

COPING STRATEGIES OF INDONESIAN TECHNICAL INTERN TRAINEES IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OF AICHI PREFECTURE

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Abstract: The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) is a common scheme for Indonesian trainees to enter Japan. Among the various employment sectors, the construction sector has high work demands and safety risks. TITP trainees often face problems when entering actual working conditions due to inadequate pre-departure preparation and field requirements. This study aims to describe the problems faced by Indonesian TITP in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture and the coping strategies they have developed. Qualitative method are used through literature review and in-depth interviews. The analysis is conducted from a coping strategies perspective, which examines the efforts individuals make to manage the demands or pressures they face. The results of the study show that trainees face language barriers, work pressure, and vulnerable work positions. To cope with these conditions, trainees develop coping strategies through self-directed learning, social network support, and adaptation to local work models.

Keywords: TITP; Indonesian trainees; Construction sector; Coping strategies; Aichi Prefecture

INTRODUCTION

Japan's current population is in a super-aging situation, where the elderly constitute a very large group, thus triggering various challenges (Iskandar, 2019). Over the past few decades, Japanese society has experienced rapid population aging, which has led to significant changes in the working-age demographic (Cabinet Office, 2023). To address structural deficiencies in the labor market, the Japanese government has implemented a series of policies, with a primary emphasis on increasing productivity and encouraging more inclusive labor participation among citizens. However, as domestic measures have proven insufficient, labor migration policies are gaining attention as a practical and evidence-based measure to address labor market imbalances (MHLW, 2024). The Japanese government has taken steps to address this labor market imbalance by gradually increasing its reliance on foreign workers through various schemes, including the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), which began in 1993. In particular, this policy has shown measurable progress in target sectors, especially those most vulnerable to demographic pressures, such as the construction sector (OECD, 2025).

The construction industry plays an important role in social infrastructure development and contributes significantly to shaping a dynamic future for Japan through efforts such as urban revitalization and regional development. The industry also plays a vital role in contributing significantly to post-disaster recovery, disaster prevention and mitigation, and measures to address infrastructure degradation (Statistics Japan, 2024). However, Japan's construction industry has declined due to the country's slow economic growth. On the one hand,

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since 2014, construction investment has continued to increase despite overall economic stagnation. This phenomenon is due to the need for reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake and demand for infrastructure related to the Tokyo Olympics. However, once these specific demands are met, Japan's construction industry will shrink again. In addition, Japan's aging and declining population will trigger a decline in construction production activity. Given the critical role of the construction industry in maintaining social infrastructure, it is socially imperative to address labor shortages and ensure the continuity of production activities (Shibata, 2021).

Japan continues to face a labor shortage in the construction sector. The number of workers peaked at 4.55 million in 1997, but has gradually declined by about 30% to 3.18 million in 2020. Demographically, more than 36% of workers are now aged 50 or older, compared to only 11.8% who are under 30, highlighting the inevitable problem of an aging workforce and a shortage of young workers entering the sector (Sasaki & Gondo, 2024). To address the issue of a declining and aging workforce in this sector, TITP has been implemented as one of the main solutions to help overcome labor shortages in the Japanese construction industry (Asai & Goso, 2025).

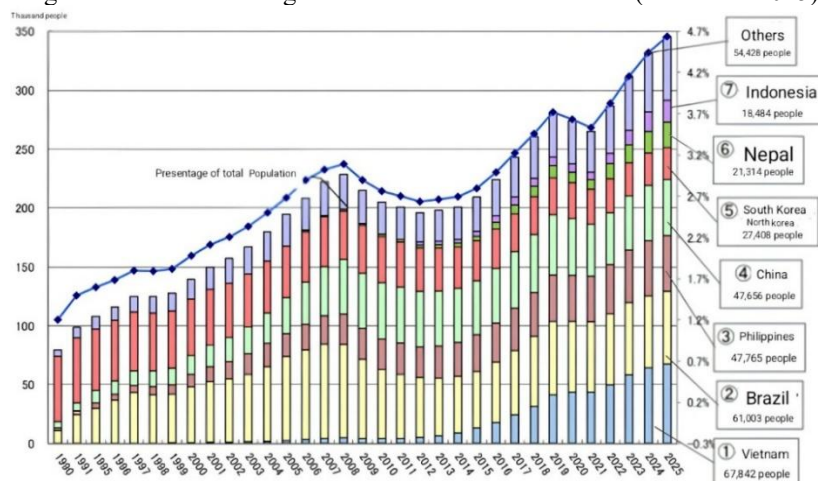
Table 1: Prefectures with the largest number of registered foreign residents (as of June 2025)

| Foreign Residents by Prefecture | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------|
| 1 | Tokyo | 775,340 |
| 2 | Osaka | 360,390 |
| 3 | Aichi | 345,900 |
| 4 | Kanagawa | 306,363 |
| 5 | Saitama | 277,209 |

Source: Immigration Services Agency of Japan

Tokyo ranks first as the region with the highest number of registered foreign residents in Japan as of June 2025, with a total of 775,340 people. This high number reflects Tokyo's role as Japan's political, economic, and social center, which offers job opportunities, education, and relatively more diverse access to public services for foreign residents. In second place, Osaka Prefecture recorded 360,390 foreign residents, demonstrating the strategic role of the Kansai region as a center of trade, tourism, and the service industry that provides a variety of job opportunities for foreign workers. Next, Aichi Prefecture ranked third with 345,900 foreign residents, as a prefecture with a manufacturing and construction sector base that attracts migrant workers. Aichi Prefecture is one of the prefectures with the largest migrant population in Japan. Aichi Prefecture is located near the geographical center of Japan. According to JETRO, this prefecture is known for its balanced development of industry, commerce, and agriculture in Japan. The manufacturing sector here is growing rapidly, with clusters focusing on transportation equipment such as automobiles and aerospace.

Figure 1: Status of Foreign Residents in Aichi Prefecture (as of June 2025)



Source: Aichi Prefectural Government

According to data from the Aichi Prefectural Government in 2025, the number of foreign residents in Aichi Prefecture as of the end of June 2025 was 345,900 people, this number increased by 14,167 compared to the number of foreign residents as of the end of December 2024. The proportion of foreign residents in the total population of Aichi Prefecture was 7,453,054 people. The number of foreign residents contributed 4.64% of the total population in Aichi Prefecture.

The graph shows the status of foreign residents in Aichi Prefecture (as of the end of June 2025) by country, and demonstrates the long-term dynamics of the increase in the number of foreign residents in Aichi Prefecture. The largest number of foreign residents in Aichi Prefecture are from Vietnam (67,842), followed by Brazil (61,003), the Philippines (47,765), China (47,656), and South Korea/North Korea (27,408). Significant contributions also come from Nepal (21,314) and Indonesia (18,484), while the “other” category reaches 54,428. This composition reflects Aichi's characteristics as a manufacturing and construction hub, which has historically attracted migrant workers from both Asian and Latin American countries.

The notable increase in foreign residents from Asian countries indicates that Aichi Prefecture is one of the most attractive destinations for international migration to Japan. The diversity of foreign residents entering Aichi with various residency statuses, one of which is the workforce group, shows a shift in foreign labor sources that increasingly relies on work-based migration and technical training schemes, in line with Japan's labor policy in response to domestic labor shortages. Furthermore, the line showing the proportion of foreign residents to the total population shows a steady increase, confirming that the presence of foreign residents is not only increasing numerically but also becoming more significant in the demographic structure of the region. In other words, foreign residents have become an integral component of the social, economic, and labor dynamics in Aichi Prefecture.

Table 2: Largest Foreign Residents by Residence Status in Aichi (as of June 2025)

| Foreign Residents Based on Residence Status | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Permanent Resident | 104,828 |
| 2 | Long-Term Resident | 42,636 |
| 3 | Technical Intern Training | 39,711 |
| 4 | Engineer, Humanities, International Services | 31,237 |
| 5 | Specific Skills | 26,246 |

Source: Immigration Services Agency of Japan

Based on data from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan as of June 2025, the distribution of foreign residents in Aichi Prefecture shows that the Permanent Resident group is the largest category, with a total of 104,828 people. This indicates that Aichi is a region with a relatively high rate of long-term settlement, reflecting the social and economic stability that encourages migrants to settle permanently. In second place, the Long-Term Resident category recorded 42,636 people, which shows the significant presence of foreign residents with long-term stay status, although not yet permanent.

The Technical Intern Training category ranked third with 39,711 people, confirming Aichi's role as one of the main centers for migrant labor absorption in the TITP scheme. Overall, this distribution pattern shows a combination of long-term migration and labor mobility as the main characteristics of the foreign population structure in Aichi Prefecture.

In particular, the high number of foreign nationals in the Technical Intern Training category, which has reached a significant number and ranks among the top three categories in Aichi, reflects the important role of this program in Japan's migrant labor structure. The Technical Intern Training Program was officially launched by the Japanese government in 1993. The program initially originated from overseas affiliates, joint ventures, or partner companies. The duration was initially limited to one year, then the maximum contract duration was increased to two years in 1997, and then to three years after the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 2010, which forms the basis of the program to this day (IHRB, 2017).

One concern is the increasing number of TITPs in the construction sector. Although many migrant workers are already employed in the construction sector, Japan is still unable to meet the increasing demand for domestic labor, so it continues to accelerate the recruitment of foreign workers, most of whom come through the TITP program (IHRB, 2017). Based on JITCO's explanation of the Technical Intern Training Program, after TITP participants enter Japan, they will first undergo Japanese language training and other preparatory training. This is aimed at providing them with the necessary knowledge and information, such as their legal protections, and then practical skills, and so on, in relation to their employment with Japanese companies or implementing organizations.

Lower-skilled workers are vulnerable to challenges such as excessive recruitment fees from recruitment agencies, as well as exploitation and abuse in the workplace (IOM 2021). Technical interns, like many other migrant workers worldwide, face various difficulties adapting to new environments. Globally, migrant workers are more vulnerable to workplace risks, which can result in poor health, increased risk of injury, and higher mortality rates (Khin et al. 2024).

The IOM (2025) explains that the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) is the primary legal framework governing the entry, stay, permitted activities, and departure of foreign nationals in Japan (including TITP). This law establishes a system of residence statuses that strictly defines the scope of activities that foreign nationals can engage in while in Japan, including employment. Through this system, the ICRRA regulates the legality of employment by linking labor participation to specific residence statuses, while granting administrative authority to the Ministry of Justice to manage visa issuance, extension of stay, and enforcement actions. Another legal framework for labor migration in Japan is the Act on Proper Technical Intern Training and Protection of Technical Intern Trainees. Its primary purpose is to ensure the proper implementation of the TITP, including its protective elements. This Act aims to protect trainees from abuses such as excessive working hours, unfair dismissal, and poor living conditions, as well as to promote ethical recruitment and fair employment practices (IOM, 2025).

In discussing the role of TITP in the structure of migrant labor in Japan, it is important to place this scheme in a more specific sectoral context, one of which is the construction industry. Based on a 2024 report from the IOM, the total number of TITPs in Japan working in the construction sector is 107,229, reflecting Japan's high demand for labor in labor-intensive sectors and a shortage of domestic workers. The construction industry is much more labor-intensive than other sectors, where workers are often faced with workloads that exceed their physical capabilities. The construction sector is often characterized by suboptimal working conditions and physical workloads that can potentially cause excessive fatigue and injury (Hashiguchi et al. 2020). The entire construction industry should ensure expected productivity while considering the working conditions and environment for workers and ensuring their health and safety (Choudhry, 2017).

Construction projects face challenges every day. As with any construction site, the workforce tends to change as the project progresses, and the varying skills, experiences, and health and safety risks of these workers must be managed effectively (Hashiguchi et al. 2020). TITP participants have become an indispensable workforce, performing at the same level of performance as Japanese workers. In the process, they often encounter various challenges, with language barriers being the most challenging aspect. Given the varying levels of Japanese language proficiency among TITP participants, appropriate responses are essential to minimize these challenges (Sasaki & Gondo, 2024).

Salombe et al. (2025) explain that teaching in many job training institutions in Indonesia and recipient organizations emphasizes formal grammar, neglecting the language commonly used in the actual workplace. There is a neglect of teaching technical vocabulary, local dialects, natural speaking speed, and informal language used in communication. This has a direct impact on trainees, who experience difficulties in understanding instructions, communicating with colleagues, and adapting to everyday life. Furthermore, Iskandar (2016) explains in his dissertation that his research findings show that trainees do not receive detailed information about what they will encounter when dealing with complex products. Complex here refers to the differences between the social systems and work environments that have regulated them thus far, compared to the systems that exist in Japan.

Furthermore, some companies have taken steps to build positive relationships, not only with foreign interns but also with Japanese workers, by organizing activities outside of work hours. For example, accompanying them on grocery shopping trips, introducing them to Japanese cuisine, and engaging in sports activities. However, in some companies, support for these migrant workers remains limited and does not extend to other aspects of life support (Sasaki & Gondo, 2024).

The construction sector in Japan (such as demand for infrastructure projects and others) faces labor shortages that have prompted construction companies to recruit foreign workers

through various channels, one of which is through TITP. This study on the construction sector will capture the dynamics of demand and worker adaptation in the context of real needs in the field. The purpose of this research is to explain the problems faced by Indonesian TITP trainees who enter the Japanese construction sector in Aichi Prefecture. This research focuses on Aichi Prefecture because it has one of the highest concentrations of foreign residents in Japan and is known as a center for manufacturing and infrastructure projects, resulting in high demand for foreign workers, including TITP workers.

This study aims to enrich the literature on migrant workers by focusing the analysis on the direct experiences of Indonesian TITP trainees, particularly in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture. Previous studies often emphasized language barriers and structural vulnerabilities on migrant workers; this study uses a coping strategy perspective to understand how Indonesian trainees assess and respond to the pressures they face in their working lives in Japan. Thus, this study not only reveals the forms of pressure experienced by Indonesian trainees specifically in the construction sector, but also highlights the coping strategies they use to survive in the context of unequal working relationships.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The coping strategy perspective is used as a framework in the analysis of this research. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as a continuously changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are assessed as exceeding or surpassing an individual's resources. In other words, coping is an effort to manage psychological stress. Lazarus and Folkman divide coping into two main categories. First, problem-focused coping, which are strategies aimed at directly changing or controlling the source of stress, such as seeking information, developing new skills, or taking concrete actions to improve working conditions. Second, emotion-focused coping, which are strategies aimed at managing emotional responses to stress, such as controlling emotions, seeking social support, or accepting situations that cannot be changed.

Lazarus (1999) explains that coping is related to how people manage life conditions that can cause stress. To a certain extent, stress and coping can be said to be interrelated. When coping is ineffective, stress levels tend to increase; however, when coping is effective, stress levels tend to decrease. However, caution is needed in using this as a principle, because people who are effective at coping may exert themselves more than those who are ineffective, thereby creating greater potential stress for themselves, even though they are usually able to cope with it. Overall, coping is an important part of emotional responses and stress. Ignoring how it works means not fully understanding why individuals continue to struggle to adapt to ongoing pressures and life changes.

Many coping or adjustment activities are anticipatory in nature, meaning that a person anticipates a future dangerous confrontation, such as failing a test, performing in public, or personal criticism, and this anticipation leads them to prepare for the potential danger. By planning and preparing in advance, individuals can prevent these problems from occurring or be better prepared to deal with them when they do occur. When this preparation is effective, it can change the way a person experiences the situation, potentially replacing feelings of fear or sadness with feelings of success or relief (Monat & Lazarus, 1977).

People use various coping processes, depending on their personal characteristics, the nature of environmental demands, existing conditions, and how they evaluate these things. They engage in various preparatory activities. For example, they may feel anxious without taking adequate steps to improve their effectiveness in dealing with the situation; they practice positive mental attitudes; they try to convince themselves that the problem will resolve itself or that there is no problem at all; they seek support from those closest to them or people they

trust; they try various modes of stress prevention, such as transcendental meditation, psychotherapy, relaxation, hypnosis, yoga, etc. (Monat & Lazarus, 1977).

The coping strategy perspective is used to explain how Indonesian migrant workers on TITP in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture respond to the various work difficulties they face. The basis of this theory states that work stress can arise when environmental demands—such as lack of training, heavy physical workload, risk of accidents, and language barriers—are assessed to exceed an individual's resource capacity. Workers actively assess the level of threat and their own abilities, which then determines their choice of coping strategies, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping refers to interns' efforts to actively address the source of the problem, for example, through self-directed learning of work skills, improving Japanese language skills, or seeking help from colleagues and seniors. Meanwhile, emotion-focused coping is understood as a strategy for managing emotional responses to work stress, such as accepting the situation, adjusting expectations, or reinforcing the personal meaning of work experiences. Using this framework can help identify the types of problems faced by TITP interns, but also explain the dynamics of their adaptation in the TITP program and working conditions in the construction sector in Japan.

The blue-collar workers are conceptualized by Doeringer and Piore (1971) as production and operational workers whose employment is regulated by the internal labor market rather than the competitive external labor market. Blue-collar workers are defined more by the way labor is organized, trained, allocated, and controlled within the company than by income or education levels. Doeringer and Piore define the internal labor market as an employment system in which wages, job assignments, and promotions are determined by the company's own administrative regulations. Mobility occurs only within the company, not through external recruitment. Blue-collar workers are the main group that dominates this internal labor market, especially in the manufacturing, construction, and other manual sectors. Once recruited, their careers are shaped by the company system, seniority rules, and company-specific practices, rather than by open market competition.

Referring to Doeringer and Piore (1971), the position of Indonesian trainees in TITP can be analytically understood as blue-collar workers. TITP trainees enter Japanese companies not through the competitive job market, but through administratively mediated recruitment channels involving sending organizations, supervisory organizations, and host companies. This places them directly in entry-level or beginner-level operational positions that correspond to blue-collar work. Viewed from this concept, it shows that the status of TITP trainees is that of blue-collar workers who are structurally embedded at the lowest level of the internal labor market, characterized by jobs that are bound by strict rules and limited mobility.

To capture the micro-level dynamics of how migrant workers respond to the daily stressors in their work environments that they directly encounter, a coping strategies framework is used. This framework focuses on the individual's role and provides more precise tools for analyzing how trainees interpret and respond to concrete challenges in their daily lives. Therefore, the coping strategy framework offers a more appropriate analytical perspective for examining how TITP trainees actively address workplace stressors.

This research applies the coping strategy framework by explicitly mapping these two forms of coping (problem-focused and emotion-focused) to the three main barriers or problems faced by Indonesian TITP trainees identified in the construction sector: (1) language and communication barriers, (2) long working hours and inadequate wages, and (3) workplace violence. Through this analytical mapping, this research demonstrates how various types of stressors elicit different coping responses, and how these responses are influenced not only by individual capacity but also by structural conditions embedded within the TITP system.

By integrating coping strategy theory with the empirical realities of migrant labor in the construction sector, this framework enables a grounded analysis of how TITP Indonesia

trainees actively address challenges in the workplace. This highlights that coping strategies are not merely individual psychological mechanisms, but also practices influenced by social and structural factors that reflect broader patterns related to the uncertainty of working conditions and power relations within migrant labor programs.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings given by individuals or groups to a social or humanitarian issue. This approach is suitable for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of TITP Indonesia interns working in the construction sector. The literature review method was used to obtain data from relevant and related previous research, and in-depth interviews were used to support and supplement the data. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method used to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences in great detail (Bryman, 2012). In-depth interviews were used to generate more in-depth data on individual experiences.

Table 3: Informant Data

| Name | Age | Sex | Hometown | Education | Duration of Stay in Japan | Domiciled in Aichi | Employment Sector in Construction |
|------|-----|------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| GMD | 26 | Male | Medan | High School (SMA) | 2 Year | Inuyama | Heavy vehicle operator |
| LG | 27 | Male | Lombok Timur | High School (SMA) | 1 Year | Nishio | Road construction |
| RD | 23 | Male | Medan | High School (SMA) | 2 Year | Ichinomiya | Scaffolding |

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants, TITP Indonesia interns working in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture. Each interview session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Ethical considerations were also carefully observed throughout this research process. Before the interviews were conducted, the informants were briefed on the research objectives and their rights as research participants, and their consent was obtained. To ensure confidentiality, initials were used.

This research adopted the criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Several techniques are used to enhance credibility. First, a verification process of participants (member checking), in which key interpretations are confirmed with selected participants to ensure that their experiences are accurately portrayed. Next, data triangulation was applied by comparing the narratives of various participants to identify recurring patterns and consistent themes related to workplace challenges and coping strategies. In addition, the researchers conducted a careful and systematic analysis of the data through detailed coding. This contributed to the consistency and transparency of the findings, thereby strengthening the overall reliability of the research. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to examine the coping strategies employed by TITP Indonesia interns.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data obtained through interviews with TITP Indonesia trainees working in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture, it was found that the trainees' experiences showed

recurring thematic patterns related to Language and Communication Barriers, Long Working Hours and Inadequate Wages, and Workplace Violence. In all three contexts, the trainees employed various coping strategies, both problem-solving and emotional response management, as a form of adaptation to the work conditions they faced.

Language and Communication Barriers

Language barriers are one of the most prominent challenges in the work experience of TITP trainees in Japan. The construction sector, which demands a precise understanding of instructions and intensive teamwork, as well as compliance with work safety standards, makes Japanese language skills not only a means of communication but also a key prerequisite for continued employment. Language is a key element in harmonization, which is often described as a cost-free barrier (Iskandar, 2016). The limited language skills of trainees have the potential to affect work quality and social relationships in the workplace. The difference between the Japanese language learning acquired by TITP trainees during the pre-departure stage at the Job Training Institute named *Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja* (LPK) in Indonesia, and the language and communication skills required in actual conditions in Japan creates a significant gap.

Technical instructions conveyed using specialized construction terminology, the use of local dialects, and the speed of communication in Japanese work environments often exceed the language abilities of trainees. This situation places TITP trainees in a vulnerable position, not only in terms of work performance, but also in terms of occupational safety and health, given that misunderstandings can directly lead to accidents on construction sites. Furthermore, language barriers also shape the dynamics of social relationships between trainees and senior workers, supervisors, and local colleagues. Limitations in expressing opinions, asking questions, or voicing complaints can increase the vulnerability of interns. Language is not merely a medium of communication, but also a social mechanism that mediates access to information, support, and recognition in the workplace. Based on the interview results, all three informants expressed the same views regarding language and communication barriers.

“The difficulty I experienced here was with the language. Even though I had studied at the LPK, once I arrived in Japan, my language skills were still far from what was required. Another difficulty was the language used in the field, and understanding the fast speech of Japanese people.” (GMD, heavy vehicle operator)

This statement from GMD emphasizes that even though Japanese language training was provided during the training period at the LPK, it turned out that when they entered the actual working conditions in Japan, the Japanese language training provided at the LPK was still insufficient. GMD also said that there were difficulties with the language used in the workplace, referring to the vocabulary related to construction work used in the workplace. Furthermore, GMD explained that the language training tended to focus only on general Japanese based on textbooks, with no training on vocabulary or terms related to construction. This is also in line with what was conveyed by RD, who also experienced difficulties with the language and construction terms used in the workplace.

“The language used in the workplace is different from daily language. Then I had difficulty understanding the names of materials and tools used in scaffolding work, because I had never been taught about construction words at the LPK before.” (RD, scaffolding)

RD said that he had difficulty with the language used in the field because he only had basic Japanese language skills. Furthermore, RD's statement emphasized that Japanese language lessons at LPK did not cover language lessons that were relevant to the type of work of the trainees themselves. In terms of communication, interviews with the three informants—GMD, LG, and RD—revealed that the lack of speaking practice during their studies in Indonesia had become an obstacle for them when communicating in Japan, both when trying to speak Japanese and when listening to Japanese people with certain dialects who tended to speak quickly. In this case, although tone emphasis and phonological differences rarely affect communication, differences in morphology and vocabulary can greatly hinder foreign speakers' understanding of Japanese (Takeuchi, 2023).

From the perspective of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping strategy, language barriers can be understood as a source of stress that triggers certain cognitive and behavioral responses from interns. Interns are not only faced with the technical demands of adapting to construction work but also with the need to manage the pressure caused by communication limitations. The interviews revealed how interns employed coping strategies to deal with language challenges in the Japanese work environment. The coping strategies employed by the three informants in dealing with language and communication barriers tended to be similar, namely by trying to learn languages they did not yet understand, both common languages and those used in the workplace.

“I often ask my fellow interns and seniors from Indonesia about sentence patterns that I don't know, as well as vocabulary used in the workplace. I often practice speaking Japanese on my own and continue to study the language in the early stages of my work.” (LG, road construction)

This statement from LG reflects an active, problem-focused coping strategy for dealing with language and communication barriers in the workplace. LG demonstrated conscious efforts to reduce the language gap in two ways: utilizing social support from fellow interns and senior Indonesians, and self-study initiatives through speaking practice and expanding vocabulary around constructions used in the workplace. Similar to LG, RD also actively sought to overcome her language difficulties.

“Because there are many types of materials and tools used in this scaffolding work, I handle it by carrying a pen and a small notebook with me every day. During breaks, I write down the names of the materials, items, and tools that have been used, while continuing to try to memorize them.” (RD, scaffolding)

From the perspective of Lazarus and Folkman's coping strategy, the coping carried out by LG and RD indicates a primary appraisal process that interprets language limitations as a controllable source of stress, followed by a secondary appraisal that results in adaptive strategies in the form of increasing self-capacity. Thus, the coping strategies employed not only serve to overcome daily communication difficulties but also strengthen self-confidence, minimize the risk of misunderstanding work instructions, and reduce dependence on others.

Based on the interview data, all three informants stated the same thing: that the Japanese they learned at LPK in Indonesia was insufficient for their needs once they arrived in Japan, and that the language taught tended to be textbook Japanese rather than the language used in daily life. The informants' limited Japanese language proficiency caused them to rely on imitation and nonverbal cues, which often resulted in an incomplete understanding of instructions. This indicates that language proficiency plays a crucial role in shaping not only the effectiveness of communication but also awareness and understanding of workplace safety.

Language and communication barriers have a direct and significant impact on workplace safety at construction sites (language barrier → miscommunication → unsafe action → accident risk). Limited understanding of instructions in Japanese often results in trainees not fully grasping safety procedures, thereby increasing the likelihood of improper tool use and unsafe work practices. Several informants noted that they tend to follow instructions without fully understanding them, which can increase the risk of accidents, particularly in high-risk construction environments. Additionally, the inability to read safety signs and warning labels written in Japanese reduces situational awareness, making workers more vulnerable to hazards. Therefore, clear understanding and communication, as well as training supported by language assistance, are essential for maintaining a safe work environment and reducing preventable incidents at construction sites.

Long Working Hours and Inadequate Wages

Working hours that exceed formal standards are often a central issue that affects the experience of workers in various sectors. Based on Article 32 of Japan's Labor Standards Act, normal working hours for workers are set at a maximum of 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week, excluding rest periods. In terms of rest periods, this law also requires employers to provide at least 45 minutes of rest time if working hours exceed 6 hours, and 1 hour of rest time if working hours exceed 8 hours. In addition, workers are entitled to at least one day off per week or four days off per four-week period. In terms of overtime work, employers are only allowed to request workers to work overtime if there is a written agreement between the company and worker representatives known as an Article 36 Agreement, which must be reported to the Labor Standards Inspection Office. Japanese labor law sets a general overtime limit of a maximum of 45 hours per month and 360 hours per year, with certain exceptions under special circumstances.

Referring to Iskandar's dissertation (2016), field data shows that a large number of trainees from Indonesia do not fully understand the implications of the employment contracts they sign. For them, the contract feels like a 'trap' that forces them to accept conditions 'like it or not', leaving them stuck in an uncomfortable situation with no room to demand their individual rights. The TITP trainees are in a structurally vulnerable position to exploitation, particularly with regard to working hours, including excessive overtime, limited rest periods, and, in some cases, a lack of transparency regarding the wage and overtime compensation system (Verité, 2018).

Iskandar's dissertation (2016) also explains the unequal power relations between Japan and Indonesia, which have the potential to place trainees in a situation of structural vulnerability. Dependence on the receiving and sending organizations in determining the continuity of training and employment status tends to place trainees in a subordinate position. As a result, they have limited space to negotiate working conditions, voice complaints, or refuse unfair treatment. Thus, this power imbalance can be understood as a key factor that shapes the vulnerability of trainees, while also influencing the coping strategies they develop in dealing with work pressure, status uncertainty, and the risk of exploitation.

In actual sites, according to a report by Verité (2018), various human rights organizations and independent research indicate that technical interns often experience situations where their actual working hours exceed formal standards, particularly when facing production deadlines or project requirements. For example, some TITP participants reported working significantly beyond normal working hours, including high levels of overtime without appropriate overtime compensation. In the construction industry, these excessive working hours are often exacerbated by the time-intensive nature of projects, pressure to meet production targets, and a multi-layered subcontracting system, all of which have the potential to push interns to work beyond their normal working hours.

Based on interviews with informants, GMD and RD face situations where working hours are sometimes uncertain. GMD said that on regular holidays such as Sundays, they often still come to work when there are many projects to be done, and they only get time off on certain major holidays such as Golden Weeks and winter or summer breaks. This indicates the uncertainty of their working hours, and the intensity of these working hours reflects the structural conditions inherent in the construction sector. In line with GMD, RD, who works on building scaffolding, also faces long working hours, namely overtime. RD explained that they are often asked to work overtime when the company has a lot of projects, and they sometimes work overtime until 9 p.m.

From the statements of GMD and RD, it can be understood that TITP interns face long or excessive working hours that are inconsistent. The practice of continuing to work on regular holidays and long overtime hours until late at night, especially when project workloads increase, shows that production needs and company targets are often prioritized over fulfilling interns' rights to adequate rest time. This situation reflects the vulnerability of interns, whose limited bargaining power in the face of long working hours can potentially lead to physical exhaustion. In facing these conditions, GMD and RD said the same thing, namely that they could only comply with and follow the work schedule, continue to come to work, and try to stay motivated. RD explained that when he feels tired from this work schedule and pressure, he often contacts his family in Indonesia to strengthen himself, and by reflecting on and remembering his initial intentions and goals for working in Japan, by this RD can maintain his enthusiasm and motivation.

Based on the statements from these two informants, the coping strategies used by interns in dealing with long working hours and the requirement to work on holidays and overtime are emotion-focused coping, through efforts to manage emotions and reframe situations positively (positive reappraisal). The statements of GMD and RD indicate that they do not have adequate structural space to directly change working conditions, so the responses taken are more directed at managing internal attitudes and motivation in order to maintain self-functioning in stressful situations. This strategy reflects a form of psychological adaptation that aims to minimize the negative effects of fatigue and demotivation. However, it also indicates the limited bargaining power of interns, where compliance with long working hours is a pragmatic choice rather than negotiating working conditions that are considered less than ideal.

Apart from working hours, LG specifically stated that he encountered one problem, which was the inadequacy of basic wages:

“I have never received a pay slip here, and the salary I receive has remained the same as it was from the beginning, even though I was told there had been a salary increase. I have asked the company directly, and they said it had been given to the kumiai. Then I also asked the kumiai, but I still did not receive a pay slip. I do not know the details of my salary and the deductions from it.” (LG, road construction)

The problem faced by LG is a form of ambiguity and lack of transparency on the part of both the company and the *kumiai* (accepting organization) regarding wages. The absence of pay slips indicates limited access to formal documents that should enable workers to verify wage components, deductions, and periodic salary changes. The narrative of mutual buck-passing between the company and the *kumiai* reflects an unclear mechanism in which no party provides a substantive explanation for the stated wage increase. This statement from LG reinforces the extremely vulnerable position of trainees. This structural vulnerability, as trainees, is characterized by limited bargaining power and a lack of formal channels for obtaining detailed information regarding the wages they are entitled to.

*“Regarding my pay slip, I have tried asking the company and the *kumiai* directly, but they only responded formally, and I still have not received an explanation regarding my salary. I have also conveyed this to the LPK, but there is still no clarity. I can only wait for an answer while continuing to ask about this matter.”*
(LG, road construction)

This statement indicates the informant's proactive efforts in dealing with a multi-layered institutional structure—involving companies, *kumiai*, and LPK—to obtain clarity on his wage rights. However, the lack of substantive responses from all these actors reflects the limited effectiveness of formal complaint channels and reinforces the picture of procedural uncertainty experienced by TITP apprentices. Interpretatively, the statement “can only wait” reflects a position of dependence and low bargaining power in transnational labor relations, where the strategies available to informants tend to be fewer. In this context, the informants' experiences show how the lack of wage transparency and formal documentation, such as pay slips, leads to the formation of emotion-focused coping patterns in the form of acceptance and repeated requests for clarity regarding wages.

Findings regarding long working hours and inadequate wages indicate a gap between Japan's labor regulatory framework and its implementation in actual conditions. Although Japan has relatively strict regulations under the Labor Standards Act, which sets limits on working hours and mandates the payment of overtime wages, practices in some construction sectors reveal weak oversight. In this context, TITP trainees are in a vulnerable position due to their dependence on the company, which limits their ability to refuse exploitation or report a violation. Furthermore, protection mechanisms such as OTIT are not yet fully accessible to TITP trainees, primarily due to language barriers, a lack of information, and concerns about consequences such as contract termination by the company.

In this context, strengthening the role of *kumiai*/unions is crucial to closing gaps in the implementation of labor regulations. Normatively, *kumiai* in Japan have a mandate to ensure compliance with working hour standards and wage payments. However, in practice, resource constraints and the complexity of the subcontracting structure in the construction sector reduce the effectiveness of such oversight. The key point here is that *kumiai* oversight of trainees must be continuously strengthened so that monitoring can be carried out evenly across the various job sectors occupied by TITP trainees. On the other hand, *kumiai* have the potential to serve as an alternative protection mechanism for migrant workers through advocacy and collective bargaining.

Workplace Violence

Violence in the workplace against trainees in TITP includes verbal abuse and intimidation (power harassment), physical assault or threats, and forced labor practices. In the context of TITP, violence is not only understood as physical acts but also as a form of structural coercion that reduces workers' freedom, such as threats of contract termination, wage payment termination, or mobility restrictions, which ultimately trap interns in unsafe working conditions (IHRB, 2017).

The workplace violence experienced by TITP interns is not only individual in nature but also structural. Individual violence refers to direct actions taken by specific individuals, such as supervisors or senior colleagues, and includes verbal abuse, intimidation, and discriminatory treatment. Meanwhile, structural violence takes the form of systemic conditions within the TITP framework that indirectly enable or even perpetuate the vulnerability of interns' positions, such as dependence on host companies, limited access to grievance mechanisms, and unequal power dynamics between interns and employers.

Rustam (2023) posits that the violence experienced by Indonesian TITP trainees is a phenomenon that does not always manifest physically, but also through relational and structural practices in the workplace. Violence is understood as part of an unequal power relationship between host companies, supervisors, and trainees, where implied threats, psychological pressure, and restrictions on negotiation space are considered the main mechanisms for disciplining migrant workers. These conditions exacerbate the structural vulnerability of trainees, not only due to their blue-collar status but also their dependence on the company and the *kumiai*, which limits their ability to resist or report adverse treatment. The violence operates in a continuous and relatively hidden pattern. Interviews revealed one case of verbal abuse experienced by GMD.

“I often receive unpleasant comments from other trainees, such as from senior trainees from Myanmar. They already have basic knowledge and experience in heavy equipment work, while we have none. Because of this, we often receive demeaning comments.” (GMD, heavy vehicle operator)

This explanation indicates that there are relationship issues in the work environment faced by GMD, particularly in the form of verbal abuse from fellow trainees. Differences in background, skills, and work experience, as seen in trainees from Myanmar who already have skills in operating heavy equipment, create informal hierarchical relationships among the trainees. This relationship is then reflected in a communication pattern that tends to be condescending, where interns with lower initial abilities are viewed as the weaker party. This condition not only shows the existence of competition and inequality in multinational work environments but also has the potential to cause psychological pressure, reduce self-confidence, and hinder the learning process and social adjustment in daily work activities. GMD then responded proactively to this issue.

“Our position is certainly uncomfortable with the comments from senior trainees from other countries, because we don't have any experience in this job yet. I deal with this by continuing to try to learn and understand this job well, being enthusiastic, and actively asking questions about this job to avoid mistakes at work.” (GMD, heavy vehicle operator)

This statement reflects an adaptive coping strategy oriented toward problem-focused coping in dealing with social pressure and positional inequality in the work environment. Instead of responding to verbal abuse with withdrawal or confrontation, GMD chose to improve his personal capacity through a process of continuous learning, maintaining motivation, and building active communication by asking questions of those who were more experienced and willing to help. This strategy demonstrates an effort to transform the source of stress, such as limited experience, into an opportunity for self-development. At the same time, enthusiasm and openness to learning also serve as emotional regulators, helping informants maintain a sense of control and self-esteem amid unfavorable relationships with fellow trainees in the work environment.

Furthermore, from the results of other interviews, it was discovered that RD experienced physical violence:

“I have experienced physical violence from my superiors here. From my head, body, and feet, I have been beaten and kicked. It's not just me; other senior Indonesian trainees before me have also been abused by superiors. When someone else makes a mistake, I am also affected by that mistake, and even when I have

done nothing wrong, my superiors look for mistakes and abuse me, for example, by hitting me.” (RD, scaffolding)

RD's statement indicates a serious problem in the form of physical violence in the workplace, which reflects the unequal power relationship between trainees and their superiors. The act of beating not only violates ethical and professional norms but also indicates the potential for the abuse of authority within the hierarchical structure of the workplace. This situation places interns in a highly vulnerable position, both physically and psychologically, and creates an unsafe and fearful work environment. RD explained that he frequently experienced verbal and physical violence at work, even though he hadn't committed any specific offense that violated or hindered his work. He stated that he was under significant mental and physical stress. In addition to the physical violence, RD also faced a slow response from his *kumiai*.

“I have tried reporting it to the kumiai, but their response is always slow, and no action is taken. Then I slowly gathered evidence, secretly recording the voice with my cell phone in my pocket, photographing the scars from the beatings, as evidence that such violence existed from my superiors, and I tried reporting it again to the kumiai and the LPK.” (RD, scaffolding)

The efforts made by RD are active coping strategies oriented towards self-protection through institutional efforts and strengthening evidence (problem-focused coping). RD first tried to use formal channels by reporting the incident to the *kumiai*, which is the party that apprentices depend on. However, the slow response and lack of action reflect the *kumiai*'s lack of an active role in helping trainees with their problems. This encourages informants to develop alternative strategies, which involve independently collecting documentation of the treatment they have experienced.

Through the coping strategy framework of Lazarus and Folkman, this is seen as a dominant form of problem-focused coping triggered by the informant's primary appraisal of the situation as a serious threat in the form of physical violence to safety and justice in the work environment. When the *kumiai* response was deemed inadequate, the informant conducted a secondary appraisal, realizing the need to develop alternative strategies. RD's actions of recording the voices and photographing the traces of the physical violence he experienced can be understood as an effort to overcome the forms of violence he experienced so that they would not continue. This also represents an imbalance of power relations and the absence of effective protection mechanisms. At the same time, this strategy also contains an emotion-focused coping dimension, because gathering evidence serves to strengthen a sense of control and reduce anxiety and helplessness arising from experiences of violence and slow institutional responses from the *kumiai*. Thus, the informants' coping shows a dual adaptive pattern, combining problem-solving and emotional efforts in the need for security, where the collection of evidence in the workplace serves as a form of control over situations that were previously beyond the reach of formal protection.

Efforts to report workplace violence within the context of the TITP program are not without risks for trainees. Since their residency status depends on the host company, reporting incidents could potentially lead to contract termination. In RD's case, before he decided to report to *kumiai*, it is known that he feared further violence after reporting the incident, and he was also worried about being ostracized in his workplace. RD remained in a position where he was vulnerable to violence at the company because he was afraid to report it; it wasn't until things became unbearable that he finally mustered the courage to file a report and gather evidence of the violence. Furthermore, the role of the *kumiai*, who often sides with the company,

also reduces the trainee's chances of obtaining protection. This situation creates a structural dilemma, where the trainee must choose between keeping his job or facing the social consequences of reporting the incident.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian TITP trainees in the construction sector in Aichi Prefecture are under interrelated structural pressures, and they form adaptive coping patterns in dealing with the pressures they experience. Language and communication barriers narrow the space for dialogue and negotiation between trainees and companies or *kumiai*. Although the construction sector is often considered a sector that prioritizes labor in its work, in reality, the language aspect cannot be ignored. Language continues to play an important role in the adaptation and sustainability of trainees' work in various sectors, such as the construction sector. The findings of the study show that long working hours are a characteristic of jobs in the construction sector. In these conditions, apprentices can only comply with the long working hours in order to maintain job stability and the continuity of the apprenticeship program. Although this strategy functions as a survival mechanism, it has the potential to reproduce vulnerability in the long term. In addition, construction sector jobs are known for their harsh working environments, causing apprentices to be vulnerable to workplace violence, both verbal and physical.

The statements from the informants reflect coping strategies that cover both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, depending on the situations they face, in order to survive and continue in the TITP program in Japan. Problem-focused coping is used by trainees in dealing with language and communication barriers in the work environment. Emotion-focused coping is used by interns in dealing with long working hours and cases of wage discrepancies. As well as a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping in situations where they experience violence in the workplace. This condition emphasizes the importance of strengthening the role of sending and accepting organizations in terms of adjusting language training, improving access to transparent information regarding employment contracts, and providing safe and responsive complaint mechanisms for trainees. In order to improve the readiness of trainees when entering actual working conditions in Japan, as well as fulfilling the rights of foreign trainees while working in Japan, especially in high-risk sectors such as construction.

This research suggests the need for LPK to enhance pre-departure training by integrating Japanese language instruction tailored to the trainees' specific job roles, rights-based education, and comprehensive information regarding the trainees' rights, obligations, and protections while working in Japan. Next, to further enhance their effectiveness, *kumiai* should prioritize strengthening monitoring functions by implementing periodic inspections, independent translation services, anonymous reporting mechanisms to safeguard reporters' identities, and readily accessible complaint channels. Furthermore, companies need to implement transparent employment contracts, regulate overtime in accordance with contracts and regulations, and provide protection for trainees in their companies against workplace violence.

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