

Study in Japan and the Motivation of Japanese Language Learners in Higher Educational Institutions in Indonesia

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Abstract

The number of Japanese learners in Indonesia ranks the second largest in the world after China. In addition to great interest in Japanese popular culture products, such as anime and manga, Japanese learners' enthusiasm to study in Japan has become one of the main motivations for learning the Japanese language. The changes in educational policy implemented by the Japanese government have also offered a new possibility for study in Japan. This study aims to explain how the motivation to study in Japan was cultivated through Japanese language learning in higher educational institutions in Indonesia. Researchers collected data using questionnaires distributed to Japanese language learners at designated universities and interviews with some of the respondents. This study focused on three issues: factors that motivate students to choose Japanese language study programs in university, language skills that learners want to develop in university, and their interest in studying in Japan. The result showed that interest in the Japanese language was the primary motivation for many learners to continue studying in higher educational institutions. The ability to communicate with native Japanese speakers was a significant achievement for a Japanese learner, but at the same time, it was a difficult task to achieve. Study in Japan provided learners with an opportunity to improve their Japanese language skills and gain experience in Japan. These things were expected to increase the value of learners' cultural capital and access to previously unobtainable resources.

Keywords: *study in Japan; Japanese language learning; learners' motivation; higher educational institution*

1. Introduction

The study phenomenon in Japan, with Japanese language learning as the main focus, has shown a significant increase in recent years (Sato, 2016; Shiho, 2015). Asian students, particularly those from the South East Asia region, have grown in number over 2011-2015 (Sato, 2016). According to data from the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO, 2017), the number of Indonesian students in 2016 had increased by 28.6% compared to the previous year. Indonesian students who came to Japan and studied Japanese in language schools rose eight times between 2011-2017. Furthermore, 77% out of 5,495 Indonesian students in total were studying at Japanese universities. The Japanese government has also made various efforts to promote study in Japan and Japanese language learning worldwide through JASSO and The Japan Foundation, an institution under the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs which was established in 1972. Every year, JASSO organizes Study in Japan Fair in several countries, including Indonesia. To assist Japanese language learning in secondary educational institutions in Asia, a unit within the Japan Foundation called Asia Center has initiated the Nihongo Partners program since 2014 and dispatched 1,506 native Japanese speakers to several South-East Asian countries.

Based on the 2018 survey on Japanese language education abroad conducted by the Japan Foundation (2020), the total number of Japanese learners in the world currently have reached 3,851,774 people. China ranks first with 1,004,625 learners, followed by Indonesia with 709,479 learners. Data from the Japan Foundation also shows some main motivations for studying Japanese at higher educational institutions, as shown in Table 1. Interest in *manga*, *anime*, and other forms of Japanese popular culture still ranks first. This trend is

followed by the need to increase one's competency for the sake of future work or career. Study in Japan also showed a significant percentage and became one of the main motivations for learning the Japanese language in higher educational institutions.

A study conducted by Wahidati and Kharismawati (2018) to Japanese learners in an Indonesian vocational college showed that *anime* and *manga* had a significant role in introducing the Japanese language. They became the medium for many learners to know Japanese in the early stage. *Anime* and *manga* also provide substantial support for learning Japanese since they could boost learners' vocabulary, listening skills, and comprehend the context of language use. This phenomenon was found at the tertiary level and a secondary education level (Djafri, 2016). Interest in *anime* and *manga* has motivated many Japanese learners in high schools to choose the Japanese language as their major when entering university.

Furthermore, both studies indicated a changing perception and motivation regarding the Japanese language and culture during the learning process at a tertiary education level. For example, learners became aware of the language's formal and informal pattern and the different representations of Japanese culture in *anime* or *manga* and the real world. Through this learning process, many learners who are first interested only

in anime and manga have now considered the Japanese language an essential asset to gain better professional and social status after graduating from university (Djafri, 2018). This changing perception and motivation have led learners to link the Japanese language with future work or career and further study in Japan.

Regarding the term, 'study in Japan' in this study is defined as 'the mobility of students at higher educational institutions from Indonesia to Japan.' This mobility refers to two kinds of student mobility programs: 'exchange program' and 'study abroad.' According to Massey and Burrow (2012), 'exchange program' refers to a short period of study (one semester/year) at host university through a prearranged agreement between the home and host universities.' Study abroad is defined as 'any academic student program conducted outside the home country, arranged by or conducted through an institutional entity, such as a university or nonprofit organization.' Student mobility is motivated by several factors, such as to gain international experience (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), to learn a foreign language for the sake of a professional career in the future (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Lam, Ariffin, & Ahmad, 2011), and economic reasons such as to get a better job and salary (Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite, 2014).

Table 1. The motivation of Japanese language learners in Indonesian universities

Motivation	Learners (%)
Interest in <i>manga</i> , <i>anime</i> , <i>J-Pop</i> , <i>fashion</i>	71.2
Future work or career	69.7
Interest in the Japanese language	56.1
Study in Japan	51.8
Interest in Japanese literature and culture	49.6

Source: The Japan Foundation (2017)

A study by Ikegami (2009) showed that there are three types of Indonesian student mobility. The first type is Indonesian students who receive government

scholarships, whether from the Japanese or Indonesian government, to pursue their study at graduate schools in Japan and return to Indonesia to pursue a career after

completion. The second type is those who study at undergraduate programs of Japanese universities, with or without a scholarship, and intend to return to Indonesia after completion. The third type is Indonesian students who study in Japan at their own expense and plan to work in Japan after completing their studies. During 1980-the 1990s, the number of Indonesian students in Japan showed a significant increase due to the implementation of the Japanese national policy '*ryugakusei ukeire 10 man nin keikaku* (plan to accept 100,000 international students)' initiated by Prime Minister Nakasone in 1983 (Sato, 2010). Simultaneously, the Indonesian government also promoted study abroad, including research in Japan, by providing scholarship with official ties (Arikawa, 2016). Another surge of Indonesian students going to Japan happened in the 2000s, especially the third type of students (Ikegami, 2009; Sato, 2010). During this time, Prime Minister Fukuda has also initiated a new policy called '*ryugakusei 30 man nin keikaku* (plan to accept 300,000 international students)' in 2008, a revised version of the previous one. The new policy emphasized providing employment opportunities for international students to work in Japan after completing their studies. Asian Development Bank (ADB) Institute (2014) highlighted five focuses of the new policy, including promoting study in Japan and the opportunity to change the visa status from study to work in Japan. International students in Japan were expected to boost the Japanese national economy, which is struggling with human resources issues, by staying and working in Japan after completing their education (Shao, 2008).

Previous studies regarding Japanese language learning motivation had revolved around Japanese cultural products and their effect on learners' motivation (Toyoshima, 2011, 2013). Furthermore, other studies found that many Japanese language learners, particularly in higher educational institutions, are motivated to continue studying

in Japan and work at Japanese companies (Furukawa, Kitani, & Nunoo, 2015; Kobari, 2014). However, little is known about how the motivation to study in Japan was cultivated through Japanese language learning in higher educational institutions. Also, factors that motivated learners to study in Japan, and their future expectations need to be further elaborated. Therefore, this study would address these issues by identifying factors that motivate students to choose Japanese language study programs in university, language skills that learners want to develop in university, and their interest in studying in Japan.

2. Methods

This study collected data through a questionnaire distributed to several undergraduate Japanese language study programs at higher educational institutions in Central Java and Yogyakarta. Researchers distributed a set of questionnaires to Japanese learners at all grades. The respondents' total number was 324 students, consisting of 98 males (30.25%) and 226 females (69.75%). The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three types of items, namely:

- a. Sixteen items of open-ended questions, which include respondents' background information before study at university, reasons for studying the Japanese language in higher educational institutions, the experience of taking the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) and the result, as well as respondents' motivation to study in Japan and their sources of information.
- b. Eleven items of the statement, covering respondents' preferences for study abroad.
- c. One item of the self-assessment on respondent's ability to write, read, listen and speak in the Japanese language

Besides, this questionnaire is also equipped with a background information section on respondents which includes educational background, the use of foreign languages in everyday life, other foreign languages respondents have studied formally

and informally, and their experiences of learning the Japanese language in primary and secondary educational institutions. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed and reconfirmed through interviews with several respondents from each university. The data obtained from the questionnaire and the interview results were then further analyzed to answer the issues addressed in this study.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Reasons for Majoring in the Japanese Language

In open-ended questions, respondents were asked to explain their initial reason for majoring in a Japanese language program in a higher educational institution. The answers obtained from these open-ended questions were then grouped into six categories: (1) Japan and its culture; (2) Japanese language; (3) academic; (4) going to Japan; (5) future career; (6) and others that are not included in the previous five categories. Each respondent could state more than one reason. Seventy-nine respondents (16.29%) have chosen to study in the Japanese language program because of their interest in the country and Japanese culture. *Anime*, *manga*, and other Japanese popular culture products were included in this category.

Meanwhile, 181 respondents (37.32%) chose the Japanese language major because of their interest in learning the Japanese language. There were also 91 answers of the respondents (18.76%) related to the desire to go to Japan, either to study, to work, or only for travelling. As for those whose answer was associated with a future career, there were as many as 51 respondents (10.52%). Fifty-two respondents chose to major in the Japanese language program for academic reasons. Previously, these respondents have studied the Japanese language in high school. Upon having this prior knowledge and experience, they then choose a Japanese language program

because they assumed it would benefit them to enter and study at university.

The data analysis above indicated that interest in the Japanese language was the primary motivation for many learners to continue their higher educational institutions. Furthermore, studying the Japanese language in university was considered paving the way to get to Japan, whether for studying, working, or for tourism purposes. This result showed a significant difference with the Japan Foundation (2017) survey, which proposed that interest in Japanese popular culture products is the primary motivation for learners in Indonesian universities to study the Japanese language. The result also differed from the study conducted by Toyoshima (2013), which showed that interest in Japanese popular culture products drove students to learn the Japanese language in the first place.

Regarding the finding of this study, it is worthy of attention that the experience of learning the Japanese language in secondary education might have roused learners' curiosity to study the Japanese language at an advanced level in higher education. Around 75% of respondents said they learned the Japanese language for the first time during their upper secondary education study. They also noted that the Japanese language is "unique, fun and interesting", which has triggered their interest in learning the language.

Another point worth mentioning is that learning the language in higher education improves language skills and is also considered a window of opportunity to go to Japan. It might be related to students' expectations and a perception that many scholarships or programs for visiting Japan were offered at a higher educational level, particularly for those studying Japanese.

3.2. Development of Japanese Language Skills at the Home University

The self-assessment item regarding Japanese language skills, which included reading, writing, listening and speaking skills,

showed how respondents assessed their Japanese language skills. Researchers asked respondents to evaluate themselves by rating from one to ten (“1” is the lowest score, “10” is the highest score) each of these four Japanese language skills. The data analysis results showed that the average value of these four language skills is around “7”. Furthermore, respondents also rated their speaking skills as the lowest compared to reading, writing, and listening skills. Sixty-seven respondents gave a score of “7” for speaking skills, 74 respondents for listening skills, 85 respondents for reading skills, and 91 respondents for writing skills. This result indicated that respondents were struggling over improving their speaking skills. It was not an easy task and had its challenges in learning environments outside of Japan. Besides, the questionnaire data results also showed that the opportunity to communicate with native Japanese speakers and the pride in being able to use the Japanese language in front of other people are two things that have made respondents feel contented when they can speak Japanese. The ability to communicate with native Japanese speakers was a significant achievement for a Japanese learner, but at the same time, it was a difficult task to achieve.

Apart from communicating using the Japanese language, the low participation rate in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) and its unfavourable test results indicated a massive gap between the Japanese language learning process outcomes and the expectations demands of stakeholders. The stakeholders in this matter refer to higher educational institutions, the labour market, and language learners. Most respondents who have participated in the JLPT were still at the N4 level. Meanwhile, Japanese language study programs in higher educational institutions generally set the minimum level of N3 as one of the requirements for learners to graduate. The labour market that requires Japanese language skills mostly sets the N2 level as the requirement when recruiting human resources

with a Japanese language educational background.

The difference between learning outcomes and labour market expectation has made learners feel inadequate and lack confidence in their Japanese language skills when entering global society. For learners, Japanese language skills acted as cultural capital, described by Bourdieu (1986) as academic knowledge and skills that will benefit one to acquire a better social status in society. During the language learning process in the university, learners were not driven solely by the uniqueness and enjoyable part of Japanese language anymore, but also by the benefits they could gain from mastering the language.

3.3. Japanese Language Learners’ Interest in Studying in Japan

As for learners’ interest in studying in Japan, 302 respondents (95%) expressed their desire to continue their studies in Japan. 31% of them even plan to continue their studies in Japan upon graduation from the home university. The respondents’ biggest motivation in the questionnaire response was the development of their Japanese language skills (26.13%). Some of the reasons mentioned in the questionnaire were “to improve Japanese language skills”, “to speak Japanese more fluently”, “to directly learn the Japanese language in its native country”, “to be able to communicate with native speakers” and “to pass the N1 level of JLPT”. The second motivation expressed in the questionnaire is related to living abroad, especially in Japan (21.6%).

Meanwhile, focusing solely on studying in Japan with no specific relation to Japanese language learning was the third motivation mentioned by respondents (20%). These data indicated that direct engagement and practice within the community in which a foreign language, in this case, Japanese, is utilized as the primary tool for everyday communication is considered essential for foreign language learners. A similar finding was also mentioned by the study of Sison

and Brennan (2012), which stated that international experience gained from studying abroad is considered an important point, not only for language learners but also for the labour market, that is highly valued when doing job hunting.

However, there was one finding from this questionnaire data that needs to take into consideration as well. This study found that studying in Japan, related to a future career, has the lowest percentage (5.33%). It indicated a weak direct correlation between future career and studying in Japan. In other words, respondents' motivation to continue their studies in Japan did not correlate exclusively with future a career but was associated with improving Japanese language skills. Learners want to improve their Japanese language skills by studying in Japan to gain cultural capital, which will be used to gain some benefits from previously unobtainable resources, such as a better career in the future. This fact is what Darvin and Norton (2015) called in their model of investment as "affordance in learning" or "perceived benefits of investment in foreign language learning".

Previous studies that discussed the relationship between study abroad and professional career development showed similar results. Varghese (2008) found that the excellent need the labour market has for skilled human resources is one of the things that motivates individuals to study abroad and master a specific skill. Lam, Ariffin, and Ahmad (2011) also suggest that study abroad is closely related to language learning and the development of a professional career in the future. In the case of Japanese language learners in this study, they focus on the further development of Japanese language skills that have been learned in Indonesian universities. Several respondents mentioned that their Japanese language teachers inspired them in high school. Therefore, they decided to study Japanese to learn more about Japanese language education and pursue a career as a Japanese language teacher. There were also 15.55% of

respondents who were willing to work in Japanese companies or job fields using the Japanese language after graduated from the home university. In contrast, Japan's desire to work in the job fields with no relation to Japanese language skills was 12.20%, while in Indonesia was 10.67%.

Another finding of this study that was worthy of further consideration is that respondents interested in continuing to Japanese language schools or vocational schools in Japan after graduating from home university have only a small percentage (1%). This fact indicated that Japanese learners in higher educational institutions did not want to choose Japanese language schools or vocational schools as their study destinations in Japan. Interviews conducted with several respondents showed that they were more interested in continuing their studies at the postgraduate level in Japan through scholarship programs offered by the Japanese and Indonesian governments.

This finding could tell how the current study phenomenon in Japan has impacted Japanese language learners in higher educational institutions. As a result of the implementation of the Japanese new policy 'plan to accept 300,000 international students', studying in Japan through Japanese language schools has shown a significant increase in the number of participants and the programs offered. The program attracted many participants because they could learn Japanese at a language school while doing some part-time jobs in Japan. It provided participants with an opportunity to experience studying and working in Japan. Interviews with respondents revealed that some want to participate in the program to gain the experience of living, studying, and working in Japan while improving their Japanese language skills. This experience's perceived benefits are expected to increase the value of their cultural capital (Norton, 2013). Some respondents considered this new program as a possible option besides the scholarship program. The limited opportunity to get a scholarship is one of the

learners' obstacles to studying in Japan. Therefore, these programs that provide an ample opportunity to learn, do an internship, and work in Japan are considered an alternative that could facilitate Japanese language learners' needs.

4. Conclusion

Foreign language skill is one of the essential assets in the current era of globalization. Through learning the Japanese language in higher educational institutions, learners' motivation to study Japanese has grown from merely the interest in the language into the self-actualization in language practice and the cultural capital value of foreign language learning. This study shows that instead of the interest in Japanese pop-cultural products, learners have greater motivation in the Japanese language itself. The process of learning Japanese at the home university has changed the learners' perspective on language skills and their value. The discrepancy between the result of the learning process and the labour market demand has made learners look for ways to improve their language skills. In this regard, Japanese language learners in Indonesian higher educational institutions utilized the opportunity to study in Japan for several purposes, namely to improve Japanese language skills and to gain experience of life in Japan.

Furthermore, this opportunity also allows learners to study the language in the workplace setting while doing an internship or part-time job. Therefore, they will be able to gain not only language skills but also some soft skills in the workplace, which are expected to bring advantage to them in the future. Study in Japan is a way for learners to enhance their cultural capital, giving them access to previously unobtainable resources.

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