

The Importance of Japanese Language Skills Proficiency among Malaysian Graduates in Japanese-based Companies

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ABSTRACT

The relationship in commerce and business between Japan and Malaysia has been rapidly developing and expanding in recent times. As a result, there is a dramatic rise in the demand for individuals who have Japanese language proficiency to work in Japanese companies. However, a very limited number of studies have focused on the requirements of Japanese language proficiency and importance of Japanese language skills among employees in JRCSM (Japanese Related Companies in Malaysia), especially in Southeast Asian context. This quantitative research investigated the level of importance of Japanese language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing among Malaysia Japanese Speaking Graduate Employees working at JRCSM. The results indicate that listening and speaking skills as the most important skills required in JRCSM workplace for communication purposes. The implications of this study indicate the need for the establishment of Japanese language degree programme at Malaysian universities to provide academic support for the Japanese language learners and to make sure that they are equipped with good Japanese listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Keywords: Japanese Related Companies in Malaysia (JRCSM), Japanese language skills' proficiency, Malaysian Japanese Speaking Graduate Employees (MJSGEs), workplace communication

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s, Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamed introduced the country's "Look East" policy, which was one of the factors that enhanced the bilateral relations, especially those related to commerce and economics. Since then, not only economic relations but also diplomatic and cultural relations and

exchanges between Malaysia and Japan have strengthened and flourished. These issues altogether have resulted in more Japanese firms opting to invest in Malaysia. Japan positions itself as one of the main trade partners of Malaysia as well as a major provider of direct foreign investment and economic assistance (Furuoka, 2007; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003).

Research Background and Problem

The relationship in commerce and business between Japan and Malaysia has been rapidly developing and expanding in recent times. This is evident in the increase in the number of joint-ventures between Japanese and Malaysian firms as well as Japanese subsidiaries in Malaysia. In April 2014, there was a total of 1,412 Japanese Related Companies in Malaysia, (JRCSM) which are either joint ventures or wholly-owned Japanese companies (Japan External Trade Organization [JETRO], 2014). As a result, there was a dramatic rise in the demand for individuals who had Japanese language proficiency to work in Japanese companies. Taking this into account, Japanese language proficiency has become vital for Malaysians looking for jobs in JRCSM (Ooi, 2013). Consequently, Malaysian job seekers need to require a specific level of Japanese language proficiency to find employment in JRCSM. Furthermore, the increasing number of Japanese related companies has attributed to the need of employing ASEAN countries' university graduates such as those from Malaysia who have both good proficiency in Japanese language and knowledge of

Japanese business practices (Izumi et al., 2014; Maeno et al., 2013, 2015). Izumi et al. (2014) had conducted a study regarding the problems with business Japanese competencies of business people working in Japan-related workplace in Singapore. However, a very limited number of studies have focused on requirements of Japanese language proficiency and importance of Japanese language skills among employees in JRCSM, especially in Southeast Asian context (Izumi et al., 2014; Yeoh, 2018). This research, therefore, investigates the level of importance of Japanese language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing among Malaysia Japanese Speaking Graduate Employees (MJSGEs) working in JRCSM.

Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate Japanese language skills' proficiency among MJSGEs working in JRCSM. The study examined the level of importance of Japanese language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing among MJSGEs. The study aims to answer how important are the Japanese language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) for MJSGEs working in JRCSM.

Literature Review

Japanese Language Proficiency in a Multinational Workplace. In JRCSM, the Japanese language is considered as the medium of communication. Since there are a total of 1412 Japanese-Related Companies in Malaysia and most Japanese

people's proficiency of English is still low (Iwasaki, 2006), Japanese language skills are considered to be essential for local employees (Yoshida et al., 2013) such as MJSGEs and other graduates for employment. According to Ainol et al. (2007), in the Malaysian context, most MJSGEs learn the Japanese language because they believe that it is useful for gaining employment.

Multinational companies (MNCs) such as JRCSM, more often are formed through branches and subsidiaries and hence a number of languages co-exist due to both the geographical dispersion of MNCs across national borders and the multilingual profile of their workforce (Angouri, 2007). Cooren (2006) explained that proficiency in Japanese language skills was important for the MJSGEs to build good relationships with their Japanese employers. A language is also an important tool for information transfer and organising social relationship, thought patterns and actions (Robichaud, 2006). Hence, the use of the Japanese language may have a great effect on relationship building and knowledge sharing between and among local employees and Japanese expatriates in JRCSM. Therefore, if MJSGEs are able to communicate in the Japanese language with good Japanese language skills, they are expected to understand the Japanese culture better and this will contribute to their business communication wellbeing in JRCSM (Peltokorpi, 2007). Furthermore, parallel research done by Yoshihara (1999) highlighted the importance of language issues in Japanese MNCs describing the two

pillars of their international human resources management strategy as "Management by Japanese" and "Management in the Japanese language". Studies cited above show that the Japanese language played an important role in JRCSM and also influences the way JRCSM manage their subsidiary operations. According to Yoshihara (1999), even though Japanese manufacturing companies have extensive experience in international operations, foreign subsidiaries are traditionally managed by Japanese expatriates. Communication-related to important issues (such as work-related matters and technology and project transfers between subsidiaries and headquarters) has been traditionally conducted in the Japanese language.

According to Asakawa et al. (2013), internationalisation of Japanese companies, with the majority being manufacturing companies, has been particularly rapid in the 2000s due to the globalisation process and the economic recession at that time. Japanese companies are now trying to be on par with corporations in other developed countries in order to be competitive in the global business environment (Disco Inc., 2012a). This includes hiring more non-Japanese employees with intercultural communication and language skills (Disco Inc., 2012b). Therefore, proficiency in Japanese language skills is needed in JRCSM, even though English has become an important language in Japan (Disco Inc. 2012a). Iwasaki (2006) pointed out that the English language proficiency of most Japanese people was still limited. Therefore,

Japanese language skills are essential for local employees such as MJSGEs and other graduates for employment (Yoshida et al., 2013).

Bloch (1995) and Ojanperä (2014) mentioned the effects of foreign language skills on individuals' job performance in multinational corporations such as JRCSM. Firstly, it is stated that foreign language skills affect career opportunities. Secondly, foreign language skills have an indirect effect on job performance such as contributing to better cultural awareness and intellectual growth (Bloch, 1995; Ojanperä, 2014). This is particularly true in the context of Japanese language as it is a highly contextualized language, and Japanese people usually do not express themselves in a straightforward way (Hall & Hall, 1977, 1989). Therefore, in order to understand information accurately in the Japanese society, MJSGEs with good proficiency in Japanese language skills are expected to be more sensitive to subtle hints and be able to decode hidden meanings within the Japanese communication context.

Japanese Language Proficiency in the Workplace. Japanese language proficiency refers to what individuals can do with their knowledge of the Japanese language and how well they can use the language to communicate effectively in the real world. Flynn et al. (2008) stated that "listening is considered by some to be the single most important element in the communication process, even more highly valued than speaking as a communication skill necessary in the business world"

(p. 143-144). In addition, according to Wolvin and Coakley (1996), listening is instrumental in the workplace. Furthermore, employers have identified listening as one of the most important communication skills for employees at all levels and indicate that good listening skills are an important indication of employee competence. According to Lynch (2011), communicative events require effective use of two-way listening skills in group discussions and team projects, meeting, training and seminars sessions, and interactions with clients, superiors, and others. Each of these tasks places specific demands on the ability of the workers to process and respond to spoken language.

According to Brown (2007), listening and speaking are learners' language tools. Doff (2007) also pointed out that learners could improve their speaking ability unless they developed listening ability. Baker and Westrup (2003) stated that speaking was of vital importance in the workplace, therefore, Japanese language speakers had more opportunities to find jobs in different organisations and companies.

Falsgraf et al. (1993) conducted a study to identify issues faced by Japanese language learners who worked in a Japanese workplace setting. Similar to other language environments, the workplace environment requires foreign Japanese speakers to participate in the context of making presentations, interacting with colleagues, making enquiries, and participating in group discussions. These interactions require foreign Japanese speakers to participate actively and show their professionalism

on the job. However, the study done by Shimada and Shibukawa (1999) revealed that local employees in Kuala Lumpur used the Japanese language for the purpose of greeting and daily conversation with Japanese expatriates. In Singapore, Izumi et al. (2014) revealed foreign Japanese language speakers who used Japanese in Japanese related companies in Singapore were more to a daily conversation with their Japanese expatriates in their workplace.

In literacy, reading is regarded as a set of skills that can be compartmentalised, taught, and tested. At the same time, linguistic knowledge of the foreign language (for instance, vocabulary and grammar) is an important influence on comprehension. One of the components of reading is knowledge about text structures. This is an important factor to consider in foreign language reading, especially Japanese language reading because the way in which ideas are organised in texts often varies from culture to culture. Chikamatsu (2003) supported this notion of reading and stated that:

“Japanese texts often begin with ambiguous, indirect meta-phonetic statements, followed by a series of non-subjective, seemingly irrelevant examples or statements with the topic finally mentioned at the end of the text” (p. 192).

Chikamatsu (2003) added that the conclusion of Japanese texts was often vague, and required the readers to create their own conclusions. Therefore, knowledge of Japanese language text structures assists in

reading comprehension. With the required knowledge, it is easier to identify the topic and main sentences, and relationships between sentences and paragraphs.

According to Alderson (2000), reading involves bringing background and external knowledge to a text. Good reading skills are vital for learners to understand the concepts and good readers are able to effectively transmit their competency to written and oral communication tasks. Therefore, reading is very important for MJSGEs in the workplace because reading does not only affect their reading abilities but also affects their writing skill and negotiating other Japanese language elements.

The above statement revealed that learners' writing skills in a foreign language can be affected by their reading experience in a foreign language (Krashen, 1984). This is because learners are able to gain greater exposure to the foreign language if they read various types of reading texts. By reading widely, they expand their vocabulary knowledge, learn grammar incidentally, discover the way texts are organised and enrich their experiences in various ways of life. Laufer and Nation (1995), who mentioned that learners' vocabulary knowledge and writing performance had a strong and significant correlation.

Therefore, writing skills can be greatly developed when the learners' interest is recognised and when they are exposed to situations where they can produce authentic pieces of writing. For MJSGEs, the concepts and requirements of writing can be fulfilled as it is in JRCSM where they are required

to produce authentic writing task. However, it is important to note that communication requires using words correctly and appropriately in sentences. Furthermore, grammatical knowledge is also important. As such, MJSGEs are required to have a wider vocabulary and a strong foundation in grammar to enable them to cope with writing tasks and organising written texts in the Japanese language in JRCSM.

Existing literature has not focused on the writing skill for occupational purposes, skills such as assisting learners to develop competence in the specific genres to help them in their academic study, workplace, and their lives in general. Izumi et al. (2014) was the only study that had focused on writing skills for occupational purpose in Singapore. The findings of Izumi et al.'s study revealed that the most frequent requirements for writing skill among the local employees in the Japanese related companies in Singapore were writing e-mails and writing reports.

METHODS

Research Design

This is a quantitative study involving the collection of data through a survey questionnaire. The participants involved MJSGEs who graduated from public Malaysian higher education (HE) institutions. The Japanese Language Questionnaire (JLQ) was administered to participants selected through purposive sampling. The questionnaires were completed by 65 MJSGEs. The selection of this group of participants was based on three criteria.

First, participants have to be a degree holder who graduated from public Malaysian HE institutions. Second, they have learned the Japanese language in public Malaysian HE institutions and have a minimum level of N3 or above qualification for The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). With a minimum of N3 qualification, graduates have the ability to understand Japanese language used in everyday situations, and they are able to navigate through more complex daily living situations. The public Malaysian HE institutions' graduates were selected as the JLPT registration data for the northern region of Malaysia indicated more than 70% of the candidates were from the public Malaysian HE institutions (Penang Japanese Language Society, 2016). Third, they have worked in the manufacturing field related JRCSM for more than one year and have interacted with JRCSM employers in their workplace. One year of experience would have helped them gain experience in dealing with JRCSM employers in their workplace.

Instruments

Questionnaire. JLQ was adapted from Shimada and Shibukawa (1999) and Tiong (2002). The questionnaire includes four sections that requested information on respondents' personal information, academic achievement and JLPT grade, the use of the Japanese language for work-related matters and the level of importance of Japanese language skills used in JRCSM.

Implementation of the Study

Phase One. JLQ was developed and pilot tested. JLQ was administered to a small sample (n=20) similar to the potential participants. The results obtained from the pilot test was analyzed using Statistical Pack of Social Sciences (SPSS) software and the Cronbach Alpha obtained is 0.859, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. The pilot test was followed with the selection of the actual study’s participants. Initially, four organizations in Malaysia were selected based on purposive sampling and the organizations were approached through invitation letter. These four organizations are Penang Japanese Language Society, Perak Malaysia-Japanese Friendship Society, Malaysia Japanese Language Society, and Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur.

Phase Two. Organizations mentioned above were approached in order to get the relevant data about possible participants for this

study. The questionnaire was completed by 65 MJSGEs.

Phase Three. In this phase, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to analyse the participants’ responses in the JLQ. Specifically, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data.

RESULTS

The result of the level of importance of Japanese language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing among MJSGEs are presented according to the research questions.

Research Question: How important are the Japanese Language Skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) for MJSGEs Working in JRCSM?

The profile of the participants based on the data in the personal and demographic information section of the questionnaire are reported as in Figure 1.

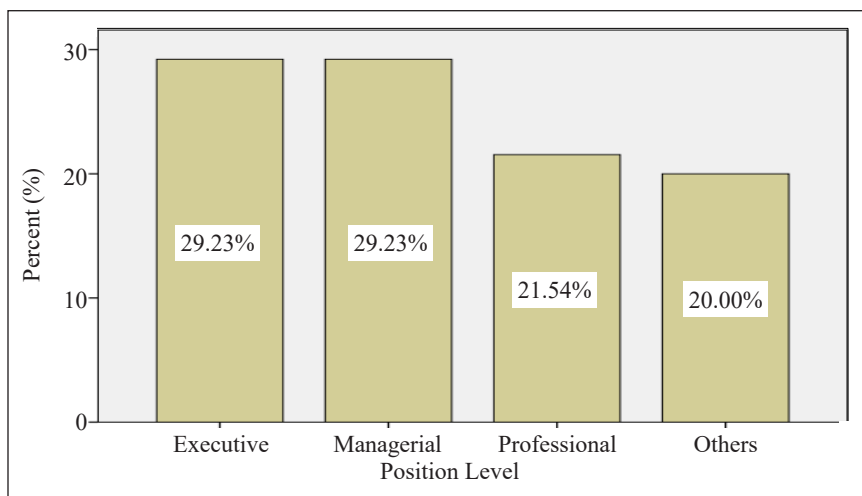


Figure 1. Distribution of participants’ position level

This section reports the participants' position level in JRCSM. It is essential to mention here that the position level used in this study refers to the position of a participant in his/her organisation. Four categories were constructed for the participant's current position. There were "professional", "managerial", "executive" and "others". General workers were grouped under the "others" category. The bar chart displayed in Figure 1 reveals that the majority of the participants are in the executive (29.23%), managerial (29.23%), and professional (21.54%) levels.

The bar chart in Figure 2 below shows that the majority of the participants obtained JLPT N3 level and N1 level with 40% and 35.38% respectively. 24.6% of the participants obtained the JLPT N2 level.

Table 1 shows the cross-tabulation of participants' position level and JLPT level using the exact count and percentage. Based on the results reported in Table 1, the chi-square test ($X^2(n = 4) = 36.356$) showed that p-value is less than 0.05, indicating

that there is a significant relationship between the levels of JLPT and position of the participants. Participants with higher JLPT levels tend to hold managerial and professional positions in JRCSM and participants with lower JLPT level tend to hold other positions which include general workers under the "others" category. The majority of the participants who had JLPT N1 level held managerial and professional positions. Both of these two categories accounted for 86.9% of participants with JLPT N1 level.

This section displays the results of the level of importance of Japanese language skills based on views of participants working in JRCSM. In these 38 items, Likert scale ranging from one (very important) to four (not important at all) was used to evaluate the relative importance of the items. For a better reporting of the results, scale one (very important) and scale two (important) were combined; and scale three (less important) and scale four (not important at all) were also combined.

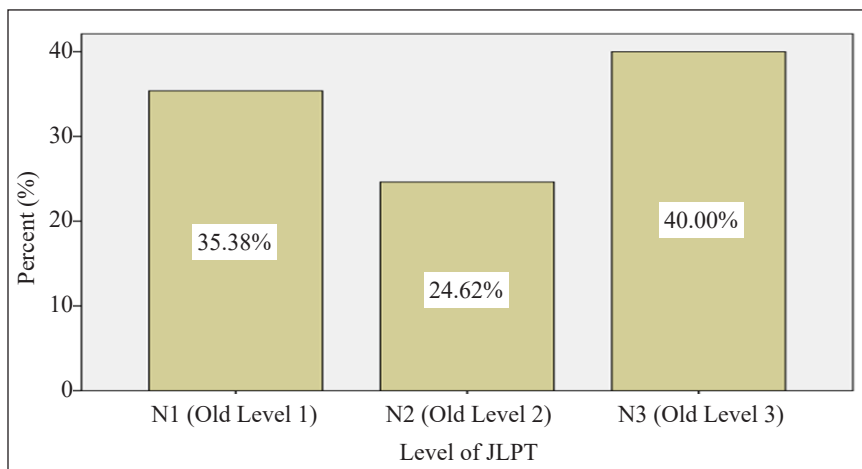


Figure 2. Participants' level of JLPT

Table 1
Cross-tabulation of position level and JLPT levels

JLPT level	Position level				
		Others	Executive	Managerial	Professional
N1 (Old Level 1)	Count	0	3	9	11
	%	0.00%	13.00%	39.10%	47.80%
N2 (Old Level 2)	Count	1	5	7	3
	%	6.30%	31.30%	43.80%	18.80%
N3 (Old Level 3)	Count	12	11	3	0
	%	46.20%	42.30%	11.50%	0.00%

Notes: $X^2(n = 4) = 36.356$, $p\text{-value} \approx 0.000$

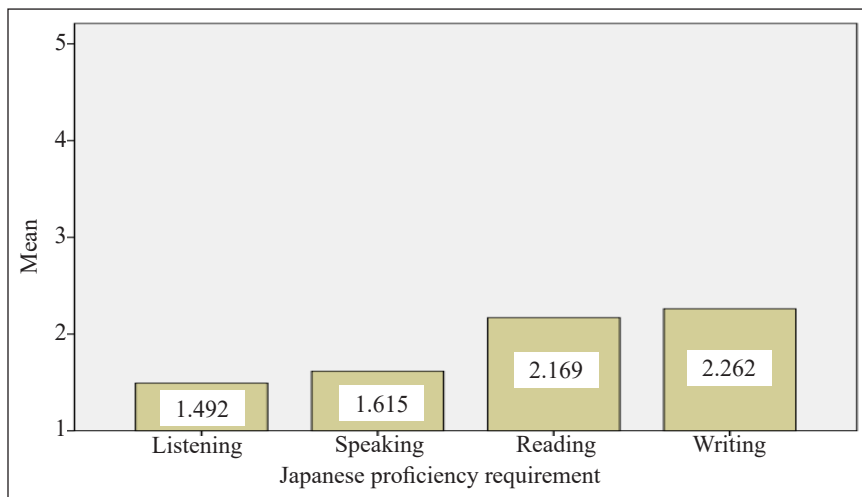


Figure 3. Level of importance of Japanese language skills in JRCSM

Figure 3 shows participants' responses regarding the level of importance of four major skills in Japanese language proficiency. Based on the data reported in the bar chart (Figure 3), it can be observed that listening and speaking skills are the top two most important Japanese language skills that are required by participants for Japanese language proficiency. Both these two skills reflect a relatively low mean value of 1.492 and 1.615, respectively. Furthermore, one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the significant difference in the level of

importance of the four major skills in the Japanese language across different position levels (Table 2).

Based on the results reported in Table 2 above, no significant difference was found for listening and speaking skills because their corresponding p values (sig. column) were greater than 0.05 (the significance level that was set before the analysis). Therefore, across all position levels, listening and speaking skills are viewed to be equally important for Japanese language proficiency in the workplace of MJSGEs.

Table 2
Japanese language proficiency requirements in four major skills by position level

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Listening	Between groups	0.692	3	0.231	0.476	0.700
	Within groups	29.554	61	0.484		
	Total	30.246	64			
Speaking	Between groups	1.106	3	0.369	0.697	0.558
	Within groups	32.279	61	0.529		
	Total	33.385	64			
Reading	Between groups	26.594	3	8.865	15.654	0.000
	Within groups	34.545	61	0.566		
	Total	61.138	64			
Writing	Between groups	23.995	3	7.998	14.118	0.000
	Within groups	34.558	61	0.567		
	Total	58.554	64			

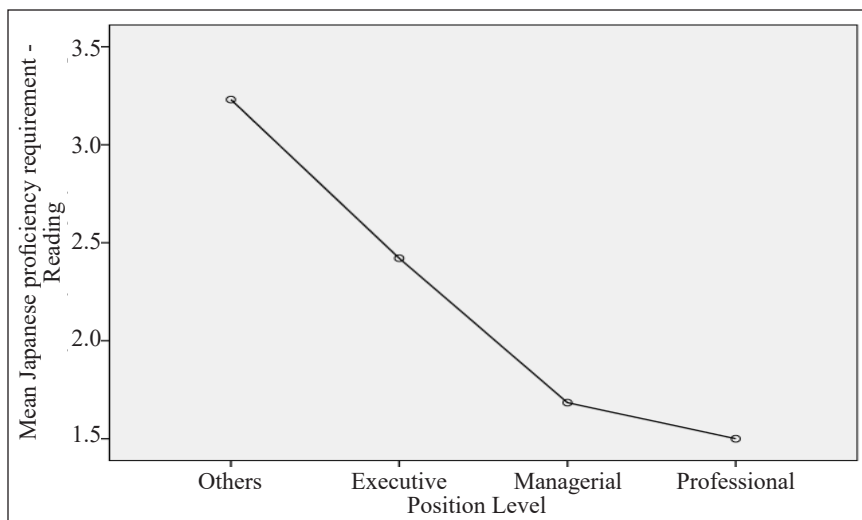


Figure 4. Reading skill requirement for Japanese language proficiency by position level

As far as reading skill is concerned, the result revealed that there was a significant difference in the level of importance for Japanese language proficiency among position levels of participants at 0.05 ($F_{3,61} = 15.654, p \approx 0.000$). Furthermore, Figure 4 shows that the participants who held the managerial and professional positions required reading skill in the Japanese

language, compared to those who held the positions as executive and others. Apart from that, the results in Table 2 also showed that there was a significant difference in the level of writing skills requirement for Japanese language proficiency between different position levels of participants at 0.05 ($F_{3,61} = 14.118, p \approx 0.000$).

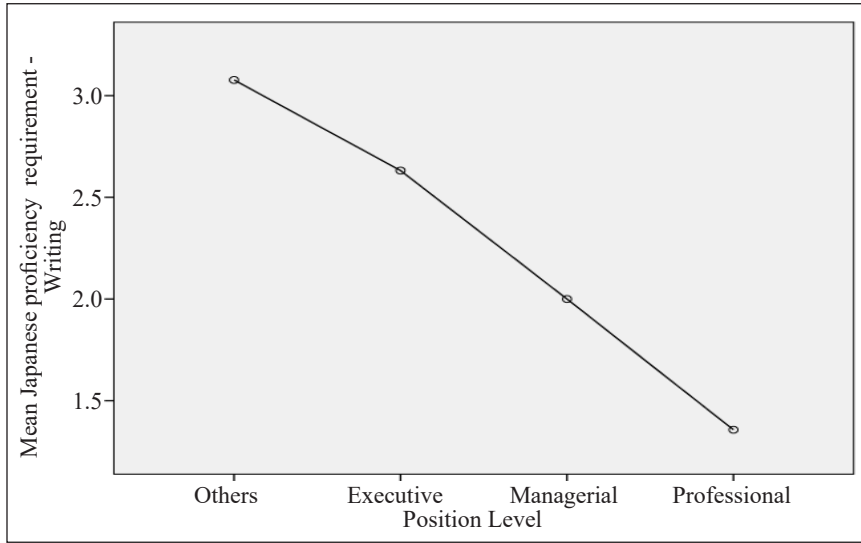


Figure 5. Writing skill requirement for Japanese language proficiency by position level

In addition, Figure 5 reveals that participants' who held the position as managerial and professional were the individuals who required writing skill (lower mean score indicates higher requirement level). Therefore, participants who held managerial and professional positions (associated with higher JLPT levels) showed that they needed to use reading and writing

skills in their work more than those who held the position as executive and others (had lower JLPT level).

Level of Importance of Four Major Skills' Sub Skill in JRCSM

The levels of importance of the four major skills in Japanese were calculated based on their underlying sub-skills.

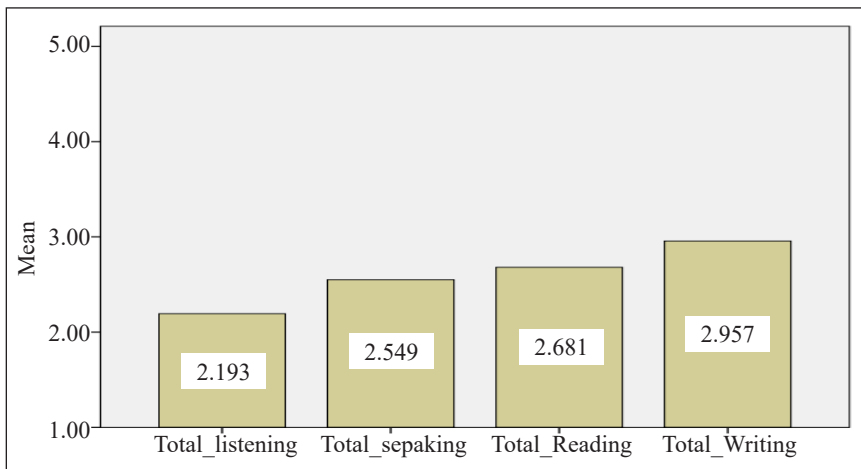


Figure 6. Level of importance of Japanese language skills in JRCSM

Figure 6 shows the level of importance (mean values) for four major skills. The data revealed that listening skill is the most important skill, supported by the lowest mean value of 2.193 (lower value indicates more important). Next, the second most important skill (in relative comparison) is speaking with a mean value of 2.549, followed by reading skill (mean = 2.681), and lastly, writing skill (mean = 2.957).

For in-depth analysis, the level of importance for the four major skills was compared across the position levels' of participants using ANOVA, as summarised in Table 3. Based on these results, p values (Sig. column) for the listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill was greater than 0.05. Thus, there was no significant difference in the level of importance for listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for participants of different position levels. This study concludes that across all position levels, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in the

Japanese language are equally important for the participants.

Level of Importance of Japanese Language Listening Skill

Figure 7 depicts the level of importance for each sub-skill of the Japanese listening skill using a bar chart. Based on the chart, it can be noticed that understanding oral instruction (mean = 1.923), understanding discussion (mean = 1.8), and understanding face to face conversation (mean = 1.769) are the three most important listening sub-skills. Besides that, all of the sub-skills except understanding formal talks and speeches showed mean values less than 2.5 (midpoint of 4 points Likert scale), indicating that they are all important.

In conclusion, the six sub-skills of listening skill (which are answering phone calls, understanding oral instructions, understanding discussions, understanding proceedings of meetings, understanding face-to-face conversations,

Table 3
Level of importance for Japanese language skills by position level

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Listening	Between groups	1.593	3	0.531	0.923	0.435
	Within groups	35.118	61	0.576		
	Total	36.711	64			
Speaking	Between groups	1.162	3	0.387	0.628	0.600
	Within groups	37.628	61	0.617		
	Total	38.79	64			
Reading	Between groups	1.301	3	0.434	0.568	0.638
	Within groups	46.544	61	0.763		
	Total	47.845	64			
Writing	Between groups	0.389	3	0.13	0.177	0.912
	Within groups	44.687	61	0.733		
	Total	45.076	64			

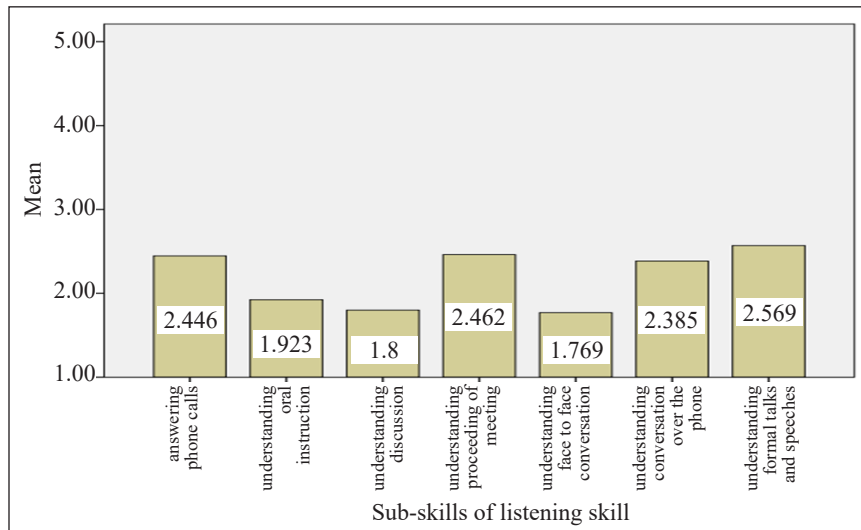


Figure 7. Level of importance for each sub-skill of the Japanese language listening skill

and understanding conversation over the phone) are important for the participants. The specific important sub-skills for the participants include understanding oral instructions, understanding discussions, and understanding face-to-face conversations.

The importance level of each specific sub-skills of listening skill was compared among the different levels of position. The

results in Table 4 show that participants from different position levels did not show a significant difference in the level of importance for all the sub-skills of listening skill at 0.05 significance levels. Thus, all seven sub-skills of listening skill are equally important across different position levels of the participants.

Table 4

Level of importance for listening sub-skills of the Japanese language by position level

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Answer phone calls	Between groups	8.872	3	2.957	2.117	0.107
	Within groups	85.19	61	1.397		
	Total	94.062	64			
Understand oral instruction	Between groups	1.695	3	0.565	0.515	0.674
	Within groups	66.92	61	1.097		
	Total	68.615	64			
Understand discussion	Between groups	2.997	3	0.999	1.404	0.25
	Within groups	43.403	61	0.712		
	Total	46.4	64			
Understand proceeding of meeting	Between groups	3.949	3	1.316	0.954	0.42
	Within groups	84.204	61	1.38		
	Total	88.154	64			

Table 4 (continue)

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Understand face to face conversation	Between groups	0.77	3	0.257	0.308	0.819
	Within groups	50.769	61	0.832		
	Total	51.538	64			
Understand conversation over the phone	Between groups	4.719	3	1.573	1.082	0.363
	Within groups	88.666	61	1.454		
	Total	93.385	64			
Understand formal talks and speeches	Between groups	8.061	3	2.687	2.28	0.088
	Within groups	71.877	61	1.178		
	Total	79.938	64			

Level of Importance of Japanese Language Speaking Skills

Twelve sub-skills were measured under the speaking skill of the Japanese language. The bar chart in Figure 8 depicts the level of importance for each sub-skill in Japanese speaking skill. By comparing the mean scores of all sub-skills, the participants pointed out that the top three most important sub-skill of the speaking

skills are greetings (mean = 1.862), face to face conversations with Japanese colleagues (mean = 1.923), and communicating with Japanese colleagues (mean = 2.138).

In general, the five speaking sub-skills that were deemed to be important encompassed greetings, telephone conversations, face to face conversations, communicating with Japanese colleagues, and work-related conversations with Japanese colleagues.

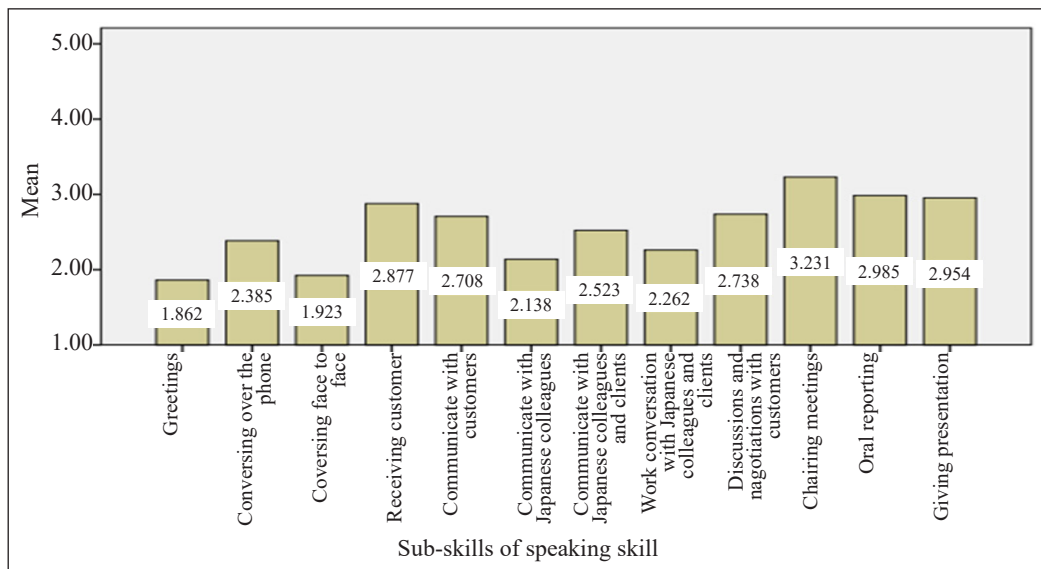


Figure 8. Level of importance for each sub-skill of the Japanese language speaking skill

Table 5 shows the analysis of variance among participants with different levels of position. No significant differences were found between the level of importance of Japanese speaking sub-skills

Table 5
Level of importance of speaking sub-skills of the Japanese language by position level

Variable		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Greetings	Between groups	4.455	3	1.485	1.528	0.216
	Within groups	59.299	61	0.972		
	Total	63.754	64			
Cconversing over the phone	Between groups	7.424	3	2.475	1.756	0.165
	Within groups	85.96	61	1.409		
	Total	93.385	64			
Conversing face to face	Between groups	4.702	3	1.567	2.083	0.112
	Within groups	45.913	61	0.753		
	Total	50.615	64			
Receiving customers	Between groups	3.99	3	1.33	1.053	0.376
	Within groups	77.026	61	1.263		
	Total	81.015	64			
Communicate with customers	Between groups	1.667	3	0.556	0.369	0.775
	Within groups	91.779	61	1.505		
	Total	93.446	64			
Communicate with Japanese colleagues	Between groups	2.548	3	0.849	0.689	0.562
	Within groups	75.206	61	1.233		
	Total	77.754	64			
Communicate with Japanese customers and clients	Between groups	3.738	3	1.246	0.788	0.505
	Within groups	96.477	61	1.582		
	Total	100.215	64			
Work conversation with Japanese colleagues	Between groups	2.244	3	0.748	0.529	0.664
	Within groups	86.31	61	1.415		
	Total	88.554	64			
Discussions and negotiations with customers	Between groups	1.074	3	0.358	0.229	0.876
	Within groups	95.479	61	1.565		
	Total	96.554	64			
Chairing meetings	Between groups	5.671	3	1.89	1.65	0.187
	Within groups	69.868	61	1.145		
	Total	75.538	64			
Oral reporting	Between groups	6.603	3	2.201	1.423	0.245
	Within groups	94.381	61	1.547		
	Total	100.985	64			
Giving presentation	Between groups	1.46	3	0.487	0.293	0.830
	Within groups	101.402	61	1.662		
	Total	102.862	64			

for all speaking sub-skills and different positions held. Subsequently, it can be noted that all twelve Japanese speaking sub-skills are equally important across different position levels.

Level of Importance of Japanese Language Reading Skills

For Japanese reading skills, the level of importance of eight sub-skills is presented in Figure 9. Based on the results given in the bar chart, reading e-mail (mean = 2.031) is the only sub-skill with a mean value of less than 2.5. This obviously indicates that this skill is the most important for the majority of participants. The finding also revealed that the sub-skill of reading e-mail was rated by the majority of the participants as the most important skill among other reading sub-skills in JRCSM. This was clear as the mean value of this sub-skill was the lowest (mean = 2.031). In addition, reading memos, reading business letters, and reading

business reports showed a significant level of importance. Therefore, reading e-mails and the three reading sub-skills mentioned above were also viewed to be important by the participants.

The differences between the level of importance of each specific sub-skills of the reading skill and different levels of position were examined and the result is reported in Table 6. At the 0.05 significance level, all the sub-skills showed insignificant differences in the level of importance between the positions held by the participants, except for reading memos ($F_{3,61} = 3.338, p = 0.025$).

The result presented in Figure 10 reveals that the sub-skill of reading memos is more important to managers and general workers (other categories in the questionnaire). This is because this sub-skill scored low mean scores by managers and general workers, compared to executive and professional positions.

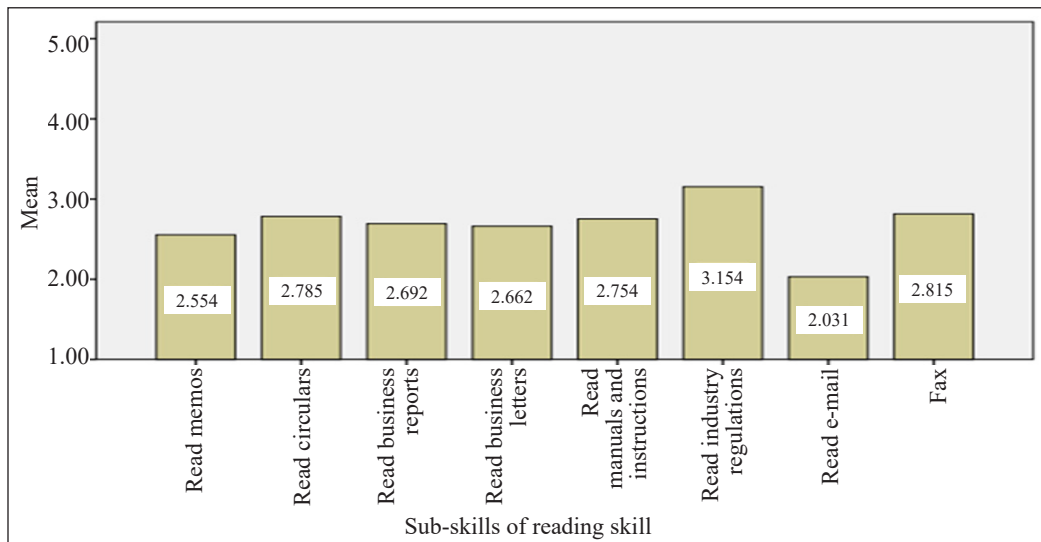


Figure 9. Level of importance of sub-skills of Japanese language reading skill

Table 6
Level of importance for each sub-skill of Japanese language reading skill by position level

Variable		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Read memos	Between groups	13.546	3	4.515	3.338	0.025
	Within groups	82.516	61	1.353		
	Total	96.062	64			
Read circulars	Between groups	8.645	3	2.882	2.302	0.086
	Within groups	76.34	61	1.251		
	Total	84.985	64			
Reading business reports	Between groups	3.528	3	1.176	0.851	0.472
	Within groups	84.318	61	1.382		
	Total	87.846	64			
Reading business letters	Between groups	1.538	3	0.513	0.368	0.776
	Within groups	85.016	61	1.394		
	Total	86.554	64			
Reading manuals and instructions	Between groups	1.232	3	0.411	0.289	0.833
	Within groups	86.829	61	1.423		
	Total	88.062	64			
Reading industry regulations	Between groups	0.423	3	0.141	0.139	0.936
	Within groups	62.038	61	1.017		
	Total	62.462	64			
Reading email	Between groups	0.969	3	0.323	0.238	0.87
	Within groups	82.969	61	1.36		
	Total	83.938	64			
Reading fax	Between groups	5.357	3	1.786	1.29	0.286
	Within groups	84.428	61	1.384		
	Total	89.785	64			

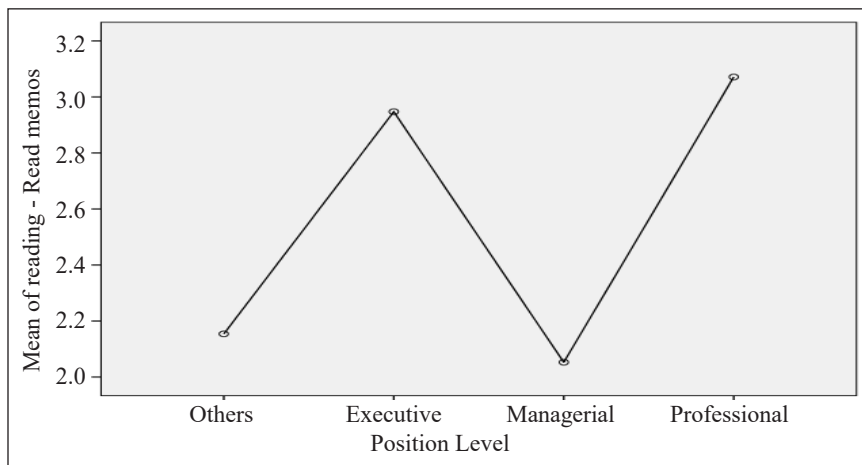


Figure 10. Mean plot for the level of importance of reading memos by position levels

Level of Importance of Japanese Language Writing Skill

Figure 11 presents the importance level of eleven sub-skills of Japanese writing skill. Based on the data presented in the chart, writing e-mail (mean = 2.492), and translating from other languages into Japanese (mean = 2.462) are the two most important sub-skills for writing in the Japanese language. The study also revealed that nine writing sub-skills that are less important for participants because the mean values of these nine sub-skills were greater than 2.5. These nine less important sub-skills are translating from Japanese into other languages (mean = 2.523), writing reports (mean = 2.954), filling up forms (mean = 2.954), writing letters (mean = 3.077), writing notices (mean = 3.338), writing memos (mean = 3.292), writing fax messages (mean = 3.185), editing written materials (mean = 3.138), and writing

proposals (mean = 3.108). Therefore, the two sub-skills that are deemed to be important for the participants are writing e-mails and translating from other languages into Japanese.

Table 7 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the differences in the importance of Japanese writing sub-skills across different levels of position. The results show that there is no significant difference in the level of importance for all the writing sub-skills across different positions held by the participants. Thus, all eleven Japanese writing sub-skills are equally important across different position levels.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained from the quantitative research study to explore the level of importance of Japanese language skills which are used by MJSGEs working

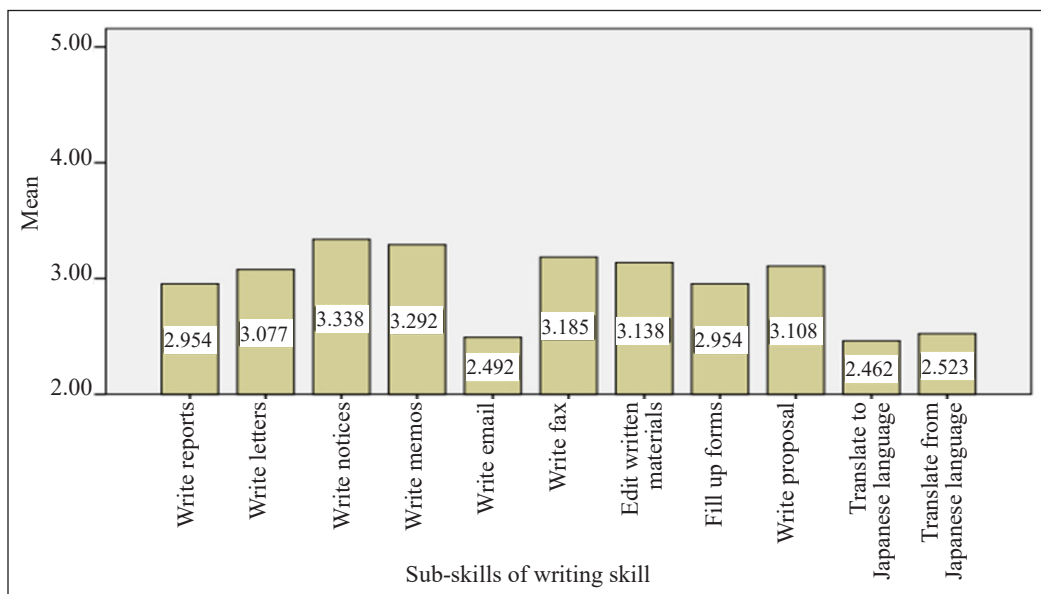


Figure 11. Level of importance of sub-skills of Japanese language writing skill

Table 7
Level of importance for writing sub-skills of Japanese language according to position level

Variable		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Write reports	Between groups	3.469	3	1.156	0.888	0.452
	Within groups	79.393	61	1.302		
	Total	82.862	64			
Write letters	Between groups	1.594	3	0.531	0.373	0.773
	Within groups	87.021	61	1.427		
	Total	88.615	64			
Write notices	Between groups	1.71	3	0.57	0.612	0.610
	Within groups	56.844	61	0.932		
	Total	58.554	64			
Write memos	Between groups	0.796	3	0.265	0.243	0.866
	Within groups	66.65	61	1.093		
	Total	67.446	64			
Write email	Between groups	0.042	3	0.014	0.008	0.999
	Within groups	104.2	61	1.708		
	Total	104.25	64			
Write fax	Between groups	4.996	3	1.665	1.477	0.230
	Within groups	68.789	61	1.128		
	Total	73.785	64			
Edit written materials	Between groups	0.789	3	0.263	0.214	0.886
	Within groups	74.964	61	1.229		
	Total	75.754	64			
Fill up forms	Between groups	2.529	3	0.843	0.61	0.611
	Within groups	84.333	61	1.383		
	Total	86.862	64			
Write proposal	Between groups	0.87	3	0.29	0.202	0.894
	Within groups	87.377	61	1.432		
	Total	88.246	64			
Translate to Japanese language	Between groups	6	3	2	1.108	0.353
	Within groups	110.15	61	1.806		
	Total	116.15	64			
Translate from Japanese language	Between groups	6.45	3	2.15	1.133	0.343
	Within groups	115.77	61	1.898		
	Total	122.22	64			

in JRCSM, it shows that listening skill is the most important skill in JRCSM workplace communication. This finding supported by the comments of Flynn et al. (2008), Yeoh et al. (2016), and Yeoh (2018) pointed out

that listening was considered by some to be the single most important element in the communication process, even more highly valued than speaking as a communication skill necessary in the business world. These

findings also concur with Wolvin and Coakley (1995) that listening is instrumental at the workplace where employers identified listening as one of the most important communication skills for employees at all levels. This indicates that good listening skills are important components of employee competence.

In addition, the findings from the MJSGEs indicated that speaking skill is also important. Speaking skill is crucial to build a good relationship with the Japanese expatriate and gain more trust from them. This finding echoes Cooren (2006), Yeoh et al. (2016), and Yeoh's (2018) views that proficiency in Japanese language skills is important for the MJSGEs to build a good relationship with their Japanese employers.

The finding indicates that knowing the Japanese language can be an advantage for those working in JRCSM. It echoes the statement made by Bloch (1995) that foreign language skills can contribute to career enhancement and according to Yoshida et al. (2013), Japanese language skills are essential for local employees such as MJSGEs and other graduates for employment. Currently, most universities in Malaysia only offer elementary level Japanese language course except for a few universities such as Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia. Therefore, the proficiency level that can be achieved before starting work at Japanese companies is limited. The study proposes the establishment of Japanese language degree programme in Malaysia universities in order to provide

a more conducive academic support for the Japanese language learners and to make sure they are equipped with the good Japanese language listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The study also indicated that the language competencies would help MJSGEs to understand the Japanese way of thinking and behaviour. This is important in Malaysian context because Malaysia is made up of Malays, Chinese, and Indians besides its minority ethnic groups from the east. Each ethnic group has its own cultural norms, lifestyle, traditions, and belief systems (Manjet et al., 2017). These findings of this study will also provide useful teaching implications for Japanese education in Malaysia by introducing the Japanese language, thinking and behaviour to the different ethnic groups who hold different belief systems. These can be achieved by introducing Japanese work culture into the Japanese language courses.

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