

A Stakeholder-Based Curriculum Approach to Japanese Language Education in Indonesia: Integrating Language and Intercultural Competence for Internship Program in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the competencies required by Japanese companies to accept interns and provide implications for the development of a stakeholder-based curriculum for Japanese language study programs in Indonesia. This study used a mixed methods approach through a survey of 20 Japanese companies and interviews with industry representatives. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The results showed that cross-cultural understanding was the most needed competency (4.10). In terms of soft skills, moral integrity (4.22), loyalty (4.16), and teamwork (4.10) were the main competencies. These findings suggest that the success of an internship program is determined not only by language skills but also by the ability to adapt to Japanese work culture. This research emphasizes the importance of developing a stakeholder-based curriculum that integrates language, cross-cultural, and professional skills competencies to enhance students' work readiness in an international environment.

Keywords: *Intercultural Competence, Curriculum Development, Stakeholder-Based Curriculum, Japan Language Education*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has increased the mobility of the workforce across borders and expanded opportunities for students to gain academic and professional experience in an international environment. The internationalization of higher education has encouraged the development of various forms of student mobility, including international exchange programs and internships, which aim to enhance graduates' global competency and employability. Various

studies have shown that international mobility experiences, including internships abroad, contribute to improved language skills, cross-cultural competency, and graduates' readiness to enter the global job market (Pozniak et al., 2025). In this context, Japan has become an important destination for Indonesian students to participate in internship programs, particularly in the manufacturing, service, and hospitality sectors. These internship programs not only provide practical work experience but also provide students to understand Japanese work culture and develop professional communication skills in Japanese. In this context, Japanese language study programs in Indonesia play a crucial role in preparing students to communicate effectively in an international work environment. Language education focuses not only on mastering linguistic competence but also on developing cross-cultural communication competencies, enabling learners to understand the values, norms, and social practices of the language-speaking community.

Recent research indicates that the integration of language and cross-cultural competence is a crucial factor in preparing graduates for professional interactions in a global environment (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2017). Therefore, Japanese language learning in higher education needs to integrate aspects of Japanese language and work culture to provide students with more comprehensive communication readiness in an international professional context.

However, curriculum development in higher education is often more academically oriented and does not fully consider the needs of industry as a key stakeholder. A stakeholder-based curriculum approach emphasizes the importance of involving various parties, including the industrial sector, in developing competencies relevant to the needs of the global job market (Jackson, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020). This lack of industry involvement in the curriculum development process can create a gap between the competencies taught in higher education and the skills required by companies. Therefore, analysing industry needs is a crucial step in designing a curriculum that prepares students to face the demands of cross-cultural communication and work culture in an international environment.

Despite this, curriculum development in higher education often remains primarily academically oriented and fails to fully consider the needs of industry, a key stakeholder. A stakeholder-based curriculum approach emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement, including the industrial sector, in developing competencies relevant to the needs of the global job market (Jackson, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

Previous research has shown that Indonesian students participating in internship programs in Japan face various challenges in the adaptation process, particularly related to differences in work culture and professional communication (Haryanti, 2024). Furthermore, evaluations of internship programs have also revealed a gap between student competencies and industry needs, particularly in communication and work readiness (Haryanti et al., 2025).

However, most research focuses on the perspectives of students and programs, while studies examining the needs of industry, the end users of graduates, are limited. Therefore, analysing industry needs is a crucial step in designing a curriculum that prepares students for the demands of cross-cultural communication and work culture in an international environment.

This research aim to:

1. Identify the hard and soft skills requirements expected by Japanese companies in internship students.
2. Analyse the competencies most needed in implementing internship programs at Japanese companies.
3. Provide recommendations for developing a Japanese language study program curriculum that is stakeholder-based and relevant to the needs of the Japanese industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stakeholder Approach in Curriculum Development

Curriculum development in higher education increasingly emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement to ensure the relevance of academic learning to the needs of the workplace. A stakeholder-based approach emphasizes the need for involvement of various stakeholders within an organization or educational

institution in the decision-making process, including curriculum design (Freeman, 2010; Freeman & McVea, 2001). In the context of higher education, key stakeholders include educational institutions, students, and the industry as the end users of graduates. Through the involvement of these various parties, the curriculum is expected to produce graduates with competencies aligned with job market needs.

In line with this approach, the concept of an industry-based curriculum emphasizes the importance of aligning learning materials with industry needs so that graduates possess skills relevant to the workplace. Research shows that industry involvement in curriculum development can help universities identify competencies needed by companies, ensuring that the learning process is oriented not only toward theoretical aspects but also toward practical skills required in a professional environment (Jackson, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Thus, a curriculum designed with industry needs in mind can improve graduates' employability.

Furthermore, the concept of work-integrated learning (WIL) is also an important approach in connecting academic learning with real-world work experiences. Work-integrated learning refers to various forms of learning that integrate work experience into the educational process, such as internship programs, fieldwork practices, and industry collaborations. This approach enables students to develop professional competencies, communication skills, and the ability to adapt to real-world work environments (Mainga et al., 2018). Therefore, curriculum development that involves stakeholders, particularly industry, is crucial in preparing students to face the demands of the global workforce.

Language Competence for Workplace Communication

Language competence is a crucial factor in preparing students to communicate effectively in an international workplace. In the context of Japanese language education, language proficiency encompasses not only basic linguistic skills but also the ability to use language appropriately in professional situations. The concepts of workplace Japanese and business Japanese emphasize the use of Japanese appropriate to the work context, including the use of formal language, polite expressions (*keigo*), and the ability to communicate effectively with superiors, co-workers, and customers. Mastery of Japanese in a professional context is crucial because workplace communication often involves social and cultural norms that differ from everyday communication (Shen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, communication competence in a foreign language is closely related to the concept of communicative competence, namely the ability to use language effectively and appropriately according to the social context and communication situation (Felix-Brasdefer & Cohen, 2012; Shaxrizoda & Visola, 2026). In the context of workplace communication, this competence includes the ability to understand written and spoken information, convey ideas clearly, and interact professionally with various parties. Therefore, developing language competency for the workplace needs to encompass a range of interrelated language skills.

The concept of communication competency also relates to the ability to use language effectively in specific social contexts, encompassing an understanding of the meaning of language, the purpose of communication, and the situations in which it is used. In the context of workplace communication, this competency encompasses the ability to comprehend written and spoken information and to convey ideas clearly and professionally to various parties. Research on the need for Japanese language competency in multinational organizations indicates that the most needed language skills in the workplace include speaking, reading, listening, and writing, as these skills are used in activities such as discussions, presentations, reading company documents, and written business communication (Daengsubhaa et al., 2021).

Intercultural Competence in the Japanese Work Environment

Intercultural competence is a crucial aspect of communication in international work environments, especially when individuals come from different cultural backgrounds. This competence relates not only to language skills but also to the ability to understand the values, norms, and social practices of the culture that speaks that language. In the context of professional communication, intercultural competence enables individuals to interpret communication behavior, understand other cultural perspectives, and adapt communication strategies to diverse work situations. Recent research shows that intercultural competence plays a crucial role in successful

communication and collaboration in multicultural organizations, particularly in global work environments (Deardorff, 2020).

Furthermore, workplace communication is also influenced by the characteristics of a country's work culture. In Japanese companies, organizational culture is often associated with the values of collectivism, loyalty to the organization, and the importance of maintaining harmony within the work group. Research on Japanese work culture indicates that hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates, teamwork, and commitment to the organization are strong characteristics of work practices in Japanese companies (Yamaguchi, 2017). These values influence how employees interact, make decisions, and express opinions in the workplace.

In everyday communication practices, Japanese corporate culture also emphasizes the importance of professional etiquette and communication norms that reflect respect and social harmony. Business etiquette, such as greetings, polite language, and professional behavior in meetings and interactions with customers, is a crucial part of communication in Japanese companies. Recent research shows that understanding Japanese communication norms and business etiquette is crucial for foreign workers to adapt effectively to the Japanese workplace (Warnel & Umeda, 2019). Therefore, developing cross-cultural competence in Japanese language education is crucial to preparing students for professional communication in the Japanese workplace.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the competencies required by Japanese companies accepting internship students. The quantitative approach was used to identify the level of need for various competencies through descriptive statistical analysis, while the qualitative approach provided a deeper understanding through interviews with company representatives involved in the internship program. The mixed methods approach allowed researchers to integrate the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data, resulting in a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The respondents in this study were Japanese companies that accept or have the potential to accept internship students from Indonesia. A total of 20 companies from various industrial sectors participated, including manufacturing, food service, healthcare, hospitality, and welfare services. Respondents were recruited through collaboration with two Indonesian labour recruitment companies in Osaka, ensuring the companies involved were relevant to the internship program. The companies were selected based on their experience or potential collaboration with Japanese language study programs in Indonesia, thus representing the competency needs of internship students.

Research data was collected through a questionnaire designed to identify the competencies required by Japanese companies for internship students. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using a Likert scale to measure the level of need for various competencies. Qualitative data was obtained through interviews conducted on October 1, 2025, to gain a deeper understanding of the skills required in the Japanese work environment. Data collection took place from October 2025 to February 2026. The questionnaire was distributed online and facilitated by two large companies in Osaka that act as recruiters of Indonesian workers, specifically for internship programs. This enabled the researchers to obtain responses from companies relevant to the research objectives.

The research instrument covered several competency aspects, namely hard skills and soft skills, as well as information related to the internship program. Hard skills included Japanese language skills such as reading, speaking, writing, and translation, communication skills, information technology skills, and cross-cultural understanding. Soft skills, meanwhile, encompassed competencies such as moral integrity, loyalty, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and self-development. In addition to the questionnaire, qualitative data was also collected through interviews with two large companies in Osaka that act as recruiters of Indonesian workers for

internship programs. The interviews were conducted to obtain more in-depth information regarding competency requirements and the companies' experiences in accepting interns.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to illustrate the level of competency requirements expected by Japanese companies. The analysis was conducted by calculating the average (mean) value and percentage for each competency indicator. Meanwhile, qualitative data from the interviews were analysed thematically to identify respondents' views on the skills required in the Japanese work environment. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses were then integrated to provide a more comprehensive picture of industry needs and their implications for the development of Japanese language study program curricula.

DISCUSSION

The companies participating in this study consisted of 20 companies operating in several sectors in Japan, including food services, nursing care, manufacturing, accommodation, recreation, healthcare, and social welfare services. The distribution of respondents by industry sector is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Division of Marine Zones of the Masel Island Community

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Food Services Industry	4	20.0	20.0	30.0
Medical Care	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
Nursing Care	4	20.0	20.0	55.0
Industrial Product Manufacturing	3	15.0	15.0	70.0
Hospital	1	5.0	5.0	75.0
Accommodation	2	10.0	10.0	85.0
Leisure Industry: Hotels, Hot Springs/Spa	2	10.0	10.0	95.0
Disability Welfare Services	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

The industrial sectors that receive the most internships are the food service and nursing care industries, each accounting for 20%. Furthermore, companies from the industrial product manufacturing sector account for 15%, and the accommodation and recreation industry, such as hotels and onsen (hot springs), account for 10% each. Meanwhile, other sectors, such as human resources services, disability welfare services, hospitals, and healthcare, account for smaller percentages.

These findings indicate that internship opportunities for Japanese language students are not limited to specific industrial sectors but are spread across a wide range of service and industrial fields in Japan. This suggests that Japanese language graduates need flexible communication skills to adapt to various work environments.

Hard Skills Required

The average hard skills competency scores required by Japanese companies are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Required Hard Skills

No	Skills	Average
1	Cross Cultural Understanding	4.10
2	Reading	3.50
3	Listening & Speaking	3.48
4	Communication	3.35
5	ICT	2.96
6	Writing	2.86
7	Translating	2.81
	Hardskills Average	3.29

As shown in Table 2, cross-cultural understanding is the competency most needed by Japanese companies, with an average score of 4.10. This competency is followed by reading skills, with an average score of 3.50, and listening and speaking skills, with an average score of 3.48. Furthermore, general communication skills have an average score of 3.35, while information technology (ICT) skills have an average score of 2.96. The competencies with the lowest average scores are writing skills, with a score of 2.86, and translation skills, with a score of 2.81.

These results indicate that cross-cultural understanding is the most sought-after competency by Japanese companies. This finding suggests that students' success in internship programs is determined not only by language skills but also by their ability to understand the values, norms, and cultural practices of the Japanese work environment. Cross-cultural competence enables individuals to adapt their communication behaviour to the prevailing social and cultural expectations of the international work environment (Deardorff, 2020).

This finding is also supported by previous research by Haryanti (2024), which showed that the adaptation process of Indonesian students in internship programs in Japan is significantly influenced by their ability to understand the work culture, communication norms, and social environment of Japanese companies. This suggests that cross-cultural competence is not only important in the initial adaptation phase but also a key factor in students' successful communication and performance throughout the internship program. Therefore, integrating cross-cultural competence into Japanese language education is crucial in preparing students for work in an international environment.

Soft Skills Required

In addition to hard skills, Japanese companies also value various soft skills. The soft skills required by Japanese companies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Required Hard Skills

No	Skills	Average
1	Moral Integrity	4.22
2	Loyalty	4.16
3	Teamwork	4.10

No	Skills	Average
4	Self-Development	3.84
5	Problem Solving	3.58
6	Integrity	3.47
7	Organizational Commitment	3.42
8	Lifelong Learning and Information Management	3.23
9	Sincerity/Dedication	3.08
10	Leadership	2.92
11	Entrepreneurship	2.30
	Soft skills Averages	3.48

Based on Table 3, moral integrity, loyalty, and teamwork skills are the most valued competencies, reflecting the characteristics of Japanese work culture. The analysis shows that moral integrity has the highest average score of 4.22. This competency is followed by organizational loyalty with an average score of 4.16 and teamwork with an average score of 4.10. Other competencies also considered important are self-development skills with an average score of 3.84 and problem-solving skills with an average score of 3.58. Conversely, entrepreneurial skills have the lowest average score of 2.30.

High average scores on these aspects indicate that Japanese companies place a high emphasis on professional attitudes and work ethics. These characteristics align with Japanese work culture, which emphasizes group harmony, organizational loyalty, and commitment to the company. In this context, internship students are expected to be able to work not only individually but also contribute to a team and adapt to prevailing organizational values. The finding indicates that competencies such as integrity, teamwork, and professional responsibility are important factors influencing graduates' employability and success in organizational settings (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Mainga et al., 2022).

Japanese Communication Skills

Further analysis of Japanese communication skills revealed varying levels of need based on the type of communication activity in the workplace.

Table 4. Mean Scores of Japanese Communication Skills

No	Japanese Communication Skills	Means Score
1	Ability to understand Japanese conversation	4.30
2	Ability to Communicate Formally in Japanese	3.85
3	Ability to Communicate Casually in Japanese	3.85
4	Ability to Make Phone Calls in Japanese	2.40
5	Ability to Answer Phone Calls in Japanese	2.70
6	Ability to communicate with customers in Japanese	3.75

The finding on Table 4, shows that the ability to understand Japanese conversation had the highest average score of 4.30. This indicates that receptive skills, particularly in understanding work instructions, everyday conversations, and interactions between employees, are crucial competencies in the Japanese workplace. Furthermore, formal and informal Japanese communication skills each had an average score of 3.85. These findings indicate that interns are expected to be able to adapt their language use to the context of the situation, both in communication with superiors and co-workers. This ability is closely related to the use of appropriate language styles, including the use of polite forms (*keigo*) in formal situations. The ability to communicate with customers in Japanese also demonstrated a relatively high level of need, with an average score of 3.75. This suggests that in some industry sectors, such as service and hospitality, interns interact not only with fellow employees but also with customers, thus requiring more complex and service-oriented communication skills. However, Japanese telephone communication skills showed lower scores, at 2.40 for making calls and 2.70 for receiving calls.

This finding indicates that telephone communication remains a challenge for students, likely due to limitations in understanding conversations without visual context and the use of more complex formal language. Overall, these results suggest that the need for Japanese language competency in the workplace places greater emphasis on practical communication skills in real-world situations than on technical linguistic skills (Jackson, 2017; Mainga et al., 2022). This suggests that successful communication in the workplace is determined not only by linguistic ability but also by the ability to understand the context of the situation and adapt language use appropriately. In this context, the use of Japanese in the workplace is closely related to the concept of communicative competence, where individuals are required to be able to use language effectively according to social and professional situations (Shen et al., 2024). Therefore, Japanese language learning needs to be more oriented towards developing contextual communication skills that reflect real-life interactions in the workplace rather than solely academic language proficiency.

Qualitative Findings from Interviews

Interviews with two companies in Osaka indicate that companies emphasize not only Japanese language skills but also the ability to adapt to Japanese work culture. Respondents emphasized the importance of work attitudes such as discipline, responsibility, and the ability to work in a team as key factors in the success of internship students.

Furthermore, the companies stated that communication skills in real-world work situations, such as interacting with superiors and customers, are more important than academic language skills. Interviews also revealed that understanding work ethics and communication norms in Japanese companies is a major challenge for internship students. These findings support the quantitative analysis, which showed that cross-cultural competence and soft skills are highly important in the Japanese work environment.

Implications for Curriculum Development

The findings of this study provide important implications for the development of Japanese language study program curricula in Indonesia. First, the curriculum needs to integrate Japanese language learning with the development of professional communication competencies relevant to the needs of the workplace. Second, the curriculum also needs to focus more on developing cross-cultural competencies to provide students with a better understanding of Japanese work culture. Research shows that integrating cross-cultural competencies into the curriculum can improve students' readiness to work in a global environment (Deardorff, 2020).

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with research by Pitri Haryanti (2025), which suggests that internship programs in Japan need to be supported by a curriculum relevant to industry needs, particularly in strengthening communication competencies and student work readiness. Therefore, a stakeholder-based curriculum approach is crucial to bridge the gap between education and industry needs (Jackson, 2017).

Overall, this study complements previous research findings that focused on internship program experiences and evaluations by providing perspectives from industry, the end users of graduates. Thus, developing a curriculum that integrates language competency, cross-cultural competency, and professional skills is a strategic step in improving the quality of graduates of Japanese language study programs in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that students' success in internship programs at Japanese companies is not solely determined by Japanese language proficiency, but rather emphasizes cross-cultural understanding, practical communication skills, and soft skills such as integrity, loyalty, and teamwork, reflecting Japanese work culture. These findings reveal a gap between the academically oriented curriculum and the real needs of industry, while also contributing by presenting the industry's perspective as a user of graduates in stakeholder-based curriculum development. Therefore, Japanese language study programs are advised to integrate language competency with professional communication and Japanese work culture through contextual learning approaches such as work simulations, role-plays, and work-integrated learning, as well as strengthening the development of students' soft skills. Furthermore, active collaboration between universities and industry needs to be enhanced in curriculum design and internship program evaluation. This study is limited by the limited number and scope of respondents. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve more industry sectors and use a broader approach to obtain a more comprehensive picture and test the effectiveness of implementing a stakeholder-based curriculum in improving students' work readiness in an international environment.

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