
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mapping Japanese Language Proficiency Test Needs for Vocational Students Based on Industrial World Demand

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| ABSTRACT

Currently, it is hoped that the Indonesian government will be able to meet the industry needs for vocational graduates at the university level. This study aims to map the need for Japanese language proficiency tests for vocational students based on the demands of the industrial world. In addition, this study also investigates how the industry demands the Japanese language skills of vocational students. The data was collected through a survey conducted on eight foreign companies that employ employees with Japanese language skills. This research shows that the industry's need for Japanese language proficiency tests is still very high. Specifically, the industry requires graduates with business communication skills in Japanese and graduates who have mastery of the vocabulary of industrial terminology. It is a challenge for vocational graduates, so there is continuity between vocational graduates and the needs of the industrial world. In addition, English language and soft skills, the ability to work in teams, and high integrity are still needed in the industrial world.

| KEYWORDS

Vocational; Japanese; skill, industry; graduates

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

One way to measure a person's foreign language ability is through a test. In foreign language learning, an internationally recognized test as a standard of learner ability has been determined. The Japanese language has several internationally recognized tests, including the JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test), J-Test, and NAT Test. These tests certainly make Japanese language education providers target their graduates to obtain certification in at least one of these tests so that graduates can easily be absorbed into the industrial world. Many Japanese learners are influenced by an interest in Japanese popular culture, Japanese language, history, literature, art, industry, and tourism [Nishizawa, 2022] [Gale, 2012]. Based on a survey conducted by The Japan Foundation in 2020, it was stated that more than 3.8 million students in 134 countries study Japanese. The Japan Foundation (JF) and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services (JEES) mentioned that in 2019 there are 1.168. 535 examinees in 2019 [Japan Foundation, 2020]. In addition, education in Japan is also increasingly global, with nearly 300,000 international students studying at Japanese universities [Japan Student Services Organization, 2020].

The demand for vocational graduates by industry is currently increasing. The Indonesian government specifically requires a link and match between industry needs and the skills possessed by vocational graduates [A, D., 2020] [Disas, 2018]. Industry requires vocational graduates to be better prepared to enter the world of work to easily adapt to the fast rhythm of work in the industrial world. In addition, to support the performance of the industrial sector and educational institutions by bureaucrats [Lilles, 2017]. Vocational education is considered a tool to reconcile economic conflicts and social goals [Kilpatrick, 2000]. In Indonesia, vocational education is getting more attention after being a "second-class education" [Hadiwardoyo, 2020].

This study aims to map the industry's need for Japanese language proficiency tests based on the description above. Research and articles related to vocational education, especially in the Japanese language and its need in the industrial world, have been previously carried out by Tian (2020) and Haristiani et al. (2015). Tian offers a teaching model for vocational education called the "Enhanced Education 2.0 Action Informatization Plan." On the other hand, Haristiani researched an interactive Japanese vocabulary learning model. Based on the two previous studies, it can be understood that research on learning models in vocational education has been carried out previously. In this study, the industry will explore the mapping of the need for Japanese language proficiency tests for vocational graduates.

2. Methods

This research was carried out with a quantitative approach. Creswell (2012) argues that quantitative design is a method for measuring certain theories by researching the correlation between two or more variables. The description of the analysis and data is done descriptively. One of the methods used in descriptive research is a survey. The data in this study were obtained through a survey using a questionnaire as a tool. The survey was conducted on eight foreign companies that employ employees with Japanese language skills. The survey conducted through this questionnaire was distributed via Google Form for 1.5 months, starting from April 4 to May 17, 2022.

The survey was distributed online to industries located in Central Java, Indonesia. The industry is engaged in various fields, including heavy equipment, energy, electronics, etc. Survey takers are the human resources department responsible for determining qualifications and recruiting prospective employees. Fourteen questions were asked about the need for a Japanese language proficiency test for vocational graduates. Based on the survey, conclusions were obtained to answer the formulation of the problem. It mapped the industry's needs for the Japanese language proficiency test for vocational graduates.

3. Result and discussion

3.1 Japanese Proficiency Test

There are several types of Japanese language proficiency tests held in Indonesia, including the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), Nihongo Achievement Test (NAT-Test), and Japanese Test (J-Test). The JLPT is the most popular Japanese language test designed to measure the proficiency of Japanese language learners [Niveri, 2019]. JLPT is an assessment that provides Japanese language proficiency certification to foreigners. JLPT is managed globally by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services. JLPT was first held in 1984. Initially, JLPT was held to measure the ability of foreigners in Japan who do not use Japanese as their mother tongue. So, even a Japanese citizen can take the JLPT if his or her mother tongue is not Japanese. Now, JLPT is often used for foreigners who want to continue their studies in Japan. At the beginning of its implementation, the JLPT was held once a year, namely in December. However, since 2009, the JLPT has been held twice, namely in July and December. Initially, JLPT had four levels, but starting in 2010, JLPT had five levels starting from the lowest, namely N5, N4, N3, N2, and the highest is N1. The maximum score for each level is the same, which is 180 points. The test-takers will later get a certificate that can be used to study or work in Japan and Japanese institutions and companies in countries other than Japan.

NAT-Test is a test measuring Japanese language skills for learners who do not use Japanese as their mother tongue. Meanwhile, the NAT-Test started five years after the JLPT was held. Under the auspices of Senmon Kyouiku (専門教育), NAT-Test conducted its inaugural exam in 1989. Like the JLPT, NAT-TEST is also designed to measure the Japanese language skills of non-Japanese speakers. The materials tested in the NAT-Test are the same as the JLPT, namely language knowledge or *gengo chishiki* (言語知識), the ability to understand reading texts or *dokkai* (読解), and listening skills or *choukai* (聴解). The results of the NAT-TEST exam are announced relatively quickly than the JLPT, which is no later than three weeks after the exam is held. It is just that the schedule for holding the NAT-Test is more frequent than the JLPT, which is six times a year in February, April, June, August, October, and December. The level of Japanese language proficiency tested consists of five levels.

Unlike the JLPT and NAT-Test, the J-Test measures the ability to communicate in Japanese. Specifically, the J-Test is intended for the admission of new students to schools in Japan, the recruitment of foreign employees in Japanese companies, and the acceptance of prospective nurses/caregivers to work in Japan. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, it is stated that there are 3 million foreigners living in Japan [Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2019]. This fact shows that J-Test is a bridge for foreigners who want to work in Japan. The ability level in the J-Test starts from level F to A. The lowest F level and the highest A. In addition, a business level is also provided for those who need a certificate of Japanese language proficiency in the business field. Just like the NAT-Test, the J-Test is held six times a year. In this J-Test, there is no pass or fail system. The final assessment is in the form of classifying the level of understanding of the Japanese language. J-Test was introduced in 1991 to measure the ability of Japanese language learners objectively. Every year, the J-Test is followed by prospective employees or students in order to enter Japan. In Indonesia, the J-Test was introduced in 2018. The J-Test is held simultaneously every odd month every year, on a predetermined date and month, namely in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

3.2 The Survey

The following are some of the questions and the results of a survey conducted through questionnaires.

1. Do You know about the types of Japanese Language Proficiency Tests?
In this question, 100% of respondents answered that they knew about the types of tests to measure Japanese language skills.
2. If "yes", what types of tests do You know?
Through these questions, 100% of respondents answered that they knew JLPT. Meanwhile, 62.5% of respondents know about J-Test, and 37.5% know about NAT-Test.
3. Do You know the level of competence in each type of Japanese language proficiency test? (For example, JLPT: N1-N5, J-Test: A-C, D-E, FG).
Through these questions, it can be understood that 87.5% of respondents answered that they knew the level of competence on the Japanese language proficiency test. At the same time, the remaining 12.5% of respondents answered that they did not know.
4. Do You know the purpose of each type of test above?
Based on the answers given to the questionnaire, it can be understood that 38% of respondents answered they did not know, while the remaining 62% answered they knew.
5. Do you require applicants to attach a certificate of Japanese language proficiency when applying for a job at your company?
In the question above, 62.5% of respondents answered "yes," while 37.5% answered "no."
6. If "Yes," what type of certificate should be attached?
62.5% of respondents answered that the certificate that must be attached when applying for a job at their company is JLPT, while the J-Test and NAT-Test certificates get 12.5% each. The rest answered that the certificate does not need to be attached.
7. What is the minimum skill level that the applicant must have? (Example: JLPT N3)
In this question, 50% of respondents answered that the range of required skill levels is equivalent to N2 to N4 JLPT. At the same time, the remaining 50% answered that they were not concerned with this matter.
8. Based on our experience, is there a match between the certificate and the employee's Japanese language skills?
Based on these questions, 75% of employees who attach a certificate of Japanese language proficiency have equivalent Japanese language skills at work. At the same time, 25% feel that the Japanese language proficiency certificate owned by the applicant is not by his ability at work.
9. How long do You think an employee needs to renew a certificate?
In this question, 25% of respondents answered that they did not know when an employee should renew their Japanese language proficiency certificate. Meanwhile, the remaining 75% answered that the certificate should be renewed every 1-5 years.
10. What foreign language skills do You think employees should improve, even though they already have a certificate of Japanese proficiency?
87.5% of respondents answered that speaking skills are skills that every employee must hone. At the same time, 12.5% of respondents answered that mastery of vocabulary or *goi* (語彙) is the main skill that must be improved.
11. Do You require your employees to be fluent in a foreign language other than Japanese?
In this question, 62.5% of respondents answered "yes," while the remaining 37.5% answered "no."
12. If "yes," what foreign languages should they be proficient in?
Continuing the previous question, 87.5% answered that English is the second foreign language that an employee must master. In comparison, 12.5% answered that mastering other foreign languages besides Japanese is not mandatory but highly recommended.
13. Do you think an employee must have a certificate of proficiency in a foreign language other than Japanese?
87.5% of respondents answered that a certificate proving foreign language proficiency is required regarding foreign language proficiency certification. The remaining 12% stated that the certificate was not important.
14. What soft skills would you like your employees to have besides speaking Japanese?
In addition, the questionnaire also asked questions about the soft skills the industry wants for its employees. In this question, respondents answered that being able to work in a team and having high integrity are the most important things; this is evidenced by the high number of respondents' answers, each of which is 100%. On the other hand, being able to work under pressure, having problem-solving skills, and being able to innovate each has 87.5%. In addition, the ability to lead has a high percentage of 75%.

3.3 Mapping Japanese Language Proficiency Test Needs for Vocational Students

Based on the description above, it can be understood that industries that need employees with Japanese language skills have understood that there is a test that measures Japanese language skills. However, unfortunately, not all industries understand the different types of tests to measure Japanese language proficiency. To date, the JLPT is the most popular test than any other type

of test. The JLPT is the oldest test used to measure Japanese language proficiency. Therefore, the industry is still guided by possessing a JLPT certificate to measure a person's Japanese language ability. Furthermore, the industry also requires the renewal of the Japanese language proficiency certificate to monitor Japanese language skills. The required JLPT level is in the range of N2 to N5. However, some industries do not set a range of ability levels based on certificates held by prospective employees. In this case, the industry tends to test the Japanese language skills of prospective employees by self-test (written and interview) conducted by the human resources department.

Industry understanding for other types of tests other than JLPT is still very minimal. The industry still tends to use the JLPT as the main benchmark for measuring one's Japanese language skills. The industry also requires employees to sharpen their speaking skills or *kaiwa* (会話), especially in the business realm, and the ability to master industry-related vocabulary. The industry expects employees to have other foreign language skills besides Japanese, especially certified English. Apart from foreign language skills, the industry requires its employees to have soft skills, be able to work in teams, and have high integrity. Based on the description above, it can be understood that the industry's needs for prospective employees are the industry wants employees to have Japanese language certification from basic to advanced levels; the industry wants prospective employees to have the ability to speak in the business realm and can master industrial vocabulary, the industry wants employees to master English as a companion language, as well as to have other soft skills, especially those related to the ability to work in a team and have integrity.

Regarding Japanese language skills, it is understood that Vocational students need to sharpen their speaking skills in the business realm and mastery of vocabulary in the industrial sector to become graduates who are ready to work. In the Japanese curriculum in vocational schools, courses on Japanese for business are available. However, based on the questionnaire results above, the credits for courses related to business Japanese should be added. In addition, vocational education in higher education is also required to provide a greater portion of internship activities so that students can apply Japanese language skills in real terms in the field [Ratna, 2021].

The addition of these credits is, of course, also used as a provision to obtain a certificate of Japanese language proficiency that is internationally recognized and recognized by the industry. Reflecting on the surveys that have been carried out, most industries still use the JLPT as a benchmark to determine a person's Japanese language ability. It is certainly a challenge in the future, considering that the JLPT was originally prepared for academic purposes. Based on this, it is necessary to prepare an internationally recognized vocational Japanese language proficiency test so that the industry will use it more frequently in recruiting employees. With this test, vocational graduates who have been equipped with the ability to enter the industry can obtain a Japanese language proficiency certification in their field. Of course, it will also make it easier for the industry to measure and get vocational graduates so that there will be no more complaints about business Japanese conversational skills and lack of vocabulary mastery in the industrial realm.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to map the need for Japanese language proficiency tests for vocational students based on the demands of the industrial world. Based on the description above, it can be understood that the need for Japanese language proficiency tests based on the demands of the industrial world for vocational graduates is still very high, especially in Japanese communication skills for business purposes and mastery of industrial vocabulary. In addition, English language skills are also an added value in recruiting employees at Japanese companies operating in Indonesia, especially in the Central Java area. Furthermore, the industry also requires employees to have the ability to work in teams and have high integrity in the company. This research contributes as evidence that vocational Japanese language proficiency tests are very much needed by the industry so that vocational graduates become graduates ready to be absorbed in the world of work. This research has not surveyed the industrial domain precisely (food, textile, electrical equipment, etc.), so in future research, it is hoped that this can be done.

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