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## Needs of Japanese Language Proficiency Perceived by Multinational Organization Employees

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### Abstract

The purposes of this study were 1) to investigate needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees, and 2) to study additional suggestions from respondents. The research samples were 80 employees working in multinational organizations in Bangkok derived through Simple Random Sampling technique. The instruments used for collecting the data were the rating-scale and open-ended questionnaire. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and content analysis were used for data analysis. The findings were needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees was at the highest level. The highest needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees were Speaking and the lowest needs were Writing. The additional suggestions were as follows: 1) Employees should be trained on expressing ideas with critical and analytical discussion; 2) Employees should be trained on reading and summarizing the documents and then presenting them through a form of writing and presentation; and 3) Employees should be taught to understand Japanese community and cultural aspects.

**Keywords:** Needs of Japanese Language Proficiency; Japanese in the Workplace Context; Japanese in the Multinational Organizations.

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## **1. Introduction**

The significance of Japanese language in the workplace is demonstrated by Asakawa and his colleagues [1] who advocate that internationalization of Japanese companies has been particularly rapid in the 2000s due to the globalization process and the economic recession at that time. In order to be competitive in the global business environment, it is essential to recruit more non-Japanese employees with intercultural communication and language skills [2]. In this way, it cannot be denied that proficiency in Japanese language skills is needed while working with the Japanese employers and clients. Japanese language proficiency is, therefore, becoming one of the vital recognition skills between employers and employees in the Japanese organizations [3]. According to Flynn and his colleagues [4], Japanese language proficiency refers to what individuals can do with their knowledge of the Japanese language and how well they can use the language to communicate effectively in the real world. A more radical approach is supported by [5] who highlights that group discussions and team projects, meeting, training and seminars sessions, and interactions with clients, superiors, and others require effective communicative two-way conversation. In consequence, it might be concluded that Japanese language speakers have more opportunities to find jobs in different organizations and companies. The level of linguistic competence in any language needed for transnational work is, therefore, highly concerned. According to the study collected in Germany, its findings present that language used in a multilingual workplace display very specialized linguistic forms depending on the purpose and the language user's repertoire [6]. Supported by Blommaert and his colleagues [7] who point out that the linguistic competence necessary for specific workplace communication might be quite different from what is typically taught in language classrooms which presumes ability of the complete spectrum of the standard variety of a language.

## **2. Research Purposes**

The purposes of this study were:

- 1) to investigate needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in four aspects: Listening; Speaking; Reading and Writing; and
- 2) to study additional suggestions from respondents.

## **3. Research Methodology**

This study focused on needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Bangkok which consists of 80 samples from six multinational organizations derived through Simple Random Sampling technique. The instruments used for gathering the data were the rating-scale and open-ended questionnaire based on needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees. The first part (Part 1) of the questionnaire asked for the demographic information of the respondents: Gender and Work Experience. The second part (Part 2) concerned with needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees. The third part (Part 3) asked for opinions and suggestions of the respondents. The five levels of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees used in the questionnaire were ranked as "The highest level", "High level", "Moderate level", "Low level", and

“The lowest level”. Responses from the questionnaires were subsequently coded. The data of the respondents’ coded responses were statistically calculated and analyzed. Data analysis from questionnaire both single item and whole questionnaire which presented by a form of rating scale. These rating scales were calculated to find out mean and standard deviation and then translated based on criteria developed by Best [8] as follows:

- 5 refers to The highest level
- 4 refers to High level
- 3 refers to Moderate level
- 2 refers to Low level
- 1 refers to The lowest level

This, then, is calculated into mean scores as a following formulation.

$1.00 \leq < 1.50$  refers to the lowest level.

$1.51 \leq < 2.50$  refers to low level.

$2.51 \leq < 3.50$  refers to moderate level.

$3.51 \leq < 4.50$  refers to high level.

$4.51 \leq < 5.00$  refers to the highest level.

The collected data was analyzed using a computer program. The statistics used for analyzing the data were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

#### **4. Results**

Part 1: Results of the demographic data of the respondents

Table 1 showed that percentages of respondents in genders ranged from 27.50% as male employees and 72.50% as female employees. For work experience, the percentages ranged from 6.25% for less than 1 year, followed by 43.75% for 1-5 years, 22.50% for 6-10 years, 18.75% for 11-15 years and 8.75% for 16-20 years.

**Table 1:** Results of the Demographic Data of the Respondents

Demographic data of the respondents	n	Percentage
<b>1. Gender</b>		
1.1) Male	22	27.50
1.2) Female	58	72.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2. Work experience</b>		
2.1) Less than 1 year	5	6.25
2.2) 1-5years	35	43.75
2.3) 6-10 years	18	22.50
2.4) 11-15 years	15	18.75
2.5) 16-20 years	7	8.75
2.6) More than 20 years	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Part 2: Results of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees

**Table 2:** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Overall

No.	Aspects	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1.	Listening	4.54	0.62	Highest
2.	Speaking	4.65	0.62	Highest
3.	Reading	4.59	0.61	Highest
4.	Writing	4.48	0.65	High
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.57</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>Highest</b>

The above table indicated that needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in overall was at the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.57$ ). The highest rank at the highest level was Speaking ( $\bar{x} = 4.65$ ), followed by Reading, Listening and Writing ( $\bar{x} = 4.59$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.54$  and  $\bar{x} = 4.48$  respectively).

**Table 3:** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Listening

No.	Components	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1.	Understand conversation under the phone	4.50	0.63	Highest
2.	Understand face-to-face conversation	4.74	0.54	Highest
3.	Understand formal talks and speeches	4.32	0.69	High
4.	Understand formal and informal presentation	4.61	0.47	Highest
5.	Understand discussion in the meeting	4.53	0.77	Highest
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.54</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>Highest</b>

The table presented that needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Listening was at the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.54$ ). The highest rank at the highest level was “Understand face-to-face conversation” ( $\bar{x} = 4.74$ ), followed by “Understand formal and informal presentation” ( $\bar{x} = 4.61$ ) whereas the

lowest rank at a high level was “Understand formal talks and speeches” ( $\bar{x} = 4.32$ ).

**Table 4:** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Speaking

No.	Components	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1.	Communicate with Japanese customers and clients	4.58	0.49	Highest
2.	Communicate with Japanese colleagues	4.62	0.74	Highest
3.	Discussion and negotiations with Japanese customers and clients	4.49	0.79	High
4.	Discussion and report in the meeting	4.71	0.47	Highest
5.	Giving presentation	4.84	0.62	Highest
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.65</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>Highest</b>

The table demonstrated that needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Speaking was at the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.65$ ). The highest rank at the highest level was “Giving presentation” ( $\bar{x} = 4.84$ ), followed by “Discussion and report in the meeting” ( $\bar{x} = 4.71$ ) whereas the lowest rank at a high level was “Discussion and negotiations with Japanese customers and clients” ( $\bar{x} = 4.49$ ).

**Table 5:** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Reading

No.	Components	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1.	Read business report	4.47	0.53	High
2.	Read business letter/emails	4.59	0.68	Highest
3.	Read manuals and instructions	4.73	0.49	Highest
4.	Read company regulations	4.60	0.66	Highest
5.	Read memo/notice/announcement	4.55	0.73	Highest
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>Highest</b>

The table illustrated that needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Reading was at the highest level ( $\bar{x} = 4.59$ ). The highest rank at the highest level was “Read manuals and instructions” ( $\bar{x} = 4.73$ ), followed by “Read company regulations” ( $\bar{x} = 4.60$ ) whereas the lowest rank at a high level was “Read business report” ( $\bar{x} = 4.47$ ).

**Table 6:** Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in Writing

No.	Components	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1.	Translate to Japanese language	4.35	0.57	High
2.	Translate from Japanese language	4.42	0.60	High
3.	Edit written materials	4.20	0.79	High
4.	Write formal reports	4.69	0.58	Highest
5.	Write letter/emails/notice/memo	4.75	0.73	Highest
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.48</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>High</b>

The table illustrated that needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees in

Writing skills was at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ). The highest rank at the highest level was “Write letter/emails/notice/memo” ( $\bar{x} = 4.75$ ), followed by “Write formal reports” ( $\bar{x} = 4.69$ ) whereas the lowest rank at a high level was “Edit written materials” ( $\bar{x} = 4.20$ ).

### Part 3: Opinions and Suggestions from the Respondents

The opinions and suggestions from the respondents were listed as follows:

1. Employees should be trained on expressing ideas with critical and analytical discussion.
2. Employees should be trained on reading and summarizing the documents and then presenting them through a form of writing and presentation.
3. Employees should be taught to understand Japanese community and cultural aspects.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussions

The research findings indicated that the highest needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees were Speaking and the lowest needs were Writing. The additional suggestions were as follows: 1) Employees should be trained on expressing ideas with critical and analytical discussion; 2) Employees should be trained on reading and summarizing the documents and then presenting them through a form of writing and presentation; and 3) Employees should be taught to understand Japanese community and cultural aspects. According to Oxford [9], the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is to interact with the community of the language. As mentioned before, language learning is like creating another social self, adjustable to a new environment (i.e. the society of the target language). This cannot be easily achieved only through knowledge of socio-cultural aspects of the language. It is accomplished through actual experience of language learning and interacting with native speakers by using the target language. For this reason, language is acquired rather than learnt. Acquisition occurs unconsciously and spontaneously, while learning is conscious knowledge. A more radical approach is demonstrated by Bloch [10] who focuses on the significance of language used in transnational work. It is typically that employers search for employees who are not linguists but those with strong professional competency in addition to language skills. Therefore, it might be concluded and discussed that TNI Japanese lecturers should emphasis on teaching language skills paralleled with globalized workplace skills.

## 6. Recommendation

Recommendation for this study The highest needs of Japanese language proficiency in multinational organization employees are speaking skills. Therefore, it is significant for graduates to be provided a variety channel of speaking practices in a workplace situation. Recommendation for further study A study of problems of learning Japanese should be identified in order to prepare the graduates for their future career.

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