

Article

A Japanese Language Proficiency and Business Japanese Competence: What do Malaysian Japanese Companies Expect?

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Abstract: Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates with Japanese language proficiency (JLP) and business Japanese competence (BJC) employed in Japanese companies (JC) in Malaysia are considered an asset by their employers. However, to what extent are their JLP and BJC sufficient to function in JC is an under researched area and deserves further scrutiny. Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify JC employers' JLP and BJC requirements of Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates in their Malaysian companies. This qualitative research via semi-structured one-to-one interviews with JC employers of selected companies in Malaysia investigated the requirements of JLP and BJC for Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates employed in JC. The findings revealed that JLP requirement is dependent on position and task whereas time management and business customs, *Ho/Ren/So* (Reporting / Contacting / Consulting) are considered as important BJC practices. Furthermore, speaking and listening in Japanese language is considered as crucial skills and the most challenging for Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates at JC to master. Incorporating Japanese business customs and workplace practices in Japanese language curriculum at higher education and increasing internship opportunities at JC would ensure Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates acquire the required JLP and BJC through their higher education. This research augurs well for the enhancement of Japanese language curriculum in higher education institutions in Malaysia as well as Japan-Malaysia bilateral trade to further strengthen Japanese companies' presence in Malaysia and attract new Japanese investments with high level of JLP and BJC manpower.

Keywords: Business Japanese competence; Japanese Companies; Japanese language proficiency, Malaysia Japanese Speaking Graduates; Japanese language curriculum

Introduction

In the past decades, Japanese businesses have been expanding beyond their shores via new business start-ups, extending mother companies' operations abroad and also relocating their operations abroad dominantly to Southeast Asian countries. The movement and expansion of Japan's businesses into Malaysian shores is due to the decline of businesses in Japan impacted by its fast aging population. Therefore, Japanese companies (JC) in Japan are pressured to transform into globally oriented organisations (BBC News, 2013; Izumi et al., 2014; IMD, 2020) to survive and ensure their business and profit sustainability. The increasing number of JC in the Southeast Asian region has provided employment opportunities for ASEAN countries' university graduates especially Malaysian graduates who are equally proficient in Japanese language and knowledgeable

of Japanese business practices (Izumi et al., 2014; Maeno et al., 2013, 2015; The Japan Foundation, 2022). This implies that Malaysian employees in JC need to acquire a specific level of Japanese language proficiency (JLP) and Japanese business competence (BJC) to be employed in the JC in Malaysia. The language skills enable the employees to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge effectively (Nurul Fariyah et al., 2024). Furthermore, employers expect graduates entering the job market to be well equipped with the required hard and soft skills (Manjet, 2021). This is reflected in the growing number of Malaysians learning Japanese as a foreign language. With a big number of Japanese language learners such as 39,247 in 2018, Malaysia is ranked tenth worldwide by The Japan Foundation (2020). The data indicates JC as preferred employment source that encourages many Malaysian job seekers to learn Japanese language and acquire business practices knowledge as JC in Malaysia require a specific level of JLP and BJC for employment.

In view of the expansion of JC in Malaysia, there is a gap for more proficient local speakers in the language and more business competent Malaysian Japanese speaking employees (MJSE). Besides, the different business communication styles and business cultures can lead to miscommunication between the MJSE and JC employees in an internationally flavoured business setting. MJSE working within JC are exposed to various communication gaps related to mismatches in terms of language, cultural values and assumptions, as well as business customs. Further, there exist extreme paucity in literature on the perspectives of JC regarding JLP and BJC required of MJSE in their Malaysian companies. The objective of this research is to identify JC employers' JLP and BJC requirements of Malaysian Japanese speaking graduates in their Malaysian companies. As such, a related research in this context will enhance literature on multinational JC's language and business competence requirements of MJSE.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This is a qualitative study his is a qualitative study that involved one-to-one semi-structured interview with Malaysian JC employers to investigate the requirements of JLP and BJC from the lens of JC in Malaysia (Creswell & Creswell, 2022)

2. Research Instrument

The instrument utilised in this study were semi-structured interviews for MJSE and JC employers. The interview questions were adapted from Shimada & Shibukawa (1999) and Tiong (2000). Using these types of questions, the researcher could identify, describe, and classify the themes. Prior to interviewing the participants, the researcher of this study developed an interview protocol that included a list of questions (semi-structured interviews with the participants who were MJSE was pilot tested with nine MJSE, and semi-structured interviews with the JC participants who are Japanese employers or supervisors of MJSGEs was pilot tested with two JC employers) to be asked in the interviews along with the major topics to be the focus of discussion with the interviewees. The qualitative data was performed with the use of semi-structured interviews with the participants who were MJSE; audio-taped and transcribed, and semi-structured interviews with the JC participants who are Japanese employers or supervisors of MJSGEs (audio-taped and transcribed).

3. Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used in this research to select the employers on voluntary basis. The purposively selected participants are the Malaysian JC employers are plant managers, department heads, managers, and section heads from factories in Kedah, Penang, Perak, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor. 26 Malaysian JC employers out 44 agreed to participate in the study. These Malaysian JC were contacted via 44 MJSE who are working in JC and who participated in an earlier stage research. The MJSE are graduates of Malaysian public universities and have taken The Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) and obtained a minimum of N3 and above. With a qualification of N3, these graduates can understand the language as used in daily situations and have the ability to navigate through more complex daily living situations. The graduates have been

working at manufacturing and engineering industries in managerial and administrative positions as well as performing roles as translators and interpreters for at least a year.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data involves transcribing, identifying, coding, and categorising themes found in the data. The data analysis of qualitative data in this study provided a thick description that focuses on (1) the requirement of Japanese language proficiency and Business Japanese Competence by the MJSE, (2) the levels of importance of Japanese language skills used by MJSE working in JC.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the semi-structured interview conducted with the 26 participants from Malaysian JC.

1. The Requirements of JLP among Malaysian JC

Table 1 shows the requirements of JLP levels by Malaysian JC. In addition, Table 1 presents tasks related to the requirements of JLP. Four themes were realised from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the 26 JC participants. These themes are categorised as skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Table 2 displays the themes which emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the JC participants. In addition, Table 2 presents the categories and sub-categories that are related to the requirements of JLP in JC. The sub-categories presented in descending order are based on the number of responses.

Table 1. The requirements of JLP at Malaysian JC

Number of JC	JLPT Requirement	Task Requirements related to JLP
8	N2~N1 (Advance level)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Task requirements differ based on job content. 2. Task requirements differ based on level of employee responsibility 3. High-level JLP is desirable for local managers if Malaysian JC are not able to communicate in local languages such as English and Malay language. 4. If MJSE specialised in Japanese, the required level is advanced. The level that can convey nuances is desired by Malaysian JC. 5. Employees that have N1-N3 qualifications are required to localise the work.
8	N3 (Intermediate Level)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employees are required to conduct daily conversations. 2. Employees are required to communicate for general work. 3. MJSE with managerial position should be able to communicate in Japanese language independently and proficiently according to the level with their headquarters in Japan. 4. Employees that write in Japanese language in their interaction with headquarters are required to understand the content of documents written in Japanese language. 5. Employees are able to communicate with Japanese clients who are not proficient in English, especially when related to documents written in Japanese language.
8	N5~N4 (Beginner Level)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employees are required to perform daily conversation. 2. Employees are required to have the ability to greet and use simple words. 3. Employees are required to have the ability to support Japanese expatriates, display management skills though not required to have a high level JLP.
2	Not Particular	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are no requirements regarding JLP. JLP will be an added advantage if MJSE is able to communicate in Japanese.

2. Japanese Listening Skills' Proficiency Requirements

Table 2 shows selective categories for Japanese listening skills. As illustrated in Table 2, five codes emerged from the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews with 26 participants from JC regarding the requirements of JLP for listening skills. Based on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, according to Table 1, 61.5% of the participants stated that speaking and listening are the two most important skills required for working in JC.

Understanding Conversations

65% of the JC indicated that to avoid communication breakdowns between the expatriates and the local employees, Japanese listening skills can enhance their communication. This is because by using Japanese language, both parties can understand each other's utterances and convey their ideas or explanations effectively.

Understanding Oral Instructions

As mentioned by the participants, JC viewed listening skills to be important because it is required by all JC and help the MJSE to understand instructions given by the JC employers. Specifically, they emphasised that (1) understanding oral instructions and (2) being able to confirm information with their interlocutors are viewed to be two of the requirements.

Understanding Meeting Discussions

Most JC have indicated that MJSE in managerial positions are required to understand conversations and understand discussions in the meetings. They have also indicated that MJSE are required to have a high level of proficiency in Japanese listening skills. Additionally, this high level of proficiency in the Japanese listening skill should be equivalent to JLPT N2 and above. However, general employees are not required to understand the discussions in the meetings. Therefore, responses from these JC participants revealed that general employees are required to have a moderate level of listening skills equivalent to JLPT N3. Most of the JC revealed that their companies did not set the JLP levels as requirements for recruitment. They have highly evaluated the MJSE, however, who actually have lower language proficiency skills, thus the mismatch.

Understanding Discussions with Clients

MJSE in managerial positions are required by their JC employers to understand discussions with Japanese clients who are not proficient in the English language. The JC mentioned the ability of MJSE to understand discussions and communicate effectively with their clients will reduce their workload.

Ability to Confirm Information

The analyses of semi-structured interviews have also shown that the ability to confirm information is an important sub-skill among all listening sub-skills. This is highly needed for mutual communication at the workplace in JC. This skill is important for MJSE to understand oral instructions and to confirm the information with their interlocutor.

3. Japanese Speaking Skills' Proficiency Requirements

Table 2 shows sub-categories for Japanese speaking skills. As illustrated in Table 2, nine sub-categories emerged from the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with the 26 participants from JC. The interviews focused on issues related to the requirements of proficiency in Japanese speaking skills.

Daily Conversation

Based on the interviews, most JC employers (Japanese) who were assigned to work in Malaysia obtained a minimum proficiency in English language. These employers prefer MJSE with good Japanese language speaking skills, especially when the MJSE hold supervisory positions such as section heads or section managers. These positions require good speaking skills to enhance communication between Japanese

expatriates and local employees. Local employees possessing a high level of JLP will, in turn, achieve effective communication. Based on the interviews with the JC, it can be concluded that MJSE who hold positions such as section heads and section managers are required to: (1) speak the Japanese language, (2) understand instructions, and (3) deliver messages to their operators or subordinates in the local language.

Most JC mentioned that their companies do not require high JLP nor a particular JLPT level for general employees. General employees are required to have the ability to understand the meaning employers want to convey to them. Thus, the proficiency levels the MJSE were required to have are below the moderate level. In other words, MJSE are required to have proficiency level that is equivalent to N4. General employees are not required to communicate with Japanese clients or counterparts from their headquarters.

Moreover, most JC revealed that JLP enhances communication between JC and MJSE. They have also noticed that when local employees understand Japanese language, they are able to adapt to the workplace environment faster because they are able to easily understand Japanese language. Therefore, speaking skills are important for those who want to gain mutual understanding. However, almost all JC indicated that MJSE are expected to be able to communicate in Japanese language at workplace but are not expected to use honorific and humble expressions. Such expressions are used by Japanese employees at their headquarters in Japan. JC stressed that the content of the message is more important compared to the nature of the sentences.

Greetings

Nearly half of the JC mentioned that Japanese attach a strong significance to greetings. They require MJSE to learn some common Japanese business phrases which are useful for professional settings. JC mentioned that greeting each other is a practice in their companies. Japanese employees will greet each other especially in the morning upon reporting to their workplace. This is deemed an important practice to maintain harmony in the working environment.

Meeting or Video Conferencing

Regarding the importance of speaking skills at the workplace, MJSE in managerial positions are required to attend meetings and/or video conferencing conducted in the Japanese language. It has been noted that 34.6% of the JC have indicated that MJSE must communicate in Japanese with colleagues and their headquarters during meetings. This mostly occurs when the counterparts from Japan do not have a high level of English language proficiency. Taking this into account, JC revealed that their companies require a high proficiency in Japanese speaking skills for meetings or video conferencing conducted in Japanese.

Meeting with Japanese Clients

34.6% of the JC revealed that speaking is considered the most important skill needed by MJSE to deal with Japanese clients from various countries as well as with their counterparts at their headquarters in Japan as the clients' English language proficiency is limited. As such, MJSE must have a high level of Japanese speaking skills' proficiency. According to JC, the requirement of speaking skills in the Japanese language is equivalent to the level of JLPT N2 and above.

Business Discussions, Negotiations, Customer Service and Presentations

The JC stated that companies demand a high level of speaking skills from those in executive and managerial positions doing administrative tasks. These group of employees are required to communicate with Japanese colleagues and Japanese clients. In this context the required JLP level is intermediate and above.

27% of the JC stated that it is advisable for MJSE to have a higher level JLP when considering the speaking skills, understanding other Japanese groups and negotiating with Japanese colleagues or clients. It has been noticed that to achieve mutual understanding, speaking skills are very important in JC.

15.4% of the JC mentioned that MJSE who are in managerial positions are required to conduct presentations or oral reports in the Japanese language. Therefore, they require a high level of JLP at levels of JLPT, N2 and above.

Based on interviews with JC participants, it could be observed that the requirements of speaking skills in terms JLP differed from one participant to another.

4. Japanese Reading Skills' Proficiency Requirements

Table 2 shows the sub-categories for Japanese reading skills. Four sub-categories emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. Compared to the listening and speaking skills, Japanese reading skills are the least important skills required by JC. In fact, 15.4% of JC mentioned that Japanese reading skills are not required in their workplace.

Reading e-mails

57.7% of the JC mentioned that MJSE need to possess reading skills especially for reading e-mails. According to these JC, it is necessary for MJSE to be able to communicate or exchange communication in the Japanese language via reports and e-mails. The JC have indicated that the required level of proficiency in Japanese reading skills are equivalent to JLPT N2. JC further explained that although this requirement is for some categories such as section heads and managers, it will be an added advantage when MJSE are able to read in Japanese language.

Reading Business Documents

57.7% of the JC mentioned that MJSE holding positions such as heads, managers and engineers are required to read manuals and instructions written in the Japanese language.

5. Japanese Writing Skills' Proficiency Requirements

Table 2 shows the sub-categories for Japanese writing skills. As illustrated in Table 2, four sub-categories emerged from the analysis of semi-structured interviews. In fact, 34.6% of the JC mentioned that Japanese writing skills are not required at their workplace.

Table 2. Thematic categories for requirements of JLP

Themes	Categories	Sub-Categories	Number of Responses of JC	
JLP Requirements	Listening	1 Understand conversations	17	
		2 Understand oral instructions	15	
		3 Understand discussion in meetings	9	
		4 Understand discussion with clients	9	
		5 Able to confirm information	6	
		Speaking	1 Daily conversations	12
			2 Greetings	11
			3 Meetings or video conferences	9
			4 Meetings with Japanese clients	9
	5 Business discussions and negotiations		7	
	Reading	6 Customer service	5	
		7 Presentations	4	
		8 Care of the Japanese Expatriates	1	
		9 Interpretation for local workers	1	
		1 Reading e-mails	15	
	Writing	2 Reading business documents	15	
		3 Reading memos	6	
		4 Reading Faxes	3	
		5 Reading Newspaper articles	1	
	Writing	1 Writing e-mails	13	
2 Writing business documents		9		
3 Writing memos		7		
4 Writing Faxes		3		

Writing e-mails

50% of the JC required their MJSE to have a high level JLP in writing skills to enable them to communicate effectively via e-mail. According to one JC from the production and sales department, MJSE must deal with many e-mails that are exchanged with sales-oriented JC. Thus, MJSE are required to write business e-mails to their Japanese customers. At the same time, they have to write reports in Japanese language to their counterparts in various countries. Therefore, JC look for a high level of proficiency in Japanese writing skills and this level should be equivalent to JLPT N2.

Writing Business Documents

34.6% of JC required their MJSE to have proficiency in Japanese language to write business documents such as reports. Nearly 20% of JC mentioned that writing reports and e-mails are necessary tasks in their departments. Thus, MJSE are not recruited when they fail to meet JLP requirements in writing. These JC require MJSE to have at least JLPT N2 level.

6. Business Japanese Competence (BJC) Requirements

Table 3 presents six themes that emerged from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with 26 JC participants. These themes are related to the requirements of BJC among JC. These themes are sense of time, Japanese business customs, teamwork, greeting in Japanese business, expertise knowledge and handling of e-mails. The themes are as follow in descending order of the number of responses.

Sense of Time

80% of the JC stated that "Sense of time" is the most important BJC that their companies require MJSE to acquire. The most important BJC required by JC was related to time management. According to the semi-structured interviews with the 26 JC, the issues related to time management were listed as follows:

- i. Loose on time
- ii. Time operation: The meeting does not start or end at a fixed time.
- iii. Time management, schedule management: Meeting start time may be delayed.
- iv. The MJSE are loose about time and schedules.
- v. Detailed comments from the JC are summarised as follows:
 - a. The MJSE's sense of time is different from the Japanese. (For example, in Japan, it is common to arrive 5 or 10 minutes before work begins, but in Malaysia it is the opposite.)
 - b. In Japan, it is common to prepare in a timely manner, but in Malaysia, preparations are often made immediately or on ad-hoc basis.

The MJSE taking leave on the day that they are involved in handling important tasks. The JC preferred if the MJSE informed their superior in advance their absence from work unless it is an emergency. Therefore, 80% of JC required the MJSE to improve their punctuality and prepare tasks in advance. They further explained that if MJSE learn to prepare tasks in advance, all colleagues involved with the same task will be able to complete the task in timely manner for the day. Furthermore, if the MJSE understand Japanese sense of time, MJSE will be able to prepare their tasks with greater details before a meeting or an event. This, in turn, will allow the task to be completed well.

JC mentioned that in Japanese companies, the employees should try their best to avoid arriving late. In some circumstances, if the MJSE cannot avoid arriving late to work, they are expected to inform their immediate superiors via telephone at least 10 minutes before the start of working hours. JC further explained the working culture requirements in terms of preparation of tasks. In relation to that, if a superior or colleague requests the MJSE to be in charge of a task, it is necessary to understand the details of the request not only to prepare but to act to stay one step ahead. Furthermore, regarding leave, JC stated that taking paid leave is an employee's right, but they do not encourage employees to request for sudden leave as it affects daily operations and annoy other employees. JC advised that MJSE should consult their superiors in advance before applying

leave. Most of the JC stated that local staff's understanding and adherence to Japanese practices such as being punctual, keeping promises, etc. will benefit their companies.

Japanese Business Customs

60% of JC stated that MJSE should learn or be able to understand Japanese business customs. Based on the semi-structured interview with JC, Japanese business customs required by JC are summarised as follow:

- i. Japanese way of thinking
- ii. Understanding of Japanese indirect expressions
- iii. Learning about reporting, contacting, and consulting, so called 「Ho • Ren • So」 in the Japanese language
- iv. Bowing, greeting and smiling
- v. Having an active and diligent attitude
- vi. Paying attention when MJSE are listening in meetings, etc.

Among the Japanese business customs mentioned by JC, 「Ho • Ren • So」, “Reporting / Contacting / Consulting” is the Japanese business customs emphasised by JC. JC stated that it is very important for the MJSE to learn how to handle “Reporting / Contacting / Consulting” as this is a specific term that expresses three particularly important steps for communication in the Japanese workplace as well as in basic Japanese business practices. JC required MJSE to complete “Reporting / Contacting / Consulting” while considering the content and progress of their work. JC stated that it is important for the MJSE to know the way of “Reporting / Contacting / Consulting” because the Japanese workplace requires employees to work as a team.

Teamwork

50% of JC stated that they required the MJSE to be able to work in teams and to learn how to work in teams. The requirements of teamwork were listed out as follow:

- i. Be more considerate to others in the party, the Japanese word is “omoiyari”.
- ii. Learn the behaviours and movements to engage in teamwork.
- iii. Update progress regularly.

JC mentioned that if everyone working on a team acknowledges each other, they will be able to work as a team effectively. To enable MJSE to work in teams, they must learn how to manage their behaviours in the team. Therefore, in the Japanese workplace, “Reporting / Contacting / Consulting” are important parts that every employee needs to practice. JC required MJSE to learn how to successfully partake in reporting. JC require MJSE to report to their superiors immediately once a task is completed. In case of unexpected incidents, JC expect MJSE to inform their superiors to work out solutions. In conclusion, JC require MJSE to demonstrate leadership attributes as a part of the team.

Greetings in Japanese Business

Demonstrating respect through greetings is essential for fostering strong professional relationships and building trust in the Japanese business environment. Properly greeting others with the appropriate honorifics is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, reflecting respect and courtesy. Therefore, greetings are considering Japanese business etiquette and is part of Business Japanese Competence (BJC) Requirements. 50% of JC require MJSE to know the Japanese ways of greetings since JC have stated that greetings are crucial component of the Japanese language and culture in general, and particularly in business communication. Human relationships are important for smooth work and the Japanese always try to build good relationships which start with greetings. Therefore, whether inside or outside the company, Japanese always greet people whenever they meet. Most JC have stated that in Japanese business customs, they will greet each other at the workplace even though they do not know each another. Malaysians, however, do not practice the same customs. JC have mentioned that they prefer MJSE to learn the correct way of Japanese greetings, apply sincere and polite mannerisms to their greetings such as proper bows and smiles. JC stated that even if MJSE

are not yet proficient in the language, MJSE can make good first impressions by smiling at the Japanese colleagues, their clients and offering greetings.

Expertise Knowledge

40% of JC require MJSE to be experts. Semi-structured interviews with JC revealed that MJSE lack expertise. This is due to MJSE doing their work at superficial level and not taking the initiative to solve problems or find solutions to problems. MJSE tend to do what they are told, falling short of trying to find more ideas that fit the solution or improvements in their tasks. In other words, MJSE tend to do their tasks without thinking critically. JC require MJSE to be patient to understand the content that was conveyed to them by JC. The tasks and the knowledge that JC wish to convey to them need to be understood and communicated properly. JC have also stated that MJSE must learn to “*Listen to explanations*”.

JC require MJSE to know their responsibilities. They must obtain the knowledge or information over their clients or customers to serve them better. MJSE must be able to think theoretically and be able to explain tasks in sequence. JC also mentioned that reading comprehension skills in the Japanese language is necessary due to a variety of the documents used in their work where documents are written only in Japanese. Therefore, MJSE are required to understand the content of written Japanese.

Handling Emails

30% of JC have mentioned that MJSE should learn how to handle business e-mails the Japanese way. JC have stated that MJSE should learn when to send business e-mails to addressee only and when to use BCC line. Particularly, MJSE must know how to handle confidential information when overseeing business e-mails.

Table 3. The requirements of BJC among JC

Themes	Number of Responses of JC	%
Sense of Time	21	80
Japanese business customs	16	60
Teamwork	13	50
Greeting in Japanese business	13	50
Expertise knowledge	11	11
Dealing with e-mails	8	8

Discussion

The findings above provide a generalisation that JLP requirements among JC matches past research conducted among MJSE working in Malaysian JC. JC employers also revealed that listening skills are most important. JC have similar views as MJSE (Yeoh & Manjet, 2020). Understanding conversations and oral discussions are the most important sub-skills in a Japanese working environment. These findings are supported by the studies done by Flynn et al. (2008), Tyler (2011) and Yeoh et al. (2020) where their studies have shown the importance of listening as a work-based skill. As for speaking skills, significant findings from this study revealed that Japanese expatriates do not intend to force local employees to have BJC such as learning the honorific and humble expressions and using them. This is because most of the JC have mentioned that the content of the message is more important than the formation of the sentences. The ability to convey messages correctly is more important than the honorific or humble expressions.

Another important finding from this study indicate JC prefer local employees that can understand Japanese business practices such as punctuality and keeping promises, as it will be beneficial for the company. BJC rates higher in importance compared to JLP in JC. These findings are supported by the research done by Izumi et al., (2014) in Singapore who mentioned that communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) is the reference point for BJC. Yeoh and Manjet (2020) assert that business specific knowledge and skills are required to work successfully in Malaysian JC. Based on the findings from the semi-structured interviews with JC and comparing them with the responses from MJSE, a mismatch is found between MJSE (Yeoh & Manjet, 2020) and JC. A current study has revealed that JC do not expect MJSE to use the honorific

expressions but MJSE display anxiety regarding the use of honorific and humble expressions due to the inappropriate use of these expressions at their workplace.

The study predicated on the premise that tertiary level institutions in Malaysia must enhance the Japanese language curriculum by incorporating Japanese business customs and Japanese workplace practices, and this is supported by Japan Foundation (2022). This would be to make sure that Japanese language learners are well equipped with an appropriate level of the Japanese language and the knowledge of Japanese business customs (Japan Foundation, 2022). Tertiary level Japanese language learners should be provided authentic learning experiences and learning resources. Apart from that, exposure to Japanese workshop through internships and industrial orientation will increase awareness on the need of high level of JLP and BJC. Integration of above recommendations in the blueprint of rebranded Japanese language curriculum can also prepare graduates to adapt to the Japanese working environment and enable them to apply theoretical knowledge to practice at workplace. As listening and speaking are the highly stressed Japanese language skills and most required by JC, they also tend to present the most challenges faced by the MJSE in JC. Therefore, the revised curriculum should address strengthening these particular language skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion this research is a good platform to further investigate JC in a wider scope to identify BJC practices required for local employees as competence in Business Japanese seems to be more emphasized compared to JLP by Malaysian JC. This will augment well for the development of positive bilateral Japan-Malaysia relationship in terms of incoming investment. Next, the findings of this research should also be taken as a guide to strengthen and enhance the current Japanese language curriculum in Malaysian higher education institutions. The study is predicated on the premise that the higher education institutions in Malaysia must strengthen the Japanese language curriculum by incorporating real exposure to the Japanese language for the learners. This can be done through creating opportunities where the Japanese style environment exists. Such Japanese language curriculum can also prepare the graduates to adapt to the Japanese working environment and to practise their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills especially the listening and speaking skills as these two Japanese language skills are found to be the most required skills by JC.

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