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# Japanese as a Second Language for Indonesian Migrant Worker Candidates: Linguistic and Intercultural Challenges in Pre-departure Training

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# Abstract

This study examines the linguistic and intercultural challenges faced by Indonesian migrant worker candidates learning Japanese as a second language (JSL) in a pre-departure training context. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires involving 20 participants enrolled in a Japanese language training program. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three interconnected challenges. First, learners experience difficulties in acquiring Japanese literacy due to the simultaneous learning of multiple writing systems (hiragana, katakana, and kanji), which results in cognitive overload and reliance on romaji. Second, pronunciation-related difficulties—particularly vowel length, gemination, contracted sounds, and pitch accent—interfere with meaning-making and reduce learners' confidence in spoken interaction. Third, learners face sociopragmatic challenges in using politeness strategies (keigo), interpreting indirect expressions, and adapting to hierarchical and non-verbal communication norms in Japanese workplace contexts. These findings highlight the close relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence in migration-oriented language learning. The study contributes to Japanese as a second language and second/foreign language education research by foregrounding migrant worker candidates as a distinct learner population and by emphasizing the need for integrative pre-departure training models that combine literacy, pronunciation, and intercultural pragmatics.


# Introduction

International labor mobility has intensified the need for language education programs that prepare migrant workers for effective communication in linguistically and culturally diverse workplaces. For Indonesian migrant worker candidates seeking employment in Japan, learning Japanese as a second language (JSL) is not merely a matter of acquiring grammatical knowledge or vocabulary, but also of developing the ability to communicate appropriately within hierarchical, indirect, and culturally embedded professional environments. In this context, linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence are inseparable components of communicative readiness.

Previous research on Japanese as a second or foreign language has predominantly focused on learners in academic or formal classroom settings, such as university students or long-term study-abroad participants (Mori & Mori, 2011). While these studies have provided valuable insights into grammar acquisition, vocabulary development, and general proficiency, relatively limited attention has been paid to migrant worker populations whose language learning is shaped by time constraints, instrumental goals, and immediate workplace demands. As a result, existing JSL research does not fully capture the communicative challenges faced by learners preparing for employment rather than academic advancement.

Pre-departure language training programs for migrant workers represent a particularly underexplored context in second and foreign language education research. In such programs, learners are required to

simultaneously develop basic literacy across multiple Japanese writing systems, achieve sufficient pronunciation accuracy to avoid misunderstandings, and acquire sociopragmatic knowledge relevant to workplace interaction. For learners whose first language uses a Roman alphabet and whose cultural communication norms differ from those of Japan, these demands can create substantial cognitive and communicative challenges.

From an intercultural perspective, effective workplace communication in Japan requires more than linguistic accuracy. Learners must also develop sensitivity to politeness strategies (keigo), indirect expressions, and context-dependent meanings that are central to Japanese interactional norms (Mc. Conachy & Fujino, 2021). Difficulties in these areas may result not only in communicative breakdowns but also in anxiety, reduced confidence, and challenges in professional integration. Despite their practical significance, studies that integrate linguistic and intercultural dimensions of JSL learning among migrant worker candidates remain scarce.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to investigate the linguistic and intercultural challenges experienced by Indonesian migrant worker candidates enrolled in a Japanese pre-departure training program. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What linguistic challenges do Indonesian migrant worker candidates encounter when learning Japanese in a pre-departure training context?

(2) How do pronunciation-related difficulties affect their meaning-making and spoken interaction?

(3) What sociopragmatic and intercultural challenges emerge in preparing for Japanese workplace communication?

By examining these questions through interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires, this study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends JSL research by foregrounding migrant worker candidates as a distinct learner population with workplace-oriented language learning needs. Second, it integrates linguistic and intercultural perspectives to demonstrate how script literacy, pronunciation, and sociopragmatic competence intersect in migration-oriented language learning. Third, it offers pedagogical insights for the design of more integrative pre-departure language training programs that better prepare migrant workers for communicative participation in Japanese professional environments.

## Literature Review

# Japanese as a Second Language in Non-academic Contexts

Research on Japanese as a second or foreign language (JSL) has expanded significantly over the past two decades, addressing areas such as grammar acquisition, vocabulary development, pronunciation, and literacy skills. However, much of this research has been conducted in academic contexts, particularly among university students and long-term study-abroad learners (Mori & Mori, 2011). While these studies provide important insights into general patterns of Japanese language learning, they often overlook learner populations whose language use is primarily instrumental and workplace-oriented.

Learners preparing for employment in Japan, such as migrant worker candidates, differ markedly from academic learners in terms of learning goals, time constraints, and communicative needs. For this population, Japanese language learning is closely tied to immediate professional functionality rather than long-term academic proficiency. As a result, challenges related to literacy, pronunciation, and pragmatic appropriateness may have more direct consequences for workplace performance and social integration. Despite the growing presence of migrant workers in Japan, empirical studies examining JSL learning in pre-departure or vocational training contexts remain limited.

## Literacy and Script Acquisition in Japanese Language Learning

One of the most distinctive features of Japanese is its use of multiple writing systems—hiragana, katakana, and kanji—which poses unique challenges for second language learners. Previous studies have shown that learners whose first language employs an alphabetic writing system often experience cognitive overload when required to simultaneously acquire multiple scripts. Difficulties related to visual similarity, character memorization, and script differentiation are commonly reported, particularly among adult learners.

To cope with these challenges, learners frequently rely on romaji as an initial literacy scaffold. While romaji can facilitate early access to pronunciation and meaning, prolonged dependence may hinder the development of functional literacy required for real-world communication. In workplace contexts, limited script competence can restrict learners' ability to interpret written instructions, safety notices, and formal documents, thereby affecting communicative effectiveness and job performance. These findings suggest that script acquisition in JSL should be understood not only as a linguistic issue but also as a functional and contextualized skill linked to communicative demands.

## Pronunciation, Intelligibility, and Meaning-making in JSL

Pronunciation has long been recognized as a critical component of oral communication in second language learning. In Japanese, phonological features such as vowel length, gemination, contracted sounds, and pitch accent play a crucial role in distinguishing meaning. Research in second language phonology indicates that learners whose first language lacks such distinctions may struggle to perceive and produce them accurately, leading to misunderstandings even when grammatical structures are correct (Levis, 2018).

Beyond intelligibility, pronunciation difficulties can also influence learners' confidence and willingness to communicate. In workplace settings, inaccurate pronunciation may be interpreted as a lack of competence or professionalism, thereby affecting interpersonal relations and task coordination. However, pronunciation research in JSL has often focused on classroom-based learners and controlled instructional settings, with limited attention to how pronunciation challenges impact meaning-making and interaction in occupational contexts. This gap highlights the need for research that connects pronunciation accuracy with functional communication in real-world environments.

## Intercultural Communicative Competence and Sociopragmatics

Effective communication in Japanese professional contexts requires not only linguistic accuracy but also sensitivity to sociopragmatic norms. Concepts such as politeness strategies (keigo), indirect expressions, and non-verbal communication are deeply embedded in Japanese interactional practices. Studies on second language pragmatics emphasize that learners often struggle with these features due to limited exposure to authentic discourse and differences in cultural communication norms.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) provides a useful framework for understanding these challenges, as it highlights the integration of linguistic knowledge, sociocultural awareness, and pragmatic ability. In the context of L2 Japanese, research has shown that learners may experience uncertainty and anxiety when navigating hierarchical relationships and selecting appropriate levels of politeness (McConachy & Fujino, 2021). Misinterpretation of indirect expressions or non-verbal cues can further complicate interaction, particularly in workplace settings where power relations and expectations are implicit.

Despite the relevance of ICC to JSL learning, empirical studies that explicitly examine the intersection of linguistic and intercultural challenges among migrant worker candidates remain scarce. Most existing research addresses intercultural adaptation broadly or focuses on students in international education contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how ICC develops in migration-oriented language training programs.

## Research Gap and Contribution

Taken together, existing literature highlights important aspects of Japanese language learning related to literacy, pronunciation, and pragmatics, yet these strands are often examined in isolation and within academic learning environments. There is a clear need for integrative research that explores how these dimensions intersect in vocational and migration-oriented contexts, particularly in pre-departure training programs for migrant workers.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the linguistic and intercultural challenges faced by Indonesian migrant worker candidates learning Japanese in a pre-departure training context. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, the study provides a holistic understanding of how script

acquisition, pronunciation, and sociopragmatic competence collectively shape learners' communicative readiness for Japanese workplace environments. In doing so, it contributes to JSL and second/foreign language education research by foregrounding an underrepresented learner population and by offering insights relevant to the design of more context-sensitive language training programs.

## Methodology

# Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the linguistic and intercultural challenges experienced by Indonesian migrant worker candidates learning Japanese as a second language (JSL) in a pre-departure training context. A case study approach was adopted to enable an in-depth and contextualized examination of learners' experiences, perceptions, and communicative practices within a specific institutional setting. This design is particularly suitable for investigating the complex interplay between language learning, cultural norms, and workplace-oriented communication demands.

## Research Setting

The research was conducted at a Japanese language pre-departure training institution in Indonesia that prepares migrant worker candidates for employment in Japan. The program emphasizes functional Japanese for workplace communication, including basic literacy in hiragana, katakana, and introductory kanji, pronunciation practice, and sociocultural norms relevant to Japanese professional environments. Instruction is delivered through classroom-based lessons complemented by role-play simulations of workplace interactions.

# Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research objectives. A total of **20 migrant worker candidates** participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from their early twenties to mid-thirties and represented diverse educational backgrounds. All participants were native speakers of Indonesian with limited prior exposure to Japanese before enrolling in the training program. To ensure confidentiality, participants are identified using numerical codes (e.g., Participant 01, Participant 02).

# Data Collection

Data were collected using three complementary qualitative instruments: semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and an open-ended questionnaire.

# Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture participants' perspectives on learning Japanese and their experiences with linguistic and intercultural challenges. Interview questions focused on three

domains: (1) difficulties related to Japanese writing systems, (2) challenges in pronunciation and spoken communication, and (3) experiences with sociocultural and pragmatic aspects of Japanese workplace communication, including politeness strategies.

Each interview lasted approximately **30–45 minutes** and was conducted in Indonesian to allow participants to articulate their experiences freely. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

# Classroom Observations

Non-participant classroom observations were undertaken to supplement interview data and to capture naturally occurring learning behaviors. Observations focused on reading activities, pronunciation drills, and role-play tasks simulating workplace communication. Field notes documented recurrent patterns, learner strategies (such as reliance on romaji), and instances of communicative breakdown.

# Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to all participants to obtain a broader range of reflections on learning Japanese. The questionnaire addressed challenges related to script acquisition, pronunciation, and sociocultural communication practices. Responses were used to corroborate and enrich themes identified through interviews and observations.

# Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through an iterative and inductive process. First, interview transcripts, observation notes, and questionnaire responses were read repeatedly to achieve familiarization with the data. Second, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units related to linguistic and intercultural challenges. Third, codes were grouped into categories and refined into broader themes. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing literature on JSL, intercultural communicative competence, and workplace pragmatics.

This analytical process resulted in three overarching themes: (1) challenges related to Japanese writing systems, (2) pronunciation difficulties affecting meaning-making, and (3) sociopragmatic and intercultural communication challenges.

# Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating data from interviews, classroom observations, and questionnaires. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers supported the review of coding decisions and thematic interpretations. Rich data excerpts are presented to provide thick description and to allow readers to assess the credibility of the analysis.

# Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by removing identifying information from all data sources. All data were used solely for research purposes.

# Results

The analysis of interview data, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaire responses from 20 participants identified three major and interrelated themes concerning the challenges faced by Indonesian migrant worker candidates in learning Japanese as a second language during pre-departure training. These themes correspond to the three summary tables presented in this study: challenges in Japanese script acquisition (Table 1), pronunciation-related difficulties (Table 2), and sociopragmatic and intercultural communication challenges (Table 3).

1. **Challenges in Japanese Script Acquisition**

Table 1
Learners' Reported Difficulties in Acquiring Japanese Writing Systems (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji)

| Type of Difficulty | Description of Difficulty | Representative Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Confusion between writing systems (hiragana, katakana, kanji) | Learners experience difficulty distinguishing between different Japanese scripts due to unfamiliarity with non-alphabetic writing systems. | *"Saya mengalami kesulitan dalam mempelajari huruf Jepang karena bentuknya berbeda dari alfabet yang biasa saya gunakan."* (Informant 03) *"I experience difficulty learning Japanese characters because their forms are different from the alphabet I am used to."* |
| Confusion between hiragana and katakana | Learners report confusion caused by visual similarity between certain hiragana and katakana characters. | *"Sulit membedakan antara hiragana dan katakana karena bentuknya hampir sama."* (Informant 10) *"It is difficult to distinguish between hiragana and katakana because their shapes are almost the same."* |
| Dependence on romaji | Learners rely on romaji as an initial learning strategy, which affects the development of kana and kanji literacy. | *"Saya masih sering menggunakan romaji karena belum terbiasa membaca huruf Jepang."* (Informant 05) *"I still often use romaji because I am not yet accustomed to reading Japanese characters."* |
| Visually similar characters | Learners encounter difficulty recognizing characters with similar shapes, particularly in katakana. | *"Huruf-huruf seperti □ dan □ atau □ dan □ sering tertukar karena bentuknya mirip."* (Informant 04) *"Characters such as □ and □ or □ and □ are often confused because their shapes are similar."* |
| Difficulty memorizing kanji | Learners struggle to memorize kanji due to the need to remember form, reading, and meaning simultaneously. | *"Kanji paling sulit karena harus menghafal bentuk dan artinya sekaligus."* (Informant 14) *"Kanji is the most difficult because I have to memorize both the form and the meaning at the same time."* |
| Context-dependent kanji meanings | Learners find it challenging to interpret kanji whose meanings change depending on context. | *"Satu kanji bisa punya banyak arti tergantung konteksnya, jadi sering membingungkan."* (Informant 14) *"One kanji can have multiple meanings depending on the context, which is often confusing."* |

As summarized in Table 1, most participants reported significant difficulties in acquiring Japanese writing systems, particularly due to the simultaneous learning of hiragana, katakana, and kanji. Among these, kanji was identified by many learners as the most challenging component because it requires memorizing both visual forms and meanings. Several participants also noted confusion caused by visually similar characters, especially within the katakana system.

Interview data indicate that while some learners gradually adapted to hiragana and katakana through repeated practice, kanji continued to pose difficulties throughout the training period for many participants. Classroom observations corroborated these findings, showing frequent hesitation during reading tasks involving kanji and reliance on instructor support.

To cope with script-related challenges, many participants reported using romaji as an initial learning strategy. Questionnaire responses suggest that romaji facilitated early pronunciation and memorization; however, classroom observations indicated that continued reliance by several learners delayed the development of fluency in reading kana and kanji, particularly during tasks involving written workplace-related materials.

### 2. Pronunciation Difficulties Affecting Meaning-Making

Table 2
Pronunciation-Related Challenges Affecting Meaning-Making in Japanese Speech

| Type of Difficulty | Description of Difficulty | Representative Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Vowel length distinction | Difficulty distinguishing long and short vowels, affecting meaning. | *"Yang paling sulit itu panjang dan pendek bunyi."* (Informant 01)<br><br>The most difficult aspect is vowel length. |
| Gemination (small □) | Difficulty producing doubled consonants. | *"Huruf kecil seperti □ sering terlewat."* (Informant 03)<br><br>Small characters like □ are often missed. |
| Contracted sounds (small □/□/□) | Learners find it difficult to pronounce contracted sounds smoothly, affecting fluency. | *"Kalau ada huruf kecil □ □ □, saya sering bingung cara bacanya."* (Informant 04)<br><br>When there are small □, □, or □ characters, I often get confused about how to pronounce them. |
| Pitch accent | Learners experience uncertainty with pitch accent patterns, leading to hesitation in speech. | *"Aksen tinggi rendah itu sulit, takut salah arti."* (Informant 05)<br><br>High and low pitch accents are difficult, and I am afraid of changing the meaning. |
| Confidence in speaking | Pronunciation difficulties reduce learners' confidence and willingness to communicate orally. | *"Takut salah ngomong, jadi lebih banyak diam."* (Informant 07)<br><br>I am afraid of speaking incorrectly, so I tend to remain silent. |

*Note. All excerpts are taken from interview and questionnaire data. Informant codes are used to ensure anonymity.*

As shown in Table 2, most participants experienced pronunciation-related difficulties involving vowel length, gemination (small □), contracted sounds (small □/□/□), and pitch accent. These features were perceived as challenging because similar phonological distinctions do not exist in Indonesian.

Interview and questionnaire data indicate that vowel length distinctions were considered problematic by many learners, as changes in sound duration often resulted in unintended shifts in meaning. Classroom observations further revealed that several participants produced minimal pairs inaccurately during pronunciation drills and role-play activities. Difficulties with small kana and contracted sounds were also observed to disrupt fluency for some learners, particularly in spontaneous speech.

Beyond intelligibility, pronunciation challenges affected learners' confidence in spoken interaction. Many participants expressed hesitation to speak due to fear of mispronunciation, and a few learners reported limiting their responses to short, memorized phrases during simulated workplace communication.

### 3. Sociopragmatic and Intercultural Communication Challenges

Table 3
Sociopragmatic and Intercultural Communication Challenges in Japanese Workplace Contexts

| Type of Difficulty | Description of Difficulty | Representative Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Use of politeness levels (keigo) | Difficulty selecting appropriate politeness levels. | *"Saya masih sering mencampur bahasa biasa dan bahasa sopan."* (Informant 02)<br><br>I often mix casual and polite language. |
| Indirect expressions | Difficulty interpreting implied meanings. | *"Kalau orang Jepang bilang chotto saya bingung."* (Informant 06)<br><br>When Japanese people say chotto, I get confused. |
| Aizuchi and turn-taking | Learners are uncertain about appropriate backchanneling and conversational timing. | *"Saya bingung kapan harus menimpali saat lawan bicara berbicara."* (Informant 01)<br><br>I am unsure when I should give backchannel responses while someone is speaking. |
| Hierarchy and seniority | Learners feel uncertain when communicating with superiors due to hierarchical norms. | *"Kalau berbicara dengan atasan, saya takut salah dan jadi tidak percaya diri."* (Informant 08)<br><br>When speaking with superiors, I am afraid of making mistakes and lose confidence. |
| Non-verbal communication | Learners have limited awareness of non-verbal cues such as silence, gestures, and eye contact. | *"Saya masih belum paham arti diam atau gestur tertentu dalam komunikasi Jepang."* (Informant 09)<br><br>I still do not understand the meaning of silence or certain gestures in Japanese communication. |

*Note. All excerpts are taken from interview and questionnaire data. Informant codes are used to ensure anonymity.*

As summarized in Table 3, many participants reported challenges related to sociopragmatic norms and intercultural communication in Japanese workplace contexts. These challenges included uncertainty in using appropriate politeness levels, difficulty interpreting indirect expressions, and limited awareness of non-verbal communication norms.

Interview data show that most participants were unsure when to use casual forms, polite forms, or keigo, often resulting in mixed usage within a single utterance. Questionnaire responses further indicated that several learners experienced confusion regarding conversational norms such as aizuchi (backchanneling), greetings, and leave-taking expressions.

Non-verbal communication also emerged as a challenge for many participants. Classroom observations revealed that some learners hesitated during role-play activities involving superiors, particularly in situations requiring indirect responses or interpretation of silence. These findings suggest that sociopragmatic challenges extend beyond linguistic form and involve difficulties in interpreting social hierarchy and implicit meaning in Japanese professional communication.

## Discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to existing theories and prior research on Japanese as a second language, intercultural communicative competence, and workplace pragmatics. The discussion is structured around the three major themes identified in the analysis.

# Script-System Overload and Early Literacy Challenges

The findings indicate that participants experienced substantial difficulty in learning Japanese due to the simultaneous acquisition of three writing systems—hiragana, katakana, and kanji. This challenge is consistent with previous studies highlighting the cognitive demands of multi-script literacy, particularly for adult learners whose first language employs an alphabetic writing system. From a sociocultural perspective, participants' reliance on romaji can be interpreted as a mediating strategy that facilitates initial access to meaning. However, prolonged dependence on romaji may impede the development of functional literacy required in Japanese workplaces, such as reading safety instructions, signage, and written task guidelines.

By situating script-related challenges within a pre-departure migrant training context, this study extends prior JSL research and demonstrates how time constraints and instrumental learning goals intensify the effects of script-system overload.

# Pronunciation Difficulties and Meaning Negotiation

Pronunciation-related difficulties, particularly those involving vowel length, gemination (small □), contracted sounds (small □/□/□), and pitch accent, were found to interfere with participants' ability to convey intended meanings. These findings align with research in second language phonology, which emphasizes the semantic consequences of phonetic distinctions in Japanese.

Beyond intelligibility, inaccurate pronunciation affected learners' confidence in spoken interaction. In workplace settings, such difficulties may lead to misunderstandings during task execution or perceptions of communicative inadequacy. This study contributes to existing literature by highlighting pronunciation as a critical component of occupational communication for migrant workers rather than a purely linguistic concern.

# Sociopragmatic and Intercultural Communication Challenges

Participants also reported challenges in navigating Japanese sociopragmatic norms, including the use of keigo, indirect expressions, and non-verbal communication practices. These challenges reflect limited exposure to authentic workplace discourse and hierarchical interaction patterns. Difficulties in interpreting indirect expressions such as *chotto* further illustrate gaps in pragmatic inference skills.

Drawing on intercultural communicative competence theory, the findings demonstrate that effective communication requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of social hierarchy, politeness norms, and interactional expectations. The results underscore how sociopragmatic challenges intersect with power relations in Japanese workplace contexts.

# Implications for Japanese Language Training Programs

The findings suggest that pre-departure Japanese language training programs for migrant workers should move beyond grammar- and vocabulary-focused instruction. Effective programs should integrate script-focused literacy development, pronunciation training emphasizing meaning contrasts, and scenario-based intercultural communication activities that reflect workplace hierarchies and interactional norms.

## Conclusion

This study examined the linguistic and intercultural challenges encountered by Indonesian migrant worker candidates learning Japanese as a second language in a pre-departure training context. Using qualitative data from interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires, the study identified three interrelated challenges: multi-script literacy demands, pronunciation features affecting meaning-making, and sociopragmatic norms governing workplace communication.

The study contributes theoretically to research on Japanese as a second language and intercultural communicative competence by demonstrating that linguistic difficulties are inseparable from sociocultural expectations in migration-oriented language learning. Unlike prior JSL studies conducted primarily in academic contexts, this research foregrounds the instrumental, time-bound, and workplace-driven nature of language learning among migrant worker candidates.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of integrative training models that combine literacy, pronunciation, and intercultural pragmatics. Such approaches are essential for enhancing communicative readiness and reducing the risk of misunderstanding in Japanese professional environments.

# Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single training context, which may limit the transferability of the findings. Second, data were collected prior to participants' departure to Japan; therefore, the study does not capture how these challenges evolve through actual workplace

experience. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine language development before and after migration or conduct comparative studies across different employment sectors.

# Contribution Statement

This study makes three key contributions. First, it extends research on Japanese as a second language by situating language learning within the context of pre-departure migrant worker training. Second, it provides empirical evidence of the interrelationship between linguistic challenges and intercultural pragmatics in workplace-oriented communication. Third, it offers pedagogical insights for the design of context-sensitive Japanese language training programs tailored to migrant populations.

## Declarations

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study did not require formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval according to institutional regulations, as it involved voluntary participation and posed minimal risk to participants. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their informed consent prior to participation.

### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

# Human ethics and consent to participate declarations

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process.

# Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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This research received no external funding.

# Author Contribution

A.S., A.N., and H.F. contributed to writing the manuscript. A.S. conceptualized the study and coordinated the research process. A.S. and H.F. conducted manuscript review and revisions. All authors approved the

final manuscript.

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