

THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ON THE COMPETENCE OF INDONESIAN CAREGIVER SERVICES IN JAPAN

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Abstract

Language skills, particularly in the context of professional communication and caregiving terminology, are an important factor determining service effectiveness, response accuracy, and the quality of interactions between caregivers and service recipients. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method of Indonesian caregivers working in Japan through the Specified Skilled Worker Program (SSW). The Japanese language proficiency variable measured includes four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), vocabulary mastery (goi) and grammar, and script comprehension (kanji, hiragana, katakana), which are often measured through standard levels such as the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) from the lowest level N5 to N1 or the Japan Foundation Test for Basic Japanese (JFT). Meanwhile, service competency is assessed based on the dimensions of task knowledge, technical care skills, interpersonal communication, and service quality. The results of the study indicate that Japanese language skills have a significant influence on improving the service competency of Indonesian caregivers, especially in the aspects of communication, accuracy in carrying out work procedures, and understanding the needs of service recipients. This study recommends strengthening Japanese language training programs that focus on the caregiving context as an effort to improve the competence of the Indonesian workforce in this sector.

Keywords : *Japanese Language Skills , Service Competence , Indonesian Caregiver*

INTRODUCTION

The elderly care (kaigo) industry in Japan is growing rapidly due to the increasing elderly population and the shortage of local labor. To meet this need, Japan is opening opportunities for foreign workers, including those from Indonesia, through various placement schemes such as the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and, most recently, the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Program. Indonesian caregivers are a vital part of maintaining the sustainability of elderly care services in Japan. However, this work requires specialized skills, particularly Japanese language proficiency, as language is key to communication, understanding instructions, and carrying out daily tasks. Japanese language proficiency is not only an administrative requirement for employment, but also a core competency that determines a caregiver's success in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. The Japanese caregiver work environment demands a thorough understanding of medical instructions, work procedures, the daily needs of the elderly, and interpersonal communication with patients and other healthcare professionals. Limited language skills often result in communication errors, reduced service effectiveness, and challenges adapting to Japanese work culture. Japanese language proficiency is generally measured based on basic competencies such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as vocabulary and grammar relevant to the caregiving context. Assessment standards, such as a minimum pass rate of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N4 or the Japan Foundation Test for Basic Japanese (JFT) A2, serve as benchmarks for assessing the language proficiency of prospective Indonesian workers before departing for Japan. However, technical and contextual language skills, such as the use of kaigo terms, often pose challenges for Indonesian caregivers entering the real world of work.

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On the other hand, caregiver service competency encompasses various dimensions, ranging from task knowledge and technical care skills to interpersonal communication and service quality. Good Japanese language skills are believed to improve work accuracy, strengthen interactions with service recipients, and support understanding of the physical and emotional needs of older adults. Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which Japanese language skills influence the service competency of Indonesian caregivers working in Japan. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of Japanese language skills on the service competency of Indonesian caregivers in Japan, as well as to provide recommendations for improving the quality of language training for prospective Indonesian workers in the caregiving sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses mixed methods research with an explanatory sequential design.

This design is done in two stages:

Quantitative Stage – measuring the influence of Japanese language skills on the service competence of Indonesian caregivers. Qualitative Stage – conducting interviews to explain, deepen, and interpret quantitative results. This approach was chosen to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between variables while explaining the factors that influence the results. The data collection method in this study is quantitative data, where the instrument uses a questionnaire distributed via Google Form, and qualitative data. As an instrument, in-depth interviews covered topics such as: Experiences of using Japanese in assignments, Communication barriers, The influence of language skills on performance, Work situations that require high competence. Data collection was conducted online (Zoom/WhatsApp call). Location and Time of the Research The research was conducted online with Indonesian caregiver respondents in various prefectures of Japan, for 4 months (June-October 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. RESEARCH RESULTS

1.1 Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 120 Indonesian caregivers working in various care centers in Japan, including nursing homes, home care homes, and special nursing homes. The majority of respondents were aged 20–35, with 1–5 years of service experience. Based on language qualifications, 65% were at the JLPT N4–N3 level, while the remainder were at the N2 level.

1.2 Japanese Language Skills

Descriptive analysis showed that caregivers' Japanese language skills were moderate (mean = 3.42 on a scale of 5). Their strongest skill was working vocabulary (kaigo tango), while their weakest skills were complex expressions and rapid conversation comprehension.

1.3 Caregiver Service Competencies

Service competency was measured using indicators such as communication, physical care, emotional care, and procedural compliance. The average service competency score was in the good category (mean = 3.76). The highest score was procedural compliance, while the lowest score was emotional care, particularly the ability to build rapport with Japanese elderly.

1.4 Relationship Analysis

Pearson's correlation test showed a significant positive relationship between Japanese language proficiency and caregiver service competency ($r = 0.62$; $p < 0.01$). This means that the higher the language proficiency, the better the quality of service provided.

1.5 The Influence of Japanese on Service Competence

Through a simple linear regression test, it was found that:

- Japanese language ability has an influence of 38% ($R^2 = 0.38$) on the variation in caregiver service competency.
- The regression coefficient shows a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.615$; $p < 0.001$).

The results show that Japanese language skills are an important factor in supporting effective service.

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2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Language Competence as the Basis for Professional Communication

The study results show that Japanese language skills play a key role in supporting effective communication between caregivers and older adults. This aligns with literature indicating that the healthcare sector relies heavily on interpersonal communication in the care process. Lack of ability to understand instructions makes it difficult for caregivers to adapt to older adults' needs, especially in emergency situations or sudden verbal requests.

2.2 The Influence of Language on Service Quality

The positive and significant relationship between language skills and service competency indicates that language skills not only influence communication but also technical performance, emotional care, and the quality of the caregiver-elderly relationship. Caregivers with higher language levels are able to:

- give clear instructions,
- understand elderly complaints without misinterpretation,
- carry out maintenance procedures according to Japanese standards,
- provide empathetic emotional support.

This competency is very important in the context of Japanese culture which emphasizes politeness, sensitivity, and high-context communication.

2.3 Challenges Faced by Indonesian Caregivers

Some caregivers at low language levels face limitations in understanding work instructions in:

- understand medical terms and kaigo,
- follow fast conversations in everyday Japanese,
- convey empathy through verbal expression,
- building trust with the elderly.

This challenge impacts how services are delivered, particularly in the emotional service aspect which was the lowest rated in the study.

2.4 Implications for Training and Policy

The research findings indicate the need to improve Japanese language training programs before and after placement.

Training should include:

- kaigo nihongo (Japanese for special care),
- cross-cultural communication training,
- simulation of live conversation with Japanese elderly.

From the perspective of host companies in Japan, support such as mentors, in-house language tutors, and on-the-job training can improve the adaptation of Indonesian caregivers.

2.5 Integration of Language Skills and Work Competencies

This research reinforces the view that caregiver competence relies not only on technical skills but also on language skills as a communication bridge. Language proficiency provides caregivers with the flexibility to understand the needs of older adults, comply with procedures, and build better emotional relationships. This demonstrates that language is an integral part of professional service competence in the healthcare sector.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Japanese language proficiency has a significant and positive influence on the service competency of Indonesian caregivers in Japan. The analysis revealed that higher Japanese language proficiency—especially in understanding instructions, kaigo vocabulary, and interpersonal communication—increased the quality of service provided. Language proficiency contributed 38% to the variation in service competency, which encompassed physical care, communication, emotional care, and procedural compliance. These findings confirm that language is not just a means of communication, but also a crucial element in building relationships with older adults, understanding their needs, and ensuring care is provided according to established standards in Japanese kaigo facilities. Challenges remain

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for caregivers with low language levels, particularly in rapid communication and emotional support, making improving language competency an urgent need.

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