THE INFLUENCE OF COSPLAYING IN INCREASING JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING AT BINUS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This research was intended to see the prospect of whether the significance of cosplay subculture had given certain influence towards these colorful communities. The target population was Bina Nusantara University students who were either in Japanese Department or those who were interested in Japanese culture. By utilizing the online questionnaire, this research used qualitative random sampling approach and expected to be used as a reference in designing the future curriculum since it was quite applicable and relevant to the condition in Indonesia. Based on the findings, cosplaying has been proven to be a beneficial activity that may help and motivate the learners to understand Japanese language and culture. Finally, the researchers suggest building Japanese language curricula based on the cosplaying activity that may be implemented soon to attract Japanese enthusiasts.

Keywords: cosplay, Japanese language, and culture, Japanese culture

INTRODUCTION

According to Matsuura and Okabe (2014), cosplay is a term in Japanese culture that refers to the combination of costume and play as part of expressing the affection for anime and *manga*'s story and characters. The difference between the western countries and Japanese is the Japanese government quickly embraces the pop culture as part of the national culture to promote the tourism industry of the country. There are no surprise people can easily find the cosplayers, which are mostly dominated by female high school and college students in places such as Akihabara and Harajuku in Tokyo, Japan.

The exact presence of cosplaying in Indonesia is unknown. The researchers predict that this culture comes through from the comic books and movies. The private TV stations in the 80s also create a new fan club of certain anime or *manga* characters. This Japanese popular culture phenomenon is captured by the printing industries by translating the popular pocket-sized Japanese comic books into Bahasa. Gradually, the readers start to idolize the characters and its costumes.

There is any difference between Indonesian and the Japanese cosplayers. There have been many Indonesian cosplayers are copying this Japanese sub-culture. The Indonesian cosplayers still think that the Japanese cosplayers are still the best because it is very difficult and expensive to make. However, albeit its limitations, the Indonesian cosplayers are capable of holding annual conventions where they can show their passion in dressing like their idols. This fandom phenomenon is like the *Doujinshi* convention, which is held regularly in Japan. In various articles, Chen (2015); Ito and Crutcher (2014); and Lamerichs (2011) have documented that the cosplayers do not only exhibit themselves as their favorite character, but also imitates the gesture, the way they speak, the words that the character mostly used, act in the character's ways, think the character's thoughts, and even assume

the character's soul. In other words, they are expected to bring their favorite anime/*manga* characters into life.

In relation to the hugely popular anime/*manga* characters, BINUS University also experiences similar phenomenon as the university is located in Jakarta. This existence of cosplayers, although not officially recorded, it can be caused by several reasons. For example; (1) Most of the students are at the undergraduate level with the range of the twenties. (2) Most BINUS University students come from Jakarta, and most of them are exposed to Japanese popular culture which makes them highly interested in Japanese culture. (3) BINUS University has Japanese Department, and it has courses that discuss Japanese popular culture. (4) Japanese culture is taught and endorsed through classes and courses (at Japanese Department), the student association or Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa (UKM), and the major student community or Himpunan Mahasiswa Jurusan (HMJ). The students from different background surprisingly dominate this UKM. They join the club simply because they are interested in it. (5) The HMJ is a club endorsed by the Japanese Department. This club is quite homogenous in terms of its population. Therefore, the students that involved in this club are more similar in its activities and programs.

At BINUS University, cosplaying itself is completely an independent course without endorsement from the university. The cosplayers are designed and make their costumes and accessories. According to Matsuura and Okabe (2014), this process of the self-making costume is the actual spirit of cosplaying. The cosplayers are making their costume following their favorite popular Japanese characters have become a standard in the Cosplay community. By looking at this trend, it is worth to analyze the nature of cosplaying at BINUS University to find out the advantages or disadvantages of this activity. With almost similar topic, Ito and Crutcher (2014) has studied the possibilities of learning the Japanese culture based on the fan culture in the US, which stated that the Cosplay community is characterized as an interest-driven, peer-based reciprocal learning environment.

Based on the empirical and experience observation within the domain of BINUS University, these cosplayers do exist among these students. Although the number is not recorded accurately, these groups of fans have an intense relationship inside and outside the university. Some members of the group who join the Nippon Club are interested in Japanese culture that endorsed by the Japanese Department. Although the Department does not officially support the students to do Cosplaying, there is a tendency to perceive that the students who do Cosplaying have a better understanding about the Japanese culture compared to those who do not. From time to time, the non-Japanese Department students also show the interest towards the Japanese popular culture. The Nippon Club organizes and conducts their events independently. Because of this phenomenon, the researchers believe that it is part of the self-immersion that strongly motivates the Cosplayers to learn about Japanese culture. Based on these notions, it is conceivable to assume that BINUS University is a perfect place since the students have similar interests and characteristics.

The researchers use the terminology of *manga* in this article not just for the comic book. In Japan, the *manga* is loved by all the people regardless of age, sex, social class, occupation, and educational level. In the larger sense, *manga* can be including caricature, cartoon (editorial, political, and sports), syndicated panel, and comic strip. The terms of *manga*, according to Ito and Crutcher (2014) generally refers to the story that is read like a graphic novel that is well-known for the set of frames and balloons. Some series are lasted more than a few decades and contain ten thousands of pages. Since 1990, every year the Japanese government endorses this culture by awarding the *manga* artists. Because of the rewards, it aspires many young and adults' artists to become *manga* artists.

The *manga*'s visual texts should be understood as a sign that represents the social and cultural reality. Unlike superheroes comics' from America who are truly have the super power, many protagonists in Japanese *manga* are rather ordinary people with no special occupations. Otmazgin (2014) has stated as the readers follow these protagonists, they also learn about the occupations, the

vocational jargon, the unique events, professional and social situations the protagonist's encounter, and the ways that occupation functions in society. The protagonists are also representing their social class and status, prestige or honor by the society.

Lamerichs (2011) has stated that fan culture such as *manga*, anime, and cosplaying is like religion or food where they can facilitate the empathy, which many of its readers feels that they share the same experience with the heroes and heroines. Reading the *manga* could create a group of fanatics who share the same values, experiences, and dreams. These activities according to Ito and Crutcher (2014) create a sort of bond between the readers which is later shown in the form of cosplay. He also states that cosplay is a combination of the English words which are costume and play. This term was coined by the game designer, Takahashi Nobuyuki who invented the term in the 1980s. Cosplaying and public performance in Japan is related to a long tradition of Kabuki Theater dating back to the feudal times in which the male actors portray both men and women who wear make-up. Ito and Crutcher (2014) has mentioned that the cross-dressing among the players is common during the performance, which happened in Takarazuka Theater Group, which was founded in 1914. The most notable cosplay group is the Harajuku girls, or the huge community of cosplayers that occurs in Harajuku, Tokyo. Like Akihabara, Harajuku is the home of exotic, carefree public performance, and cosplay expression. It is the center of fashion in Tokyo from the high fashion to the eccentric and personal fashions, which is displayed on the streets.

How cosplaying is formed and become parts of urban culture in the big cities is explained by Smith in Chen (2015) the definition about fan culture, which stated that the fan culture is the body of people who are fans of a pop culture, that has been an active group and existed in many postmodern societies. According to Chen (2015), even though they exist, its genres and dynamics of its forms are difficult to define. This phenomenon is often called as the fandom, which in fact is a multicultural territory, where each fan community subscribes to its unique media substances, values, and contexts. The young people have their fan cultures, as a part of youth subculture, many of them are little known or completely unknown to most of us. The fan culture has become a significant arena for the communication studies because anime or *manga* fandom as a subculture has an enormous influence on the youngsters. According to Chen (2015), in Japanese culture, the fans are totally involved in making *manga doujinshi* (self-published comic fanzines), cosplaying (costume play), and participating in fan activities and conventions.

This research is expected to evaluate the possibilities of doing cosplaying and how it may be beneficial towards the people who are doing this type of subculture. In extension, hopefully, this research opens new insights on the possibility of exposing cosplaying as one of many alternative ways of learning the Japanese language.

The significance of the research can be formulated into four purposes, they are; (1) to propose the different approach for the practitioners in teaching Japanese language and culture, (2) to enrich the Japanese Department curriculum, (3) provide learning alternatives for Japanese language students or enthusiasts, and (4) can be a model for language practitioners or teachers. In the larger context, this research is expected to provide a new approach in teaching the foreign language especially, Japanese language. The findings may be relevant to the teachers as well as the students. The output of this research is expected to be used as a reference in designing future curriculum since it is quite applicable and relevant to the condition in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research is using a qualitative random sampling approach where the samples are BINUS University students. Thirty-one undergraduate level students are selected regardless of age, gender, or departments. However, the equal number of students is selected between the students from Japanese students and the non-Japanese students to ensure the balance of the analysis.

The researchers will take the opportunity to talk to these cosplayer students. From these conversations, hopefully, the information can be collected, documented, and recorded especially the social interaction at those conventions and to find the fan artists to conduct further formal interviews. The additional resources are selected if they are more than sixteen years old, have considerable experience in the making of *doujinshi* or cosplay, and are willing to be interviewed. The formal interview is semi-structured with a few questions that are designed to guide the major course of the interviews and additional questions that are drawn up according to the responses that are given during the interviews. Each interview lasts at least one hour, and it is recorded.

To explain the meaning of the research, the researchers will apply the qualitative research. Patton (2002) as quoted by Suri (2008) states that the qualitative research is concerned with developing the explanations of social phenomena. For the quantitative information, the researchers will organize, summarize, and describe the surveys. These techniques are called descriptive non-experimental research. According to Johnson & Christensen (2014), the primary purpose of this type of research is to provide an accurate description or picture of the status or characteristics of a situation or phenomenon. Commonly, the researchers follow these three steps. First, randomly select a sample from a defined population. Next, determine the characteristics of the sample. Last, infer the characteristics of the population based on the sample.

For the first stage, the researchers will determine the research subjects and methods. The second and the third stages, the researchers will develop questionnaires and the list of the questions to be distributed during the cosplay conventions and events in Jakarta. At the next stage, the researchers will document the student's answer and categorized them into several categories, which later analyzed and interpreted using the theory. The final stage is arranging the outcomes and interprets the result into meaningful information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research involves BINUS University students. The selected informants from different departments are going to be treated as the major sample. Although, it is focused on the twenty informants, at the end of the sample it grows into 31 active respondents. Johnson and Christensen (2014) have stated that this snowball phenomenon sampling is commonly happened during the qualitative study and often used to maximize rapport between the respondents and interviewer during the interviews and field observations.

During the field observations at cosplay events, the researchers use digital cameras, camcorders, digital voice recorders, and field notes to record the flow of events. After the event parties, the researchers will record the informal conversations. The interviews focus on the informant's experiences from the first time they participate in the cosplay community. Although the researchers have already prepared the set of questions for the interview, these questions are focused on facilitating the informant's narrative and do not correct the deviation if it occurs. Guidelines for these topics are asked during the interview and can be listed into three categories. The first categories are how the

respondent perceived changes in him or herself as these cosplayers gain online or offline cosplay experience. The second categories are about the honest opinions regarding the certain behaviors at the cosplay events. And the last categories are the types or characteristics of a popular cosplayer within the cosplayer community.

Based on the first question of the questionnaire and the interview, it reveals that from all the 31 respondents, most of them answer that the reasons they are cosplaying are because they are either interested in the Japanese culture, wanted to be the character they wanted to be, attracted to modeling and costume-making, and for the personal purposes (satisfaction, enjoyment, and curiosity). In addition, some of the respondents address that because of cosplaying they can learn new skills such as sewing, make-up, hair/wig styling, and properties making. The second answer from the questionnaire results, which asked about the type of cosplaying they prefer, all 31 respondents give different answers. Interesting findings are found in different variables such as the cosplaying type (original, animation, *manga* or others), cosplaying categories (permanent or absolute, semi-absolute, momentum or passive), cosplaying frequency and cosplaying expenses.

There are many types of cosplaying that the Japanese enthusiasts could adapt but based on the respondents' responses, most of them chose to do the cosplay on animation character, followed by fewer original, game and *manga* characters. Meanwhile, in defining the category, the respondents are mostly into momentum cosplaying (74,2%) which is doing the cosplay of certain character as it is on a trend, followed by the passive cosplaying (19,4%), and then the least semi-absolute and permanent/absolute cosplaying. Regarding of how often the respondents conduct cosplaying, approximately 87,1% of the respondents says that it all depends on whether there's an event or not, followed by few who said once a week or a month, and none answered every day as their cosplaying frequency. Finally, the respondents give the last variable of cosplaying expenses, which is mostly either below Rp500.000 (29%) or from Rp500.000 – Rp2.500.000 (64,5%), while the rest tend to spend more than Rp2.500.00 for cosplaying. In relation to the expenses, it is crucial to note that most of the respondents say that the cosplaying budget comes from their allowance rather than their salary or other sources (96,8%).

In relation to the language and cultural proficiency, as stated in the third question of the questionnaire, it is interesting to apprehend that most of the cosplayers have few Japanese language proficiency (58,1%) and even to Japanese-illiterate (22,6%) compared to those who are above JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) N3 (16,1%). It is also quite impressive 100% of the respondents state that they would be willing to learn the character's personality, language, and body gesture to achieve the maximum cosplaying potential. By looking at this data, there have also been findings on how most of the cosplayers tend to believe that cosplaying indeed helps them to learn Japanese, such as character, culture, language, and others (87,1%), meanwhile others do not (12,9%). Finally, the respondents also state that after trying to be a cosplayer, more than half of them (with different proficiency JLPT N levels) are willing to learn more about Japanese language while the rest (22,6%) say the otherwise.

By reading the data, the researchers manage to analyze the social impact within these lavished Japanese cultures. First, the issue of how the cosplayers feel when they are doing cosplay. Most of the respondents state that by cosplaying, they tend to learn new soft skills such as sewing, hair/makeup styling, and even properties making. In extension, they also believe that cosplaying will enable them to feel some degree of satisfaction, enjoyment, and curiosity. These are very useful because students are usually the one who is motivated and believe that anything is possible. Most of the cosplayers from 31 respondents believe that cosplaying would eventually teach them about the Japanese language since they are required to understand the character they are playing (by oral expression, body gesture, and behavior). It can be defined that by doing the cosplay it is a mixture of the implicit and autonomous learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on this research, cosplaying is proven to be a beneficial activity that may help and motivate the learners to understand Japanese language and culture. Most of the respondents learn to achieve perfection in playing his or her character. It is not just about the costume and gimmicks; it is about being able to reflect the character that the cosplayer desired to be. They want to be acknowledged that they are capable of becoming that character. Most of them (96,8%) state that they are willing to join a free Japanese course if proposed. Based on the report on their cosplaying budget, it can also be stated that money is not entirely the issue.

In conclusion, this research has proven the effectiveness of cosplaying for the respondents or in broader perspective where cosplaying foster learners to learn Japanese art and culture. These cosplayers have stated their willingness to spend their energy, time, and finance to their fandom activity. To answer the issue that is brought up with this research question, the cosplaying does have its pedagogical implications—albeit not in its finest accordance—within the Japanese mastery. In addition, seeing the positive impact it has, it is also safe to suggest the notion of constructing the curricula based on the Cosplaying activity. This notion may be implemented soon to attract the Japanese enthusiasts, both for the Japanese and non-Japanese departments.

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APPENDIX

1. Kenapa kamu menyukai Cosplay? (31 responses)

Hobby

Karena dapat meningkatkan kreativitas dan mempelajari banyak skill baru (seperti belajar membuat kostum, props, styling wig, makeup, dsb)

Karena saya ingin menjadi karakter yang saya sukai

Karena saya suka tampil seperti character yang saya suka dan Cosplay sendiri termasuk seni dan saya menyukai seni

Karena kelihatanya keren

Karena bisa menjadi karakter idaman

Karena bisa menjadi karakter yang disuka

Unik

Kostumnya lucu pengen nyoba

Bisa membawa karakter favorit ke dunia 3d (asli)

Karena saya tertarik dengan anime

Karena baju baju anime unyu

Tertarik moddeling

Karena suka.

Karena pas jadi satu karakter itu kesannya beda

Saya senang bikin props.

Karena saya ingin mewujudkan karakter favorit menjadi nyata dalam bentuk Cosplay

Karena dengan Cosplay saya mendapatkan pengakuan dari orang lain

Kepuasan pribadi

Karena saya ingin mengekspresikan kesukaan saya pada suatu tokoh/serial dan suka tampil dengan get up dan/atau make up di publik

Karna kawaii

Karena saya ingin menjadi karakter tersebut

Testing my sew skill

2. Karakter Cosplay apa saja yang kamu sukai? (original, game, animation, dsb) (31 responses)

Animation

Animation

Animation

Original

Original

Anime, Game, Manga
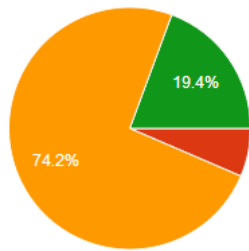
Animation, Game

Semuanya yang keren

Anime

Animation, Original

Apapun yang penting asik

Game and Animation

## 3. Kategori cosplay anda...? (31 responses)

- Permanent / Absolute (setiap harinya cosplay, bangun & tidur, bahkan telah operasi minor agar bisa menyerup...
- Semi-Absolute (selalu cosplay saat keluar rumah)
- Momentum (melakukan cosplay saat karakter tersebut sedang popular / disukai)
- Pasif (melakukan cosplay karena ajakan teman, tetapi dirinya kurang...

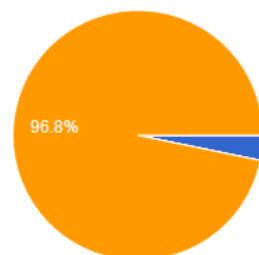74.2%
19.4%

4. Frekuensi melakukan cosplay? (31 responses)
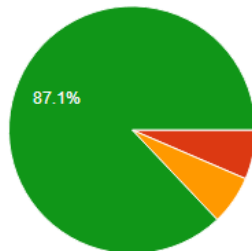
- Setiap hari
- 1 minggu sekali
- 1 bulan sekali
- Tergantung ada event atau tidak

87.1%

5. Seberapa banyak kamu mengeluarkan uang untuk cosplay? (31 responses)
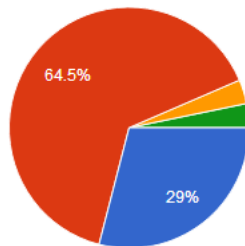
- < Rp 500.000,-
- Rp 500.000 - Rp 2.500.000
- Rp 2.500.000 - Rp 5.000.000
- > Rp 5.000.000

64.5%
29%

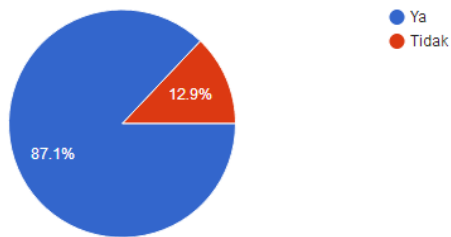## 6. Uang untuk cosplay dari : (31 responses)

- Gaji
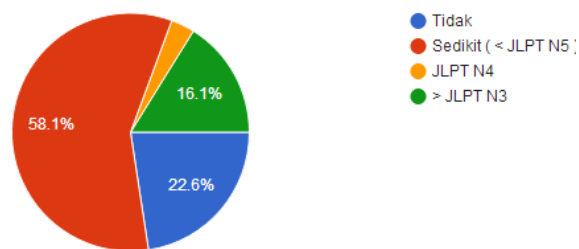- Honor atau penghasilan tidak tetap
- Uang saku
- Other

96.8%

7. Menurut kamu, apakah cosplay dapat menambah ilmu pengetahuan?
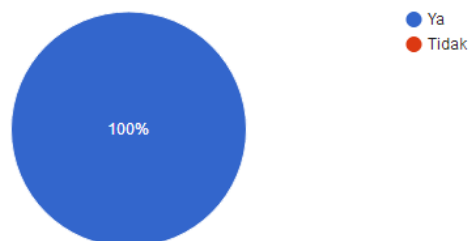(seperti karakter, budaya Jepang, bahasa Jepang, dan sebagainya)
(31 responses)

- Ya
- Tidak

87.1%
12.9%

8. Apakah kamu bisa berbahasa Jepang? (31 responses)

- Tidak
- Sedikit (< JLPT N5)
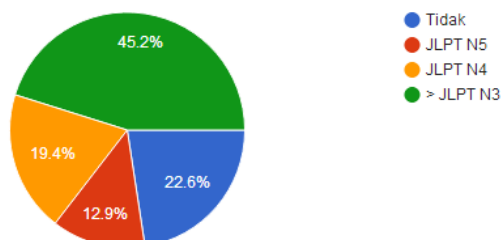- JLPT N4
- > JLPT N3

58.1%
22.6%
16.1%

9. Ketika kamu memerankan satu tokoh atau karakter, apakah kamu perlu
mempelajari kepribadian, bahasa Jepang, gesture, dan sebagainya?
(31 responses)

- Ya
- Tidak

100%

10. Setelah mengikuti kegiatan cosplay, apakah kamu ingin memperdalam
bahasa Jepang lebih jauh?
(31 responses)

- Tidak
- JLPT N5
- JLPT N4
- > JLPT N3

45.2%
22.6%
19.4%
12.9%

11. Apabila kami akan berikan kursus bahasa Jepang dengan gratis, apakah
kamu mau bergabung?
(31 responses)