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THE NEEDS FOR JAPANESE-SPEAKING HUMAN RESOURCES IN VIETNAM/ JAPAN, AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION*

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Received: 17/5/2022; Accepted: 06/7/2022

Abstract

Along with the development and deepening of the Vietnam-Japan relationship, the need for Vietnamese human resources with a certain skill in the Japanese language is getting high in various fields. In this article, we will overview this phenomenon, then see how to cope with it, focusing on language education. First of all, the kind of industry is requiring Japanese-speaking human resources, both in Vietnam and Japan, was introduced. Then we will see the necessary language education to meet such needs, including the required level of language, the current situation of Japanese language education (in Vietnam and Japan), and the characteristics you can see when they try to acquire the Japanese language. We will then consider the possibility of the development of language education as a conclusion.

Keywords: Japanese, language education, Sino Vietnamese, Chu Han, Kanji, human resources, industrial park, tourism, IT engineer, care-giver, JLPT, study abroad, overseas study in Japan.

1. Introduction

Today the relationship between Vietnam and Japan has developed and deepened in various kinds of fields. For example, many Japanese companies are heading to Vietnam to build up factories for manufacturing, as well as in order to open restaurants and retail shops in the cities of Vietnam. Some companies bring the technique and know-how from Japan to develop infrastructures such as highways, bridges, train/ subway systems, and even a “city.” Both countries also tied up for

education, such as establishing a university named “Vietnam Japan University (Truong Dai hoc Viet Nhat),” or holding designated courses for some purpose such as human development. In addition, the number of tourists and visitors to each country, as well as overseas students from Vietnam to Japan, are increasing rapidly.

Along with it, the need for Japanese-speaking human resources (HR) are getting high recently, for certain, both in Vietnam and Japan. Companies or organizations need to hire applicants with high language

* Selected from the International Conference “Supply and demand for high - skilled labor in East Asian countries: Challenges and solutions for Ho Chi Minh city” held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on 29th June 2022.

skills for a new business chance, as well as smooth and trouble-free communication with customers or co-workers. They may need to provide chances for employees to learn the language or to contact any educational organizations/ agencies to recruit high-skilled staff.

In this article, the kind of industry requiring Japanese-speaking human resources, both in Vietnam and Japan, was introduced first. Then we will see the necessary language education to meet such needs, including the required level of language, the current situation of Japanese language education (in Vietnam and Japan), and the characteristics you can see when they try to acquire the Japanese language.

2. The need for Japanese-speaking human resources

2.1. In Vietnam

In the suburb of the major cities in Vietnam, many companies come from Japan in order to develop and expand the business, establish industrial parks. The parks are located in Ha Noi, Bac Ninh, Hai Phong and Hung Yen in the North, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Long An, Ba Ria Vung Tau in the South, and Da Nang in the middle of Vietnam¹. Many of those Japanese companies wish to hire Japanese-speaking staff as interpreters or administrators of the factories.

Recently, the number of Japanese tourists to Vietnam has also increased. They

require Japanese-speaking staff and guides more often than tourists from other countries because they are not used to communicating in foreign languages, including English and tend to prefer their mother tongue.

2.2. In Japan

The two most spotlighted genres regarding Japanese-speaking Vietnamese human resources are IT engineers and caregiver.

In IT, Japan is one of the developed countries which should be grown more rapidly and strongly. In order to do so, we need engineers, full of energy and flexibility, to adapt themselves to the latest technology. However, according to the survey report by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan, the human resources in the IT field will be approximately 590,000 less than necessary (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan, 2016). This shortage of the engineer is severe in Japan, and Japanese IT companies are now paying attention to other countries in Asia, especially Vietnam and India, which are always said to be strong and hot countries in the IT field. Some Vietnamese companies are launching “bridge SE” projects which help develop the human resources for connecting the IT industries of the two countries by providing language education and financial support.

¹ Career Link ベトナムの工業団地 (Last access on April 16, 2018) https://kyujin.careerlink.asia/vietnam/%E3%82%B3%E3%83%A9%E3%83%A0/%E3%83%99%E3%83%88%E3%83%8A%

E3%83%A0%E3%81%AE%E5%B7%A5%E6%A5%AD%E5%9B%A3%E5%9C%B0

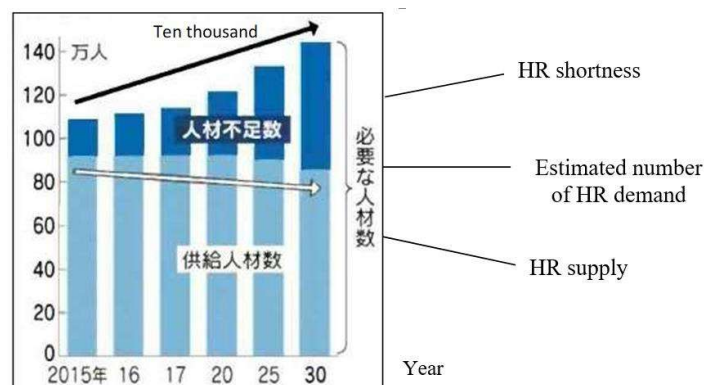


Figure 1. The estimated number of HR supply and shortness in the IT field

(Source: *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, June 01, 2017)

Also, aging is bringing the need for caregivers in Japan. As you may know, one of the largest social issues that Japan is facing now is the aging of the population, as well as the declining birthrate. The need for elder/nursing care facilities is very high as the number of elderly people is increasing, but the number of caregivers is apparently in short supply. In 2017, the government decided to give a new visa status of “care giving” to non-Japanese who are qualified to work as a caregiver in Japan by passing the designated exam and training.

3. Language education to meet the need

3.1. Requested Japanese language skill

In order to become an attractive HR and engage actively in such jobs shown above, applicants definitely need to acquire sufficient Japanese linguistic skills. Here are some examples of Japanese language skills to obtain:

- a) Basic conversation skills for daily communication (speaking and listening)
- b) Skill for exchanging ideas/information in a written form (writing and

reading)

- c) Professional or unique terms/phrases for a certain field
- d) Academic Japanese

Even if the company allows staff to use English for daily communication, the a) and b) are still necessary, as they may work as a lubricant and make a much closer relationship with co-workers. Japanese people are generally not used to speaking in English, so once they hear foreigners speak Japanese, even if it is only a few words or phrases, they will be happy enough to have active communication.

The c) is needed for any fields of work applicants will engage. It may be able to be studied either in “On the Job Training” while working or in a vocational school before getting a job.

The d) is not directly connected to the work applicants will engage in. However, if foreigners plan to come to Japan to study before getting a job, you will first need to acquire academic Japanese so that you can enter a vocational college (or maybe a university/ college) to get new knowledge/ techniques for the field you are interested

in, which may help you get a better career in the future.

3.2. Current situation of Japanese language education

As the need for Japanese-speaking HR grows, the number of people who study Japanese is increasing, especially in the past several years. In Vietnam, you can find some universities holding the Department/Faculty of Japan or the Japanese language. They require students to get the N2 (or sometimes N3) grade on JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) before graduation. Some junior high or senior high schools have started teaching Japanese as a foreign language instead of English, under the local government's policy and guidance, and the number seems to be increasing. Learners can easily access Japanese language schools in Vietnam, including the famous Dong Du and Sakura Japanese language schools in Ho Chi Minh City, attracting high school or university students, as well as office workers. In addition, preparation institutions for Technical Intern Training Programs (技能実習制度)² or agencies for the overseas study also provide Japanese language education to participants. Some of these schools/ institutes mentioned above hire Japanese native teachers for practical education, but the number doesn't seem enough for the latest situation.

On the other hand, Vietnamese students going overseas to Japan are increasing rapidly. According to the data

provided by the Ministry of Justice, Japan (2018), the number of overseas students staying in Japan as of December 2017 is 311,505. The number of Vietnamese students is 72,268, the second largest portion following the number of Chinese students (124,292).

Also by seeing the data from Jasso (Japan Student Services Organization, 2017), the number of Vietnamese students coming to Japan is as follows (as of May each year):

2011: 4,033

2015: 38,883

2017: 61,671 (*contents: 35,489 in higher education institute, 26,182 in Japanese language school).

It shows that the number of Vietnamese students in Japan in 2017 gets more than 10 times that in 2011 and it seems still increasing. The purpose of their going abroad to Japan is to acquire appropriate skills in language and professional fields for their future career. Their first step in Japan is to enter a Japanese language school to study language to a certain level. They are supposed to get an N1 or N2 grade of JLPT before graduation within 2 years at maximum. Receiving the influence of this "study in Japan" boom in these few years, many institutes or companies started opening new Japanese language schools in Japan, and the number of such schools is now getting over 600 over the country. However, the number of higher education institutes in which the students are

² Technical Intern Training Program (技能実習制度): a program directed by Japanese government, accepting young workers from various countries into

Japanese industry for acquiring skill, technique and knowledge of Japan for a couple of years, then help them contributing back in their own countries.

supposed to continue studying remains almost the same, causing intense competition among applicants.

3.3. Vietnamese students' characteristics in studying Japanese language

Japanese language has a variety of writing systems, which makes learners feel the language is extremely difficult. Hiragana and Katakana are two basic phonogram system. Japanese people use these two phonograms mixed with an ideograph: Kanji (Chinese character) when writing articles. Also, we may have some chance to use the alphabet as another phonogram for emphasis expression or input method with computers, etc.

On the other hand, the sound system of the language is relatively simple, with a limited number of vowels and consonants, even does not have lexical tones. If you have studied basic level of Japanese to some extent, daily communication with easy vocabulary can be done smoothly, although it sometimes happens that the sound/ tones of the mother tongue may affect their Japanese language when uttering words and phrases, which may make listeners difficult to catch.

Compared to students from China or Korea, Vietnamese students seem to need much more effort to pass the higher grade of

JLPT, as the writing system of both languages are completely different, as mentioned above, and need much time to master, as well as the grammar of the two languages. It sometimes happens that Chinese or Korean students who have passed the N1 already still have difficulty in oral communication, while Vietnamese N1 holders definitely have great skills in conversation.

However, there is one more characteristic of Vietnamese that has an advantage when learning Japanese - Sino Vietnamese vocabularies. The Vietnamese language has received an influence from Chinese culture and linguistic system. Many vocabularies in Vietnamese are derived from Chinese and can be written in *Chữ Hán* (Chinese character). It is generally said that about 60 to 70% of Vietnamese words are Sino Vietnamese vocabulary. Japanese language also shows the same phenomenon, with a variety of vocabulary from Chinese classic books or newly created words with the semantic system of Kanji (= *Chữ Hán*). This background, common in two languages, may sometimes help learners of each language because many vocabularies sound quite similar or constructed in the same way. Here are some examples quoted from an article written by Vinh Sinh (1996):

Table 1. Examples of Sino Vietnamese vocabularies derived from Japanese

Vietnamese	Japanese [pronunciation]	Vietnamese	Japanese [pronunciation]
triết học	哲学 [tetsu-gaku]	khoa học	科学 [ka-gaku]
xã hội	社会 [sha-kai]	kiến trúc	建築 [ken-chiku]
kinh tế	經濟 [kei-zai]	điện thoại	電話 [den-wa]

tự do	自由 [ji-yuu]	ôn độ	温度 [on-do]
nghệ thuật	芸術 [gei-jutsu]	nguyên tử	原子 [gen-shi]
chủ quan	主観 [shu-kan]	điện lực	電力 [den-ryoku]
cách mạng	革命 [kaku-mei]	quan sát	観察 [kan-satsu]
độc tài	独裁 [doku-sai]	hiện tượng	現象 [gen-shou]
ngẫu nhiên	偶然 [guu-zen]	tế bào	細胞 [sai-bou]
đại biểu	代表 [dai-hyou]	công nghiệp	工業 [kou-gyou]

However, Kanji words appear mainly in formal articles or abstract expressions. In the beginning level, most vocabularies are the ones derived originally from the native language, so the learners need to master this first before reaching the higher level on which the Sino-Vietnamese words help them in understanding/ communication and rapid improvement of the language.

4. Conclusion

Along with the deepening relationship between two countries or the current social situation in Japan, the need for Japanese-speaking HR is and will be getting much higher in a variety of fields. For example, there are many Vietnamese overseas students doing part-time jobs in convenience stores, fast-food restaurants, retail shops such as UNIQLO, or chain izakaya - Japanese-style bars in Tokyo and other cities in Japan. Some of these shops/ restaurants are planning to expand their business to Vietnam in the future, which may give chances to the students to work using their fluent Japanese and making use of their experience in Japan.

As the number of overseas students from Vietnam is getting large in this couple of years, many researchers and Japanese

language institutes are focusing on examining how to provide their language education effectively and efficiently to Vietnamese students.

Hopefully, these researches will see continuous development through active discussion and experiment, which will help much more learners acquire the language and realize a bright future for them as well as both countries.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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