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding learners to articulate reasoning, compare perspectives, and evaluate judgments using explicit critical thinking criteria. This facilitation supports the

transformation of textual engagement into structured cognitive development.

6.3 Contribution and Significance of the Study

Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on literary interpretation or isolated reading activities, this study provides a theoretically grounded and systematically articulated framework that bridges literary analysis and instructional design. By explicitly linking narrative structures to stage-based critical thinking processes, the study offers a transferable model for designing critical thinking-oriented reading instruction in Japanese language education.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

As this study is conceptual in nature, it does not empirically test the effectiveness of the proposed model in classroom settings. Future research should examine how the framework functions in actual instructional contexts and how learners' critical thinking development can be observed and assessed over time.

In addition, further studies across different genres of literary texts are needed to explore how textual characteristics influence the effectiveness of stage-based critical thinking instruction.

Additionally, future research should consider learner variables such as proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds to examine how these factors mediate the effectiveness of the proposed framework.

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