

## Cross-Cultural Intelligence in the Acquisition of Keigo: A Case Study of Indonesian Internship Students in Japan

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of cross-cultural intelligence in the acquisition of keigo (a variety of Japanese polite language) by Indonesian students participating in internship programs in Japan. With a qualitative approach, 9 participants from Institut Prima Bangsa and STBA<sup>8</sup>Yapri were involved through questionnaires and interviews. The results show that students have high motivation to learn keigo, both for professional purposes and to maintain social relationships. Students' cross-cultural awareness can be seen from the understanding that keigo is a language skill as well as a cultural competence. The independent learning strategies used include memorizing, imitating supervisors, and utilizing digital media. The findings confirm that real interactions more influence the acquisition of skills in the workplace than learning in the classroom. This research emphasizes the importance of integrating cross-cultural intelligence in Japanese language learning and recommends the development of curriculum and internship programs based on real practices and digital technology.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The mobility of Indonesian students to Japan through internship programs is increasing in line with the strengthening of international cooperation in the fields of education and industry. Students who decide to enter an internship program are usually more motivated, strong-willed, tend to be cautious about taking risks, and/or show an ambitious attitude compared to other students [1]. The program not only demands academic competence and technical skills, but also cross-cultural communication skills. Language can be understood as a social system as well as a means of communication that is inherent in society and reflects a certain culture [2]. One of the most important aspects of communication in Japan is the use of *Keigo* or a variety of polite language, which includes

*Teineigo*, *Sonkeigo*, and *Kenjougo*. Keigo is one of the complex aspects of the Japanese language, as it requires not only a proper grammatical understanding, but also a deep understanding of Japanese social and cultural norms [3]. Keigo serves not only as a formal form of language, but also as a representation of Japanese cultural values that emphasize social hierarchy, respect, and politeness. In the context of internships, mastery of keigo is crucial because it reflects professionalism and affects students' success in adapting to the Japanese work environment.

However, the reality is that many Indonesian students face difficulties in using keigo correctly [4]. This difficulty is influenced by the difference in the language system and communication culture between Indonesia and Japan [4], limited experience in interacting in formal Japanese situations, as well as Japanese language learning materials that emphasize grammatical aspects rather than pragmatic practice. A lack of understanding of keigo can hinder communication, affect interactions, and reduce the effectiveness of cultural adaptations [5]. The acquisition of keigo is not just a matter of language mastery, but also reflects an understanding of social values and communication etiquette in Japan [6].

Recent research confirms that pragmatic competence has a great influence on the success of intercultural communication. It found that students' mastery levels increase with academic experience, but social context and pragmatic awareness also strongly determine the success of use [7]. This shows that there are real challenges for Indonesian students who are facing formal communication practices in Japan for the first time.

To answer these challenges, cross-cultural intelligence or *Cultural Intelligence (CQ)* is one of the important approaches. Cross-cultural intelligence gets much attention in cross-cultural studies because it is considered important to understand how individuals are able to cope with cultural differences [8]. As a multidimensional concept, CQ was developed to describe the complexity of intercultural interactions that include elements of race, ethnicity, and nationality [9]. CQ encompasses the individual's cognitive, motivational, and behavioral abilities to adapt and interact effectively with people from different cultures. International internships can improve students' CQ, especially in the cognitive and motivational dimensions [10]. Thus, students with a high CQ are more likely to understand the cultural meaning behind the use of keigo, rather than just memorizing the linguistic form, so that their interactions become more natural and contextual.

The urgency of this research arises from the fact that the misuse of keigo not only has an impact on daily communication but can also affect the perception of supervisors, colleagues, and even future career opportunities of students. Furthermore, the ability to adapt to the use of keigo can strengthen the competitiveness of Indonesian graduates in the global job market. Few, if any, have directly examined how Indonesian students acquire and use keigo in internship settings, nor how cross-cultural intelligence supports this process. This research was implemented with a case study approach, involving Indonesian students who participated in an internship program in Japan, and using in-depth interviews, open questionnaires, and reflection documentation to explore their experiences.

Despite a number of studies on Japanese language proficiency and cultural adaptation of international students, there are still significant research gaps. Previous studies have tended to highlight Japanese language learning in the classroom or cultural adaptation in

general, while the link between keigo acquisition and cross-cultural intelligence in the context of internships has been rarely studied. Thus, this research has novelty because it combines aspects of applied linguistics with social psychology, as well as emphasizing the experience of Indonesian students in Japan as the subject of the study.

The contribution of this research is expected to be theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study expands the literature on the relationship between cross-cultural intelligence and mastery of polite language. Practically, the results of the research can be used as a basis for universities and internship organizing institutions to design more effective preparation programs, including the integration of pragmatic training and strengthening of CQ in the curriculum. Thus, this study aims to analyze how Indonesian students acquire keigo during internships in Japan, identify the factors that influence it, and formulate pedagogical recommendations that can support the success of cross-cultural communication in the future.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Keigo

Keigo is one of the characteristics of the Japanese language that distinguishes it from other languages, especially because it is closely related to the social structure and cultural values of Japanese society. The term *Keigo* or 'respectful language' is essentially determined by the choice of vocabulary and the form or structure of the sentence used [2]. Keigo is a form of language variation whose use is determined by the position of the speaker (O1) against the interlocutor or receiver (O2) [2]. Keigo is divided into three main categories: *teineigo*, *sonkeigo*, and *kenjougo*. *Sonkeigo*, known as the language of respect or honor, is used by the speaker when he wants to show respect to the interlocutor [11]. Through *Sonkeigo*, the position of the listener is elevated by the speaker by using various special honorific expressions.

On the other hand, *Kenjougo* is a form of language that shows respect to the listener by demeaning the speaker's own position. Meanwhile, *Teineigo* has differences with both *Sonkeigo* and *Kenjougo*. If *Sonkeigo* is used to honor a particular person in a professional context and *Kenjougo* to honor superiors, then *Teineigo* is more general as a form of courtesy that can be used in communication with anyone. This division is usually taught at the elementary to secondary school levels in Japan and is a classification that is generally understood by Japanese people [12]. The main function of keigo is to show respect, maintain politeness, and assert social hierarchy in communication interactions [7]. Linguistic studies place keigo as a pragmatic form of communication, where the choice of language variety is not only based on grammatical rules, but also on suitability with the social context.

Recent studies highlight that Indonesian students often face significant challenges in mastering *keigo*, particularly in determining when and how it should be used in formal situations that they rarely encounter in their daily lives. A study by Supriatnaningsih et al. (2024) on Javanese learners of Japanese revealed that pragmatic failure frequently occurs because learners lack socio-pragmatic knowledge, leading to violations of politeness principles in real communication [13]. Similarly, Maruki (2022) emphasizes that the teaching of *keigo* should not merely focus on memorizing linguistic forms but also on

developing learners' ability for authentic self-expression through practical methods such as role-plays, first-encounter conversations, and simulated formal contexts [14].

Furthermore, research on Indonesian university students shows that the complexity and context-dependency of *keigo* often result in difficulties for foreign learners compared to Japanese students, who regard *keigo* as a natural and necessary part of communication [7]. In addition, the perception of young Japanese native speakers toward honorifics has been shifting. Norms are not static but evolve with social change. This highlights the importance for foreign learners not only to acquire traditional rules but also to adapt to the dynamic pragmatic practices of contemporary Japanese society.

Therefore, the successful acquisition of *keigo* requires not only linguistic mastery but also socio-pragmatic awareness, cultural sensitivity, and continuous exposure through authentic communicative contexts, including the use of digital technologies that can simulate real interactions and provide feedback in honorific usage.

## 2.2 Cultural Intelligence

The initial definition of cultural intelligence is a person's ability to interact and work well in situations that involve cultural differences [15]. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the ability of individuals to adapt, interact, and communicate effectively with people from different cultures. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) or cross-cultural intelligence develops as an important concept that is interpreted as a person's ability to adapt and play an effective role in an environment with cultural diversity [16]. CQ is a multidimensional competency that includes cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects [17]. The cognitive dimension refers to knowledge of cultural norms, practices, and conventions; the metacognitive dimension has to do with reflective awareness of cultural differences; the motivational dimension refers to the drive to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

Meanwhile, the behavioral dimension concerns the ability to adjust actions and communication according to applicable cultural norms. CQ is positively correlated with the success of individual adaptation in a multicultural environment, both in academic and professional contexts [18]. More recent studies confirm that the international internship program plays a significant role in improving students' CQ [10], especially in the motivational and behavioral dimensions, through hands-on experience in a cross-cultural work environment. For instance, cognitive CQ relates to the extent to which students' knowledge of Japanese cultural norms and sociolinguistic rules shapes their pragmatic competence, especially in the appropriate use of *keigo* in professional interactions. Metacognitive CQ involves how students reflect on, monitor, and adjust their cultural understanding during real-time interactions, as well as the strategies they employ to anticipate pragmatic challenges. Motivational CQ, while emphasized in the study, could be further examined to show how intrinsic motivation sustains persistence in mastering culturally bound pragmatic forms such as honorific language. Meanwhile, behavioral CQ goes beyond general adaptation and concerns how students concretely adjust their communication strategies such as turn-taking, politeness markers, or modifying honorific expressions to align with workplace norms in Japan. By addressing these dimensions more systematically, the study would provide a clearer picture of how intercultural pragmatics and

second language pragmatics intersect with CQ, particularly in relation to the use of *keigo* and culturally appropriate communication in both digital and professional contexts.

In addition, research in intercultural pragmatics has shown that pragmatic competence, such as the ability to use politeness strategies and speech acts appropriately across cultures, serves as a crucial mediator for CQ in real communication [4]. Similarly, second language pragmatics studies emphasize that pragmatic failures often occur when learners cannot transfer cultural knowledge into appropriate language use, highlighting the importance of the metacognitive and behavioral dimensions of CQ [19]. These findings suggest that CQ should not only be understood as cultural awareness or motivation, but also as the ability to enact appropriate pragmatic strategies in authentic intercultural interactions.

### 2.3 Keigo and Cultural Intelligence in the Context of Students

The skill of using *keigo* cannot be separated from cross-cultural intelligence because the use of this variety of polite language is based on an understanding of Japanese social norms. Students with high CQ levels tend to have an easier time understanding the social context that demands the use of *sonkeigo* or *Kenjougo*, as well as being able to adjust their communication behavior flexibly. In contrast, students with low CQ are more likely to experience pragmatic mistakes, such as excessive use of *keigo* or not in accordance with the status of the interlocutor, which can lead to misunderstandings of communication. Several international studies confirm that effective language learning in cross-cultural contexts involves not only linguistic aspects, but also the integration of social experiences and cultural reflection [20]. In the context of Indonesian students undergoing internships in Japan, interaction with supervisors, colleagues, and customers is an important means to develop CQ while internalizing it in real communication practices. Therefore, the relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and cross-cultural intelligence is a determining factor for students' success in adapting linguistically and culturally during the internship program.

## 3. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, because the main goal is to deeply understand the experience of Indonesian students in acquiring a variety of polite languages (*keigo*) during an internship program in Japan. This approach is considered appropriate for exploring complex linguistic phenomena as well as the cross-cultural context experienced by participants.

### 3.1 Participation

The research participants were nine students from the Prima Bangsa Institute and STBA YAPRI, of whom five also took part in the interviews. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the criteria of having participated or currently participating in an internship program in Japan, possessing experience in using Japanese in formal situations, and providing informed consent. While this number is in line with common expectations for a case study, it is important to emphasize that the findings are exploratory in nature and should not be taken as broadly generalizable to all Indonesian students in Japan. The demographic data presented in the following table serve as supporting information to contextualize the participants in this specific study.

Table 1. Demographics

Items	Background	Number	Percentage
Gender	Man	4	44.4%
	Woman	5	55.6%
Total		9	100%
Internship Agencies	Nagatoya	2	22.5%
	Ooedoosen premium Toba Saichouraku	1	11%
	Yukai Resort	1	11%
	Hotel Aokiya	1	11%
	Vessel Hotel Campana Nagoya	2	22.5%
	IYES	1	11%
	IFEME	1	11%

### 3.2 Data Collection

Data is collected through several key techniques. First, an initial questionnaire was given to obtain an overview of the participants' backgrounds and self-assessments related to *keigo abilities* and cross-cultural intelligence aspects. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the participants' experiences in more depth, especially related to difficulties, strategies, and adaptation to the use of *keigo* in a professional context. However, the article does not provide sufficient detail on how the questionnaire was developed in accordance with the dimensions of CQ, nor does it include sample questions. This lack of explanation makes it difficult for readers to evaluate whether the instrument appropriately reflects the theoretical framework employed.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out through a thematic analysis approach as proposed [21]. This process includes familiarization of data, inductive coding, grouping of codes into themes, reviewing themes, and formulating analysis results in the form of interpretive narratives. This process includes familiarization with the data, inductive coding, grouping of codes into themes, reviewing themes, and formulating results in the form of interpretive narratives. To maintain validity, this study applied data triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and supporting documents, as well as source triangulation by cross-checking information obtained from different participant groups. From an ethical perspective, all participants received an explanation of the study's purpose and provided informed consent before data collection. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and all recordings and documents were securely stored. With this procedure, the research is expected to produce credible findings and contribute to the study of language acquisition and the development of cross-cultural intelligence.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents research findings based on the analysis of questionnaire and interview data that have been collected from participants of internship programs in Japan. Results were organized into several main categories, namely linguistic background, learning motivation and attitudes, cross-cultural awareness, learning environment and social interaction, and individual learning strategies.

Table 2. Linguistic Background

No	Questions	Response			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I had enough basic Japanese skills before joining the internship program.	37.5%	62.5%	-	-
2.	I have learned keigo formally in Japanese classes before.	37.5%	62.5%	-	-
3.	Previous foreign language learning experience helped me understand keigo.	37.5%	62.5%	-	-

The data in Table 2 shows that the majority of participants have basic Japanese language skills before undergoing the internship program, with 37.5% strongly agreeing and 62.5% agreeing. This indicates that the initial linguistic readiness is sufficient to support the participants in understanding Japanese in general. In addition, all participants also admitted that they had learned *keigo* formally in Japanese classes, although its application was still limited.

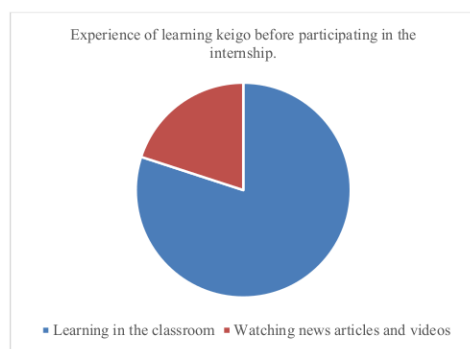


Figure 1. Experience of learning keigo before participating in the internship

In Figure 1, the interviewed participants emphasized that the learning experience on campus is an important foundation before the practice of directly participating in the internship. These findings are based on self-reported perceptions by students, rather than direct observations at the internship site. One student got the experience of learning keigo by watching the news. When interviewed, the student said:

*“Sebelum internship hanya dari kampus, dan penerapannya ketika PKL juga pernah karna lembaga pendidikan, dari situ karena ada nihonji jadi bisa diterapkan.”*  
*(Before the internship, it was only available from the campus, and the application was also available from street vendors, which were also available from educational institutions, from there, because there was Nihonji, so that it could be applied.)*

“Untuk keigo awal belajar dari kampus, dan dari berita berbentuk artikel dan video.”

(For the first time, I learned from the campus and from the news in the form of articles and videos.)

However, some studies present different perspectives. Research by Saito et al (2017) showed that learners’ pragmatic development and speech comprehensibility can also be strongly shaped by individual motivation and attitudes rather than solely prior formal learning experiences [22]. Likewise, a recent study by Konno (2021) on Japanese EFL learners found that intrinsic factors such as cultural appreciation and identity construction may outweigh formal training when it comes to pragmatic performance [23]. These contrasting findings suggest that while classroom-based pragmatic learning is valuable, it may not be the only or the most decisive factor in keigo development. Instead, motivation, personal initiative, and authentic communicative practice play equally significant roles. These findings are in line with states that formal pragmatic learning plays a role as initial capital, but its effectiveness has only been tested in real interactions [24].

Table 3. Learning Motivation and Attitude

No	Questions	Response			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I was motivated to study keigo because of the demands of the job during the internship.	37.5%	50%	12.5%	-
2.	I feel that keigo is important to maintain good relations with the Japanese.	50%	37.5%	12.5%	-
3.	I try to use keigo even though I still make mistakes a lot.	12.5%	87.5%	-	-

Table 3 shows that keigo learning motivation is strongly driven by professional needs. As many as 37.5% of participants *strongly agree* and 50% *agree* that job demands are the main factor in learning keigo.

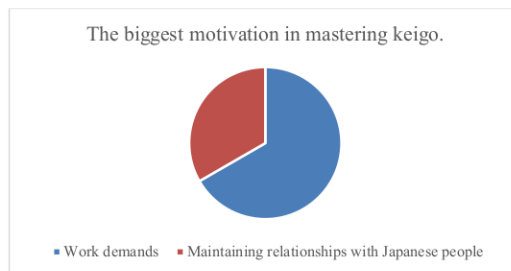


Figure 2. Motivation to master keigo



Figure 2 shows that 3 of the 5 participants interviewed said they mastered keigo because of job demands, and the other two because of maintaining relationships with Japanese people. Participant statement stating

*"motivasinya buat pekerjaan karna sering ketemu customer kalau tidak sengaja menggunakan futsuukei kurang pas."*

*(The motivation for the job is that I often meet customers, so if I accidentally use futsuukei, it is not suitable.)*

*"dari tuntutan pekerjaan yang mengharuskan menggunakan keigo."*  
*(from the demands of jobs that require using Keigo.)*

This shows that the instrumental motivation dimension (motivation due to practical and work needs) is very dominant. In addition, the majority of participants (87.5%) admitted that keigo plays an important role in maintaining good relations with the Japanese. This is reflected in the statement:

*"karna kalau di indonesia kenal pakai bahasa biasa sudah tidak apa-apa, Kalau disini kalau pertama kali ketemu orang, mereka pakai masu kei, karna butuh, tuntutan kerja dan sangat dibutuhkan untuk kegiatan sehari-hari."*

*(Because in Indonesia, if you know someone and use ordinary language, it is okay, but here, when you first meet people, they use masu kei, because we have work demands and are needed for daily activities.)*

Thus, their motivation is not only instrumental but also integrative, namely, the awareness to adapt to Japanese socio-cultural norms. Although only 12.5% of the participants *strongly agree*, almost all (87.5%) admitted to using Keigo even though they still make mistakes often. This fact shows the existence of learning willingness and a consistent positive attitude towards language learning. These findings are in line with and confirm that a combination of instrumental and integrative motivation is a key factor in the success of foreign learners in the context of Japanese culture [25]. The study by Maruki (2022) also emphasizes the true self-expression aspect of keigo learning, showing that learners are driven by the desire to use keigo in cultural and social contexts, not solely because of professional demands [14].

Table 4. Cross-Cultural Awareness

No	Questions	Response			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I understand that keigo reflects the norms of Japanese society's manners.	62.5%	37.5%	-	-
2.	I am aware that the use of keigo can affect how the Japanese judge me.	62.5%	37.5%	-	-
3.	I try to adapt my way of speaking to fit the Japanese work culture.	50%	50%	-	-

As shown in Table 4, the cross-cultural awareness of the participants is relatively high. As many as 62.5% *strongly agree* and 37.5% *agree* that keigo reflects the norms of

manners in Japanese society. All participants also realized that the use of keigo influenced the way Japanese people judged themselves, so the use of language was seen not only as a means of communication, but also as a representation of social identity and attitudes. Furthermore, 100% of participants stated that they tried to adjust their speaking style to align with the Japanese work culture, although the level of approval was split between *strongly agree* and *agree*. The participants' narratives reinforce these findings.

*"Karena senioritas di Jepang sangat tinggi maka terlihat jelas hubungan antara keigo dengan sopan santun terutama dengan senior."*

*(Because seniority in Japan is so high, it is clear that the relationship between keigo and manners is obvious, especially with seniors.)*

*"Benar-benar ada hubungannya keigo dan budaya sopan santun, karena budaya mereka memang sopan santun banget, terus dari situ lah kenapa keigo dipakai, minimal banget menggunakan masu kei. Dan jauh lebih halus keigo, dibanding tingkatan bahasa indonesia."*

*(There is really a relationship between Keigo and the culture of manners, because their culture is indeed very polite, and that is why Keigo is worn, at least using masu kei. Moreover, it is much more subtle than the Indonesian level.)*

The statement shows a deep understanding that keigo is a reflection of the social norms that prevail in Japan, in contrast to Indonesian, in terms of the strict level of politeness in the language:

*"Sangat berkaitan karna bisa dilihat dari bahasa biasa bentuk futsuukei itu kurang sopan jadi sangat berkaitan. Berbeda dengan bahasa indonesia karna jepang ada tingkatan bahasa."*

*(It is very related because it can be seen from ordinary language that the form of futsuukei is not polite, so it is very related. It is different from the Indonesian language because Japan has a language level.)*

Thus, students not only understand keigo as a linguistic skill but also as a cultural competence that requires adjustment of attitudes in interaction. These results are consistent with the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) put forward, which emphasizes the importance of adaptability in cross-cultural communication as the key to successful international interaction [16].

Table 5. Learning Environment and Social Interaction

No	Questions	Response			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I got guidance from my supervisor/tutor on how to use keigo.	-	44.4%	44.4%	11.2%
2.	My colleagues allowed me to practice keigo.	11.1%	55.6%	33.3%	-
3.	The internship work environment helped me to learn and use keigo.	33.3%	33.3%	33.4%	-

The results in Table 5 show that work environment support for keigo learning still varies. Only 44.4% of participants felt that they received direct guidance from their supervisors, while the same proportion stated that they did not receive guidance. Support from colleagues was seen as more positive, with 66.7% of participants stating that they were allowed to practice keigo in their daily interactions. However, perceptions of support for the work environment in general tend to be evenly divided, namely 33.3% *strongly agree*, 33.3% *agree*, and 33.4% *disagree*. This shows that there are differences in experience between participants, which may be influenced by policies, organizational culture, or communication dynamics at the institution where they are interning. Participant statements reinforce these findings.

*“Dengan cara diberitahu bentuknya seperti ini, kalau misalnya sedang berbicara dengan atasan. Lebih ke sering denger, terus ditiru.”*  
*(By being told what it looks like, for example, if you are talking to your boss. More often I hear it, continue to imitate.)*

*“sangat membantu karna langsung dipraktikkan didunia kerjanya langsung, kalau didalam kelas hanya sekedar teori dan praktek juga hanya sama teman jadi lebih sering lupa. Rekan kerja banyak mengajari keigo.”*  
*(It is very helpful because it is directly practiced in the world of work, if in class it is just theory and practice, and also only with friends, so you forget more often. Colleagues teach keigo a lot.)*

The narrative emphasizes that keigo learning in the work environment is more effective because it occurs contextually, in contrast to the classroom atmosphere, which tends to be limited to theory and simulation.

These results are in line with the findings, which emphasize that the opportunity to interact authentically is a key factor in the acquisition of pragmatic Japanese language competencies [26]. One of the most important factors for one's career development is the ability to socialize in the business world [27]. Thus, the support of the learning environment and social interaction plays an important role in strengthening the implementation of keigo, as well as enriching students' cross-cultural experiences.

Table 6. Individual Learning Strategies

No	Questions	Response			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I often take notes or memorize the phrases of keigo that I have just learned.	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%	-
2.	I mimic the way a supervisor or coworker uses keigo.	33.3%	44.5%	22.2%	-
3.	I use digital media (e.g., apps, videos, online dictionaries) to train keigo.	33.3%	44.5%	22.2%	-

Table 5 shows that participants developed various self-study strategies in mastering keigo. As many as 77.8% of participants stated that they routinely recorded or memorized

new expressions they encountered, 77.8% imitated the use of keigo from supervisors or colleagues, and another 77.8% used digital media such as applications, videos, or online dictionaries. This strategy reflects a combination of *observational learning and the use of digital technology in the* language acquisition process. Participant descriptions provide concrete illustrations of this strategy. One of them states:

*“Cara belajarnya yang pertama karna sudah dipelajari juga di kampus itu lebih sering menghafal. Terus kalau untuk sonkeigo jarang dipakai. Kalau di Jepang untuk keigonya cukup di masu kei saja. Kalau leader berbicara kepada manager menggunakan sonkeigo, kemudian sedikit-sekit menirukan dan dianjurkan dan diingatkan untuk menggunakan sonkeigo kepada leader karena bukan teman.”*  
(*The first way of learning is that it has also been studied on campus, memorizing it more often. And then for sonkeigo, it is rarely used. In Japan, for keigo, it is enough to go to masu kei. If the leader talks to the manager using sonkeigo, then it is imitative and it is recommended and reminded to use sonkeigo to the leader because he is not a friend.*)

This statement suggests that memorization strategies are complemented by the practice of imitating communication patterns that correspond to social hierarchies in the Japanese work environment. In addition, some participants said:

*“Banyak menggunakan keigo. Dan langsung kepenerapan, orang jepangnya mengajarkan bahasa keigo dan langsung dipraktikan kepada tamu, kadang bertanya untuk bahasa yang baiknya bagaimana kalau ke tamu.”*  
(*Much using keigo. Furthermore, immediately after being taught, the Japanese people teach the Keigo language and immediately practice it with the guests, sometimes asking for good language on how to address the guests.*)

This narrative emphasizes that hands-on practice in real work situations is an important means for students to strengthen their mastery of keigo, as well as get feedback from native speakers.

The self-study strategies developed by these participants were consistent with the research, which emphasizes that foreign language learners tend to combine formal experiences in the classroom with digital exploration as well as informal practices in everyday life [28]. Thus, the autonomous approach taken by students not only broadens their linguistic understanding but also strengthens pragmatic skills in cross-cultural contexts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research started from the hope that Indonesian students who take part in internship programs in Japan will not only be able to use Japanese correctly, but also be able to adapt to the local culture through mastery of keigo. The results of the study show that students have high motivation to learn, realize the importance of keigo in maintaining social relationships, and try to adapt to the Japanese work culture. Although the support from the work environment varies, students are still able to develop their own learning strategies, for example, by recording expressions, imitating supervisors or colleagues, and utilizing digital

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media. This proves that keigo is understood not only as polite language, but also as a cultural skill that is important for building cross-cultural communication.

In the future, the results of this research can be the basis for designing Japanese language learning that emphasizes the practice of keigo in real situations, both through simulations in the classroom and through digital technology. Follow-up research can also expand the study, for example, by comparing the experiences of students from different campuses or looking at the development of keigo abilities in the long term. Thus, this research not only adds to the understanding of the relationship between language and culture but also provides practical benefits for students' learning, internship programs, and cross-cultural skill development.

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