

Language Barrier: Language Training Mismatch and Communication Challenges among Indonesian Technical Interns (TITP) in Japan

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Abstract

This study explores the language barriers faced by Indonesian low-skilled workers under the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) in Japan. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four informants, each representing one of the following sectors: caregiving, fisheries, construction, and agriculture. The informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique. The findings reveal a linguistic mismatch between Japanese language training at LPKs (Job Training Institutions) in Indonesia and Accepting Organisations (AO) in Japan with the actual communication demands encountered in the workplace. While the training programs focus on grammar and standardized Japanese, they lack adequate preparation for the real-world, context-dependent communication skills needed in the workplace. Barriers such as limited understanding of technical terms and local dialects hinder effective adaptation. This study underscores the need for workplace-oriented, practical language training to enhance communication, productivity, and social integration of Indonesian TITP workers in Japan.

Keywords: Language Barrier; Linguistic Mismatch; Intercultural Communication; Technical Intern Training Program; Indonesian Low Skilled Worker

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1. Introduction

Efforts to remain independent from foreign labour face various challenges due to demographic changes and structural shifts in the workforce (Brody, 2002). Young Japanese workers with advanced educational attainment and graduate preferences increase on choosing

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jobs in larger companies (high-skilled sectors) and having tendency to avoid lower-skilled sectors with a 3D (dangerous, dirty, demeaning) nature, because they cannot see how they can move up the job-cum-wage-ladder (Mori, 1997). This shift has particularly impacted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and hospitality which struggle to recruit local workers. While big companies can raise wages or shift production overseas, many SMEs are forced to close. As a result, dependence on foreign labour has become difficult to avoid (Brody, 2002).

In 1993, the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) was created to transfer technology, skill or knowledge programs from Japan to developing countries, so that skills acquired could be applied in the home country. Although the Japanese government has introduced various other programs, the TITP remains in place. This is evident from the steady increase in the number of participants each year (except during the COVID-19 pandemic). The continuation of this program indicates its significant role in Japan's migrant labour policy. The high interest in the TITP program may be due to its less complicated requirements. The main requirements for becoming a TITP participant are being 18 years old, and it is difficult or impossible to acquire the desired technology, skills, or knowledge in the participant's home country.

Indonesia began sending participants to the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) after its establishment in 1993. Since then, the number of trainees from Indonesia has continued to grow steadily. According to the Foreign Employment Status Report published by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), by the end of October 2024, Indonesia accounted amounting to 93,545 individuals. This position makes technical trainees as the largest group within the residence status category of Indonesian foreign workers in Japan out of 169,539 people (Japan. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2024).

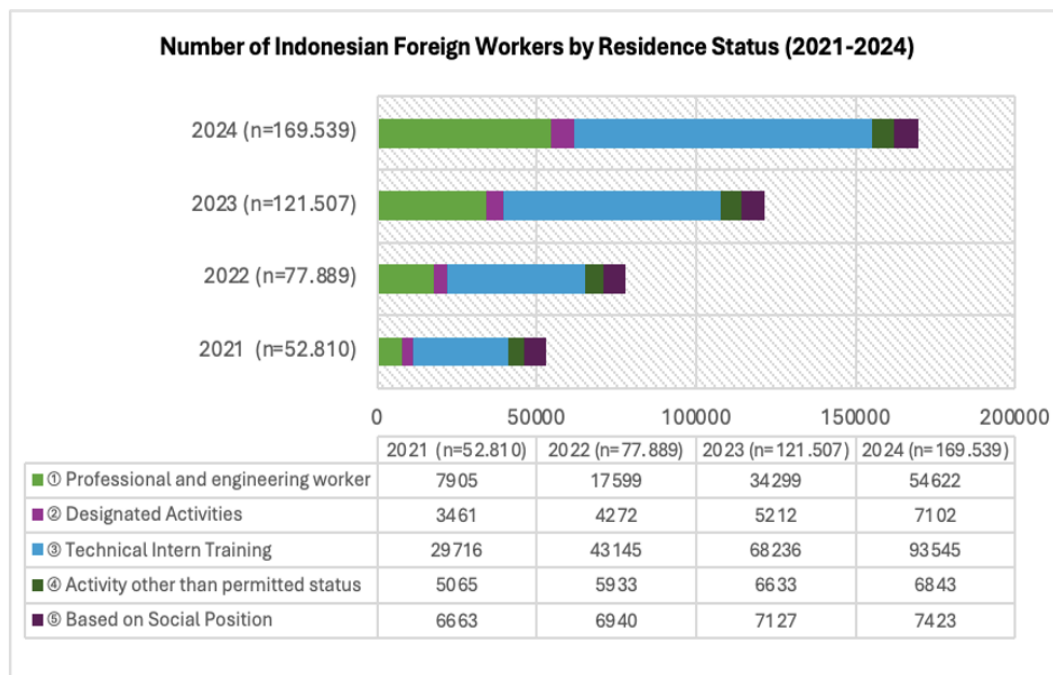


Figure 1. Number of Indonesian Foreign Workers in Japan by Residence Status 2021-2024 (Sources: Data processed based on MHLW 2021-2024, 「外国人雇用状況」の届出状況表一覧 令和 3 – 6)

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Juridically, the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) in Japan is classified as a labor recruitment system, which means that participants of this program are recognized as workers and are protected under Japan's Labor Standards Act (Mori, 1997). This differs from the classification in Indonesia, where TITP participants are not considered migrant workers but are instead referred to as trainees, thus falling outside the scope of the Migrant Worker Protection Act (MUFG, 2024). Therefore, in this study, the author adopts the classification used in Japan, referring to them as "Indonesian TITP workers," as their actual workload is equivalent to that of regular employees.

Although the TITP program attracts many participants from various countries, including Indonesia, it has also faced criticisms. Advocates and researchers highlight that TITP is often used to import cheap foreign labour under short-term contracts (Harrison et al., 2022). Additionally, the government and relevant institutions have yet to fully address the linguistic and language education needs of TITP workers. Since Japanese is the dominant language in the workplace and the use of other languages remains limited (JITCO in Otomo, 2019), the lack of attention to this aspect could potentially cause communication challenges in both work and daily life for migrant workers. Communication challenges can arise from various factors, including language differences. Language serves a crucial role in workplace and social interactions, particularly for migrant workers. However, language can also become a barrier to effective communication. Language barriers arise when two parties do not share a common language or have differing proficiency levels, making it difficult to convey messages clearly (Tanzer in Dasi & Pedersen, 2016). These barriers can lead to miscommunication and potentially hinder productivity and create workplace tension (Rojak & Handayani, 2023).

Several studies have revealed how language barriers cause communication challenges in the work experience of migrant workers across various sectors. For example, Iskandar's study on elderly care (*Kaigo*) nurses under the Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (IJEPA) program, found that proficiency in the Japanese language was a significant barrier to understanding nursing procedures. Additionally, they faced a double workload as they had to work while preparing for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (Iskandar, 2016). Next, Rustam highlights that Indonesian TITP workers often experienced verbal violence when they failed to understand instructions due to lack of the Japanese language (Rustam, 2021, 2023). The language barriers experienced by Indonesian migrant workers highlight the crucial role of Japanese language proficiency in ensuring effective workplace and social communication. Limited Japanese proficiency not only affects task execution but also increases workload, exacerbates unfair treatment, and restricts workers' ability to defend themselves when mistakes occur in the work environment. Indeed, effective communication fosters robust relationships and contributes to the overall improvement of organisational performance (Prabowo et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to examine the language barriers encountered, coworkers' responses, workers' strategy in overcoming language barriers, and motivations to improve Japanese by Indonesian TITP workers. It will primarily focus on evaluating the relevance of Japanese language preparation to the communication needs of workers in Japan.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the forms of language barriers experienced by Indonesian TITP workers in communication. Primary data is obtained from four

informants who are considered representative of the experiences of Indonesian TITP workers. Meanwhile, secondary data is collected from private and government publications to support the analysis and provide additional context. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews, in which the researcher follows an interview guide consisting of general questions. However, the interview process remains flexible, allowing the researcher to adjust the order of questions or add new ones based on the informants' responses. Informants are selected using the snowball sampling technique, where the researcher initially identifies individuals who either hold a Japanese language certification or have no certification at all, as well as being first-time workers in Japan. After the initial interviews, informants are asked to recommend other individuals who meet the same criteria. This process continues until the desired number of informants is reached.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Japanese Language Preparation

There are two schemes in the TITP worker recruitment process: Individual Enterprise Type (IET) and Supervising Organisation Type (SOT). IET is a scheme where the Implementing Company or Organisation accepts employees from local overseas subsidiaries, joint ventures, or trading partners for technical apprenticeship training. SOT, on the other hand, is a scheme where TITP workers are accepted through the intermediary of the Supervising Organisation or Accepting Organisation (*kanridantai* 「管理団体」 or placement agency located in Japan) with the Sending Organisation (*okuridashikikan* 「送出機関」 or sending agency in the home country). In 2022 about 96.5% of acceptances were Supervising Organisation Type (OECD, 2024). Job Training Institutions (LPK) are among the organisations that provide training for prospective Indonesian Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) workers preparing to work in Japan. Some LPKs hold a Sending Organisation license, while others do not. Most prospective workers without prior work experience in Japan or Japanese language proficiency enrol in LPKs for training before departure. However, some prospective workers with Japanese language skills only go through an interview process with the Implementing Organisation (IO), which is the company where they will work. Training at LPKs varies depending on each institution's policies. Therefore, most LPKs provide Japanese language training, physical training, interview preparation, and a brief introduction to Japanese work culture and society. During the interviews, MA received a job offer to work in Japan from an LPK with a Sending Organisation (SO) license in Bekasi, after completing her studies in Japanese Literature at a university in Sulawesi. As she already had Japanese language skills equivalent to JLPT N3 and understood Japanese culture she only needed to undergo the interview and document processing, without attending language training at the LPK. She spent funds only on applying for passports, visa, and other supporting documents.

Table 1. Informant Data (Sources: data based on interview with informant)

Initial	Gender	Place of Origin	Job Sector	Job Location
MA	Female	Makassar	<i>Kaigo</i> (Elderly Nurse)	Kochi
IQ	Male	Cianjur	Agriculture	Kochi
RE	Male	Banyuwangi	Construction	Kochi
IF	Male	Tangerang	Fishery	Kochi

IF, a graduate of a marine vocational school, accepted a job offer from an LPK that cooperated with his school. Since he had no prior knowledge of Japanese, he first underwent Japanese language training for one and a half years at school, before taking additional training at the same LPK for five months. He did not incur any expenses for the LPK training, as he received financial support from the company where he would be working. In contrast to MA and IF, IQ and RE, none of whom had previously studied Japanese, registered with the LPK for a training programme lasting three to six months, which also included assistance in securing job placements. They spent approximately Rp8.000.000 to Rp10.000.000 for the entire programme.

Regarding Japanese language learning at LPKs, all three TITP workers (besides MA) had similar experiences with the teaching methods they received during their three to six months of training in LPK. The methods were primarily text-based, focusing mainly on listening to the teacher's explanations and practicing exercises. However, little to no material specifically covered technical vocabulary relevant to their fields of work. Based on the interview results, the Japanese language training materials at LPKs were estimated to be equivalent to JLPT N5 level, or at most, N4. IQ used *Minna no Nihongo* Volume 1 as a textbook, but not all chapters were studied. Meanwhile, IF, who had been studying Japanese for nearly two years, used the same textbook as IQ but completed up to Volume 2. In contrast to them, RE did not use a specific textbook but instead learned through tablet-based teaching materials developed by Japanese instructors from the Supervising Organisation. These materials followed a similar approach to Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Meanwhile, MA, who studied Japanese at university, also used *Minna no Nihongo* as the primary textbook but supplemented it with additional materials, such as kanji and reading comprehension books from various sources.

“No, at the LPK, they didn't teach agricultural vocabulary, mostly just daily life vocabulary. It was mostly just repeating what was in Minna no Nihongo.” (IQ, Agriculture)

Upon arrival in Japan, workers must undergo Japanese language training as stipulated in the Technical Intern Training Act regarding language acquisition for workers. This training lasts for two months; however, if the worker has completed more than one month of training prior to departure, the duration of the training upon arrival in Japan may be shortened to one month. Although this training is mandatory, there are no specific regulations regarding the number of learning hours or the curriculum that must be taught to TITP Workers (Muta, 2023). During the one-month Japanese language training at the *Senta* (Supervising Organisation office) in Japan, all four informants exhibited a similar learning pattern, primarily involving the review materials that they had previously studied in Indonesia. MA revisited the Japanese language lessons she had learned at university. Additionally, she received a brief introduction to communication techniques and patient interaction, as her instructor had a professional background similar to hers. A similar experience was also reported by IF. In addition to revising *Minna no Nihongo* materials studied in Indonesia, he was also introduced to several technical terms related to the fisheries industry. These technical terms were taught through direct demonstrations of relevant objects, accompanied by explanations of the corresponding Japanese terms.

“It seems that our instructor was a former Kangoshi (elderly nurse). They taught us how to interact with patients. In addition to recruiting experts in the field, they also provided Japanese language instruction, mainly focusing on standard Japanese.”

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However, technical Japanese specific to Kaigo was not explicitly taught in class; instead, it was primarily acquired during practical training with professionals in the field.” (MA, Kaigo)

The idealized image of Japan as a linguistically homogeneous society has led the Japanese government to emphasize the importance of Japanese language proficiency for TITP workers. Through the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW, 2025), the government has explicitly stated that Japanese language skills are essential for TITP participants so that work can proceed smoothly and without obstacles. This emphasis is reflected in the Technical Training Program’s Operational Procedures, which state: “Since instruction and communication are usually conducted in Japanese at the site where technical intern training is conducted, Japanese language education is required to conduct technical intern training effectively and safely. In addition, since technical intern trainees will be living in Japan, they will need a certain level of Japanese language ability to lead a smooth daily life, which is the basis of their technical intern training.”

Although there is a normative acknowledgment of the importance of Japanese language proficiency, this is not accompanied by clear regulations or standardised curricular guidelines. The determination of the Japanese language curriculum is entirely delegated to the discretion of each Accepting Organisation in Japan. A similar situation occurs with Sending Organisation in each country, where Japanese language instruction prior to departure is only recommended, and thus, no clear curriculum or standards exist (MHLW, 2025). This lack of clear regulations makes Japanese language training very flexible and dependent on the internal policies of each organisation.

The lack of clear regulations has also led many institutions to continue relying on conventional teaching materials such as Minna no Nihongo, which are essentially more suited to academic purposes than to the functional communication required in the workplace. Studies by Marsono et al. (2023) also revealed that the Minna no Nihongo textbook is used by 17 institutions in West Java. The materials in Minna no Nihongo emphasise reading, writing and text comprehension rather than the practical interactions required by workers in the field (Michigami, 2023). This has resulted in a mismatch between the Japanese language acquired during training and the language used in authentic situations. This condition is reflected in the statements of informants who reported difficulties in bridging the gap between the formal language taught in institutions and the verbal communication required in the workplace. Consequently, workers often experience difficulties in adapting, due to insufficient practice in practical communication and a limited mastery of relevant technical vocabulary.

“If we learn from Minna no Nihongo, that's textbook language. But when we enter the workplace, they don't use textbook language at all. It's completely different—they use their own regional dialects, and each dialect is different. So, those hyougen (dialects) aren't in the textbooks, and that's the problem. The hyougen are already different, and on top of that, they speak really fast.” (IQ, Agriculture)

“Because the language of the book and the language of hyougen are different. Same here too, senpai didn't know what the meaning of hyougen was at first ... Yes, it's difficult, because I didn't learn at all, meaning I didn't learn choukai at all. So, I'm surprised here. What is the meaning of this words, how come it's different. It is very different from what we learnt in the book.” (RE, Construction)

3.2 Language Barrier in the Workplace

One of the most significant challenges faced by Indonesian workers in the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) in Japan is the use of regional dialects spoken at high speed by native Japanese speakers. All informant reported that dialects posed a significant obstacle to their comprehension of Japanese, particularly during their initial period in Kochi. This difficulty arose as they had to distinguish between standard Japanese and local dialects.

In the Japanese language, dialects refer to regional linguistic variations that differ from Standard Japanese in several aspects, including pitch accent, phonology (pronunciation), morphology (word structure), and lexicon (vocabulary). While differences in pitch accent and phonology generally have a minimal impact on communication, variations in morphology and lexicon can significantly hinder foreigners' comprehension of Japanese (Takeuchi, 2023). Standard Japanese is the linguistic form normatively recognized as correct and is based on the dialect spoken by middle-class residents of Tokyo. It holds official status, as it serves as the medium of instruction in educational institutions and is widely used in print and broadcast media. In certain regions such as Kyushu, Tohoku, and Shikoku, Standard Japanese is often taught alongside local dialects, particularly to older generations. As a result, in many areas, local dialects have become increasingly blended with Standard Japanese (Sanada, 2019).

The challenges faced by Indonesian TITP workers in comprehending Japanese regional dialects are closely related to the differing modes of language acquisition between native speakers and second-language learners. Native speakers generally acquire language through implicit learning, a subconscious language acquisition process. They are unaware they are learning a language but naturally understand and use it in daily communication. In contrast, explicit learning is commonly used in second language (L2) acquisition, where language comprehension is achieved through systematic learning, such as recognizing sentence patterns and grammatical rules. In other words, explicit learning is a formal language learning process (Krashen, 1984).

In cross-cultural communication, this mismatch between implicit and explicit modes of language acquisition can be explained through Integrative Communication Theory (Kim, 2001), which emphasizes that “Knowledge of the Host Communication System” within the Cognitive Component is a key factor in successful communication adaptation. This knowledge encompasses not only linguistic aspects, such as phonetics, syntax, and vocabulary, but also pragmatic aspects, including understanding how language is used according to social and situational contexts. In this case, native speakers in Kochi who acquire language through implicit learning are often unaware that they mix dialects with Standard Japanese in everyday conversations. They rely on linguistic intuition or a “sense of language” that they perceive as natural and correct, assuming their interlocutors can understand them without adjustments. Conversely, TITP workers, second-language learners of Japanese, acquire the language through explicit learning. They study using a sentence pattern-based approach and formal grammatical rules in Standard Japanese without exposure to dialectal variations in real communicative contexts. Due to limitations in pragmatic cognitive flexibility, they face difficulties in

understanding instructions and communicating effectively with coworkers who primarily use regional dialects.

“If we learn from Minna no Nihongo, that's textbook language. But when we enter the workplace, they don't use textbook language at all. It's completely different—they use their own regional dialects, and each dialect is different. So, those hyougen (dialects) aren't in the textbooks, and that's the problem.” (IQ, Agriculture)

Japan relies on migrant workers to address its labour shortage, while Indonesian migrant workers see Japan as an opportunity to earn income, develop skills, and gain international work experience. In Japanese workplaces, the Japanese language is predominantly used, while the use of international languages like English is limited. Since communication involves both parties, it is essential to strive for mutual understanding. This highlights that the responsibility for effective communication should not rest solely on the shoulders of migrant workers.

Although TITP workers and other Indonesian migrant workers are expected to communicate smoothly in Japanese, supervisor and Japanese colleagues play a vital role in facilitating smooth communication. They can foster better understanding by using more straightforward vocabulary, adjusting their speaking pace, and creating opportunities for migrant workers to acclimate. These modifications enhance communication, making it easier for workers to integrate into the workplace and society while also promoting a harmonious and productive work environment. Another language barrier faced by informants IQ, RE, and MA is their limited knowledge of technical terms before entering the workforce. During their Japanese language training, they only received instruction in standard Japanese, while technical terms relevant to their fields were not included in the curriculum. As a result, in the early stages of their employment, they encountered difficulties in performing their tasks due to a lack of understanding of the technical terminology used in their work environment.

For instance, MA had studied Japanese for four years, but her learning process was more academically focused and did not cover Japanese language aspects in the medical field. During Japanese language training at Senta, her instructor, a former elderly nurse, introduced some technical terms and communication strategies for interacting with patients. However, the material was still insufficient to meet the communication demands in the nursing field. On the other hand, IF, who has a background in marine studies and works in a field that aligns with his educational background, had a different experience from the other informants. In interactions with native Japanese speakers, he struggled to grasp the overall meaning of conversations due to dialect differences. However, in practical work, he did not face significant barriers because he had already acquired foundational knowledge from vocational school (SMK) and received training in technical terms at Senta.

From the cases of MA and IF, it can be concluded that no matter how much passive knowledge (i.e., standard Japanese) is acquired through formal education, without an understanding of technical terms in a specific field, cognitive limitations may arise, making it challenging to apply the knowledge in a professional context. Conversely, thorough preparation in technical terminology, along with alignment between job roles and educational background,

contributes to smoother and more effective work performance. This highlights that language competence is not solely dependent on grammar proficiency and general vocabulary but also on the relevance of learning materials to workplace communication needs.

“...For example, when we learn Japanese, we only learn the basics, right? I mean, we learn general language. So, since I entered the medical field, I also had to learn medical terminology... We graduated from, you know, Japanese literature, right? But personally, as a Japanese literature graduate, I feel like there are so many things we learned, but sometimes they are not useful here...” (MA, Kaigo)

These findings indicate that the Japanese language training strategy for TITP workers needs to be adjusted according to the targeted employment sector. Currently, LPK still implements training that focuses on standard Japanese without fully considering the more specific communication needs in the workplace. As a result, there is a gap between the relevance of the materials taught and the language used in the work environment, especially in sectors with complex technical terminology. Therefore, Japanese language preparation should focus on mastering grammar and memorizing general vocabulary and include context-based workplace language learning. With this approach, the authors hopes that prospective workers will be better prepared to understand technical terms to communication with Japanese colleagues.

3.3 Colleagues Response and Workers’ Strategy in Overcoming Language Barriers

These findings show that tolerance for the language barriers faced by Indonesian TITP workers largely depends on the work environment. In a supportive environment, where supervisors are patient and actively adjust their communication style, workers can boost their confidence and improve their communication effectiveness. This fosters a more positive work atmosphere and enables workers to perform their tasks more smoothly. On the other hand, in high-pressure environment, tolerance for mistakes due to language barriers is often limited to the first one or two months. After this initial period, workers typically face more reprimands and psychological pressure due to repeated communication errors. Japanese colleagues and elderly patients demonstrate tolerance toward the language barriers faced by MA; the patients utilize body language or point to relevant objects to clarify communication. They also provide additional support by reconfirming the patients’ intentions, enabling MA to understand instruction better. As well as, IF when faced difficulties understanding the captain’s instructions due to Kochi dialects. However, the captain demonstrated tolerance by adjusting his speech and simplifying instructions for clarity.

IQ experienced difficulties during the first two months, when he faced difficulties in understanding instructions from their supervisor due to limited vocabulary, difficulty comprehending technical terms, and trouble distinguishing between dialects and standard Japanese, the supervisor and colleagues were patient and tolerant of mistakes arising from these language barriers. However, because of these communication limitations, he often reflexively responded with *wakarimashita* (“I understand”) even when he had not fully grasped the instructions. This reflexive response led to an increasing number of work-related errors.

By the third month, the supervisor began issuing stricter reprimands as the mistakes continued. These reprimands, which included harsh language such as *bakayarou* ('fool'), increased the psychological pressure on IQ. As a result, IQ's confidence and motivation diminished, especially after noticing that their previously friendly interactions with the supervisor had become tense.

"In the first month of work, my boss was quite understanding, and any mistakes were generally tolerated. Even in the second month, my comprehension was still somewhat slow, but it was still considered acceptable. However, by the third month, I started getting scolded frequently because I kept making mistakes in following instructions. My boss would often use harsh words like bakayarou ('fool'). In the beginning, during my first week in Japan, my boss was still friendly, smiling, and the atmosphere was pleasant. But by the second month, the smiles started to disappear, and the stress began to build up." (IQ, Agriculture)

RE worked in a more demanding and less supportive communication environment, unlike the other informants. In the construction sector, communication was often conducted in a loud tone and involved harsher language. During the first and second months, the supervisor allowed him time to learn technical terms and showed tolerance toward mistakes. However, by the third month, as misunderstandings regarding instructions continued, the supervisor became impatient and frequently issued stern reprimands.

"...Like when they told me to dismantle something. There were specific tools for it, but if I picked the wrong one, I'd get scolded... Then there were tools I had never used before, and I didn't even know what they were called. I couldn't understand the language... I felt really embarrassed, so everything became a mess, and I got scolded again. In the past, I made mistakes, and I knew it was my fault. But now, even though I understand the job, I still get scolded. What can I do? That's just how Japanese people are... In this kind of work, most of them didn't go to higher education..." (RE, Construction)

In addition to struggling with the comprehension of technical Japanese, RE faced pressure from the harsh work environment, which was characterized by offensive language and verbal abuse. Before departing for Japan, he had heard that communication was not crucial in construction work. However, once he started the job, he realized that a higher level of Japanese proficiency was essential for understanding complex work instructions.

"They said that in school, we were taught that communication wasn't really needed at the worksite (Genba), and that advanced language skills weren't necessary. But here, it turns out that advanced language skills are actually needed." (RE, Construction)

Limited proficiency in Japanese can cause communication anxiety, leading workers to hesitate when speaking, avoid asking questions, or withdraw from interactions with their Japanese colleagues. In some instances, workers may claim to understand instructions to evade reprimands, even if they do not fully comprehend them. While this approach might minimize

short-term conflict, it increases the risk of errors and worsens the situation. If supervisors respond harshly—whether through verbal reprimands or even verbal abuse—without adequate communication support, this may heighten communication anxiety, lower work motivation, and negatively impact workers' mental well-being. If this psychological pressure persists, workers may struggle to adapt, leading to decreased productivity and job satisfaction.

To overcome difficulties understanding the instructions or communicating with coworkers and supervisor due to language barriers, all informants utilize body language, point to relevant objects to clarify communications, and conform to unclear instructions. For example, IQ when gradually adapted to the work environment and adjusted their communication strategies. Instead of immediately saying, “I understand,” he asked the supervisor to repeat instructions until he fully comprehended them. This approach helped reduce work-related errors. Additionally, he found more significant support at his second workplace, where he had Indonesian colleagues who could clarify instructions for each other. This support system contributed to smoother and more effective communication in the workplace.

RE relied on assistance from more experienced Indonesian colleagues who could clarify the supervisor's instructions. Occasionally, the supervisor would directly communicate instructions to RE's Indonesian colleagues with higher Japanese proficiency, who would then relay the information to him. When working independently, he adopted a strategy of confirming instructions with the supervisor to ensure accurate understanding. Given the high-risk nature of construction work, where mistakes could lead to accidents, this strategy was vital for maintaining safety and preventing critical errors.

“...So, at first, yes, I often asked my senpai (senior)... If I didn't understand, it would be more dangerous... So, it was better to say that I didn't understand because I didn't want to risk endangering myself and others.” (RE, Construction)

The various communication strategies used by TITP workers to overcome language barriers demonstrate that their ability to adapt is significantly influenced by the work environment, social support from colleagues, and personal initiative in seeking solutions. Flexibility and appropriate communication adaptation strategies are essential for overcoming language barriers in foreign work environments. Moreover, effective communication adaptation is not solely the workers' responsibility; social and institutional support is crucial for facilitating smoother communication and preventing long-term negative effects on workers' well-being.

3.4 Motivate to Improve Japanese

All four informants recognized the importance of improving their Japanese language skills, which motivated them to continue learning. This motivation plays a crucial role in successful workplace adaptation, as higher language proficiency reduces communication barriers and enhances work efficiency. However, the informants exhibited varying levels of motivation and employed different learning strategies, influenced by both internal and external factors. IQ encountered significant communication challenges at the beginning of his employment due to his limited proficiency in Japanese, which frequently resulted in reprimands from his supervisor. This experience negatively affected his self-confidence and diminished his

motivation to work. However, he demonstrated need-based motivation, in which his desire to learn Japanese emerged as a response to the communication difficulties he faced. Through persistent efforts, both self-directed learning and participation in social activities such as volunteering he managed to overcome these obstacles and gain confidence in his daily communication. This suggests that IQ's strong motivation to learn Japanese is closely linked to workers' ability to adapt effectively in foreign work environments.

Meanwhile, IF had limited interactions at work due to predefined job roles. However, he demonstrated a proactive approach to adapting by actively seeking opportunities to learn Japanese. He initiated conversations with Japanese colleagues and documented new vocabulary he encountered in daily interactions. Additionally, he dedicated time to language learning during his days off and in spare moments while on board. This indicates that mere necessity, his perseverance and awareness of the importance of Japanese proficiency in the workplace were key drivers in his learning process.

Conversely, despite RE's motivation to improve his Japanese language skills for work-related purposes, he faced significant external obstacles. His working conditions were more challenging than IQ and IF, and his long hours led to a higher rate of errors, leaving him little time and energy for language learning after working. Furthermore, his limited social interactions—due to his remote workplace, where the population was sparse, and houses were far apart—hindered his ability to develop his language skills effectively. This highlights that external factors, such as workload and social environment, significantly influence workers' opportunities to improve their language proficiency. However, this does not mean that RE did not have the opportunity to learn Japanese, because his work environment forced him to communicate actively, together with RE's belief that communication is best improved through direct practice, serves as an effective source of language learning for him.

According to Kim's Integrative Communication Theory (Kim, 2001), particularly the concept of affective adaptation motivation, the motivation level of TITP workers to improve their Japanese language proficiency is significantly influenced by their need to adapt to the workplace environment, as well as external factors that either facilitate or hinder the learning process. Workers IQ and IF demonstrated high motivation, primarily driven by the necessity to overcome communication barriers in the workplace. They actively sought learning opportunities and engaged with native speakers to enhance their proficiency. In contrast, although RE recognized the importance of Japanese proficiency, he encountered substantial external challenges, including long working hours and limited social interactions. These factors significantly constrained his opportunities to practice and develop his language skills.

Beyond workplace efficiency and adaptation, the motivation to learn Japanese also plays a crucial role in the long-term well-being of TITP workers. Enhanced language proficiency enables them to access more information, expand their social networks, and improve their career prospects after completing the TITP program. Thus, the motivation to acquire Japanese proficiency is not only relevant within the context of current employment but also has long-term implications for workers' overall well-being and social mobility.

4. Conclusions

A clear mismatch exists between the Japanese language training provided prior to departure and the actual communicative demands faced by Indonesian TITP workers in Japanese workplaces. Language instruction at many LPKs (Job Training Institutions) and Accepting Organisations tends to prioritise standardised grammar and formal expression, often neglecting the linguistic diversity commonly encountered at work including technical vocabulary, regional dialects, and the natural pace and informal style of spoken Japanese. Consequently, many workers face difficulties understanding instructions, communicating with colleagues, and adapting to everyday social life.

The government plays a vital role as the central authority determining the success or failure of a programme. Therefore, the Japanese government needs to strengthen its regulatory and supervisory roles in the Japanese language education process for migrant workers by establishing clear and measurable standards, as well as specifying appropriate teaching methods and materials. This is essential to ensure the consistency of training quality across various implementing institutions and to prevent disparities in standards that may affect the language readiness of workers in the field.

While pre-departure training remains essential, a more contextualised and needs-based approach to language learning could greatly enhance its effectiveness. This study recommends that the Japanese language training curriculum, especially at LPKs whose uses longer preparation durations to group prospective workers based on their respective job sectors. This way, each group can receive training on relevant technical terminology and communication techniques according to their field of work. This approach will not only reduce the gap between language learning and workplace communication practices but also accelerate the adaptation process and enhance the productivity of Indonesian TITP workers in Japan.

Equally important is the role of supervisors and Japanese colleagues. It is essential to recognise that effective communication is a shared responsibility, not solely that of the TITP workers. The Japanese side should make efforts to facilitate communication by using simplified Japanese, speaking at a slower pace, and being mindful of the workers' language limitations. It is also important to understand that Japanese is often a second or even third language for these workers, and that they typically begin learning as adults. Therefore, a degree of tolerance and understanding is necessary.

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