



Perceptions of the Roles of Care Worker Technical Intern Trainees among Myanmar Learners of the Japanese Language

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Abstract

Background: In rapidly aging societies such as Japan, the shortage of nursing and caregiving personnel is a critical concern. To address this, Japan introduced the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) to accept care worker candidates from Asian countries and later expanded the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) to include caregiving. While TITP in caregiving has received limited research attention, previous studies suggest challenges similar to those observed among EPA care worker candidates. Understanding the motivations and perceptions of trainees prior to departure is essential for developing effective education programs that foster successful integration into Japan's long-term care sector.

Methods: This qualitative study involved 16 students from two Japanese language schools in Yangon and Bago, Myanmar, who aspired to become care worker technical intern trainees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their perceptions of caregiving roles and motivations for pursuing the TITP pathway. Data were analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Kagawa University, Faculty of Medicine.

Results: The central theme identified was that "Becoming a care worker technical intern trainee is valuable." Participants valued Japanese proficiency as essential for working in Japan, motivating them to enroll in language schools. They associated caregiving with moral worth, describing it as "a good deed" and emphasizing respect for older adults as family members. Their motivations reflected economic expectations, personal growth, and aspirations for future self-realization, shaped by positive views of Japan and awareness of Myanmar's social context.

Conclusion: For prospective TITP care workers in Myanmar, caregiving represents moral, economic, and future-oriented value. These findings highlight the importance of pre-departure programs that integrate Japanese language, caregiving skills, cultural understanding, and ethical principles to promote smoother adaptation and professional development.

Introduction

Japan is facing a rapidly aging society, with a growing proportion of older adults and an increasing demand for long-term care. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare [1], approximately 2.4 million care workers will be required by fiscal year 2026, representing an increase of about 250,000 from 2022 levels. This demand is projected to grow further to 2.72 million by 2040, resulting in a shortfall of roughly 570,000 care workers [2]. Earlier forecasts had suggested that the shortage could reach as many as 377,000 by 2025 [3].

Although estimates vary, these figures collectively underscore the persistent and mounting challenge of securing an adequate care workforce in Japan.

To address this issue, Japan has sought to supplement its domestic workforce through international recruitment schemes. Under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), foreign nurse and care worker candidates from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam have been accepted [4].

However, studies on foreign care worker programs have noted challenges related to language, communication, and differences in prior caregiving experience [5-8].

In November 2017, the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), which had previously focused on sectors such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, was expanded to include caregiving [9].

This expansion enabled candidates from additional countries, including Myanmar, Cambodia, and China, to participate as technical intern trainees in Japan's long-term care sector. While some research has investigated the challenges faced by EPA care worker candidates, limited studies have examined the TITP in the caregiving field, and almost no studies have focused on trainees from Myanmar.

Myanmar presents a particularly important case, given its cultural and religious traditions emphasizing respect for older adults [10].

Understanding how Japanese language learners in Myanmar perceive caregiving and the role of care worker technical intern trainees is essential for developing pre-departure education that equips them to succeed in Japan. Such preparation is critical not only for their adaptation and professional development but also for ensuring quality care for Japan's older population.

The aim of this study was to explore the motivations of Japanese language learners in Myanmar who aspire to become care worker

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technical intern trainees, and to clarify their perceptions of the role. The findings are expected to provide foundational insights for the design of effective pre-departure education programs tailored to the needs of prospective trainees from Myanmar.

Materials & Methods

Study design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using an inductive approach to explore the perceptions and motivations of prospective care worker technical intern trainees in Myanmar.

Participants

Participants were 16 Japanese language learners (female, aged 18–30 years) enrolled in two Japanese language schools in Yangon and Bago, Myanmar. All participants aspired to become care worker technical intern trainees in Japan. Inclusion criteria were: (1) being 18–30 years old, (2) currently studying at a Japanese language school in Myanmar, and (3) expressing the intention to work as a care worker under the TITP in Japan.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between May and June 2018 at the participating schools. An interview guide was used, which included the following domains: (1) reasons for aspiring to become a care worker trainee, (2) perceptions of the role and tasks of care workers, (3) views on Japanese society and culture related to elder care, and (4) general knowledge and impressions of Japan. For example, participants were asked, “Why do you want to become a care worker technical intern trainee?” or “What do you expect from working in Japan?”. Interviews were conducted in Myanmar language by the first author, who is proficient in both Myanmar and Japanese. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent, transcribed verbatim in Myanmar, and then translated into Japanese for analysis.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach. Transcripts were read repeatedly to identify meaning units, which were then coded. Codes were grouped into subcategories based on similarity, and subcategories were further abstracted into categories. Finally, overarching themes were derived from the categories. To ensure trustworthiness, the first author and the second author (an experienced qualitative researcher) discussed the coding process and categorization thoroughly until consensus was reached.

Ethical considerations

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Kagawa University (Approval No. 2017-209). Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose, methods, voluntary nature of participation, right to withdraw at any time, and protection of personal information. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were stored on password-protected USB devices, and confidentiality was strictly maintained.

Results

Participants (Table 1)

A total of 16 participants were included in the study. All were female Japanese language learners aged 18–30 years, enrolled in two Japanese language schools in Yangon and Bago, Myanmar. Of these, 12 had completed college education and 4 had completed high school. Given that the tertiary enrollment rate for females in Myanmar was 24% in 2018 [11], the educational attainment of the participants is higher than that of the general female population.

Themes and Categories (Table 2)

Participant quotations are presented in italics to illustrate the categories and subcategories, with the participant’s identification code shown in parentheses (e.g., P. A).

Analysis of the interviews yielded 11 categories and 30 subcategories, which were further integrated into the overarching theme: “Becoming a care worker technical intern trainee is valuable.”

The categories and representative perceptions are summarized below:

Category 1: Japanese language proficiency is essential to go to Japan

This category refers to the belief that learning Japanese is indispensable for going to Japan to study or work. Participants recognized Japanese language study as both a requirement and a source of personal growth.

One subcategory emphasized studying Japanese in order to pursue opportunities in Japan. As one participant expressed: *“If I can go to Japan, I believe my future will grow. I want to learn more about Japan and Japanese.”* (P. D).

Another subcategory highlighted the importance of Japanese proficiency for employment in Japan. As one participant explained: *“For any kind of job, language is important. That’s why I have to study Japanese.”* (P. J).

Category 2: Desire to work in Japan

This category refers to participants’ strong aspiration to work in Japan, reflecting both economic expectations and the recognition of employment in Japan as valuable for their future.

One subcategory was the expectation of higher wages. As one participant noted, *“I want to work in Japan because the salary is higher.”* (P. C),

Another subcategory concerned the view that caregiving work was particularly meaningful. A participant shared, *“There are many types of technical intern trainees in Japan, but I think going as a care worker will be more useful for my future.”* (P. B).

A further subcategory reflected a broader wish for employment in Japan, regardless of occupation. As one explained, *“It doesn’t have to be caregiving. Any job is fine. I just want to work in Japan.”* (P. C).

Table 1: Participants

ID	Age*	Family Composition	Final Education	Occupation
A	25-29	Parents, Elder sister	College	None
B	20-24	Parents	College	None
C	20-24	Parents, Elder brother, Younger brother	High school	None
D	20-24	Parents, Elder brother	High school	Japanese language teacher
E	30-34	Parents, Younger brother	College	Seamstress
F	25-29	Parents, Elder brother, Younger brother	College	Sales clerk
G	20-24	Parents, Elder sister	College	None
H	25-29	Parents, Grandmother, Younger brother	College	None
I	20-24	Father, Younger brother	College	None
J	20-24	Parents	High school	Domestic help
K	20-24	Parents, Elder sister, Younger sister	College	Private-school teacher
L	25-29	Parents, Grandmother, Younger sister	College	None
M	25-29	Parents, Younger brother	College	None
N	25-29	Parents, Elder sister, Elder brother, Younger brother, Younger sister	College	None
O	25-29	Parents, Two younger brothers, Two younger sisters	College	Domestic help
P	20-24	Mother, Three elder sisters, Elder brother, Younger brother	High school	Farmer

* Ages are reported in 5-year bands to protect confidentiality.

Category 3: Desire to learn in Japan for future goals

This category captured participants' aspirations to study and gain experiences in Japan with the intention of applying them to their long-term futures. Learning in Japan was not perceived merely as short-term training, but as a pathway to achieving broader future-oriented goals and professional development.

One subcategory was the expectation of gaining new caregiving knowledge and techniques that were unavailable in Myanmar. As one participant stated: *"I want to learn caregiving skills in Japan that I cannot learn here (Myanmar)." (P. M.)*

Another subcategory emphasized the contribution of such experiences to future career goals, including ambitions to establish elder care services in Myanmar. For example, a participant stated: *"I want to work in Japan so that I can later establish my own elderly care facility in Myanmar." (P. A.)*

In addition, a subcategory concerned the broader value of learning in Japan as a way to build a foundation for personal growth. One participant explained: *"If I go to Japan, I can gain many experiences and use them for my future." (P. P.)*

Category 4: Caring for older adults is a good deed

This category captures the view that providing care to older adults and people in need carries moral worth and is regarded as a desirable, "good" act. Participants explicitly described caregiving as intrinsically valuable.

Rather than being divided into subcategories, this category was expressed consistently across participants. As one participant stated: *"Care work has value; caring for others has real meaning." (P. E.)*

All participants in this age group shared similar views. For example, one explained: *"Helping people who can no longer do things by themselves is a good deed." (P. N.)*

Another participant noted the familial dimension of this moral value: *"Even if the person I care for is a foreigner, I can treat them like my own grandparents; caring for older people is a good thing—this is why I chose it." (P. G.)*

Category 5: Aspiration to become a care worker technical intern trainee

This category describes participants' wish to become care worker technical intern trainees, grounded in their interest in elder care, positive attitudes toward caregiving, prior caregiving experience, and minimal concern about working abroad.

One subcategory reflected an intrinsic interest in elder care. As one participant stated: *"I'm interested in caring for older people and want to try it." (P. A.)*

Another subcategory highlighted positive feelings toward caregiving itself. A participant noted: *"I like taking care of older adults." (P. H.)*

A further subcategory emphasized confidence derived from prior experience. As one participant explained: *"I have cared for my grandmother before... so I'm used to it. I think I can do it." (P. F.)*

Finally, some participants expressed that they had little concern about working abroad, provided they adequately prepared themselves. For example, one participant stated: *"If I learn proper manners and go to Japan to work, I think it will be fine—though there may be difficulties." (P. J)*

Category 6: Providing care for older adults and people with limited independence

This category reflects participants' understanding that the role of care worker technical intern trainees is to support older adults and individuals with limited independence in their daily lives.

Table 2: Categories and Subcategories Identified from Interviews.

Category	Subcategories
1. Japanese language proficiency is essential to go to Japan	To study Japanese in order to go to Japan To study Japanese for employment in Japan
2. Desire to work in Japan	Higher salary in Japan Preference for caregiving as a field Willingness to work in Japan regardless of occupation
3. Desire to learn in Japan for future goals	Expectation of learning caregiving skills Contribution to future career goals Broader value for personal growth
4. Caring for older adults is a good deed	(No subcategories)
5. Aspiration to become a care worker technical intern trainee	Interest in elder care Positive feelings toward caregiving Prior caregiving experience little concern about working abroad
6. Providing care for older adults and people with limited independence	Facility-based care for older adults Caring for people with disabilities or chronic conditions
7. Facility-based caregiving	Physical care Medication assistance Daily living support Mental care and recreational activities Team-based/shift work
8. Attitude toward caregiving	Care with sincerity and compassion Treating care recipients like family members
9. Positive perceptions of Japan	Japan as a developed country Discipline and seriousness of Japanese people Respect for older adults Advanced technology and culture
10. Being needed	Necessity of care facilities in Japan Shortage of caregivers and demand for foreign workers
11. Perceptions of Myanmar's current situation and future	Limited job opportunities and low salary in Myanmar Respect for older adults in Myanmar Desire to use skills from Japan for Myanmar's development

One subcategory highlighted the recognition of facility-based care for older adults. As one participant explained: *"In the facility, as a trainee, I will take care of grandfathers and grandmothers."* (P. P.).

Another subcategory emphasized the awareness of caring for individuals with disabilities or chronic health conditions. A participant stated: *"The work is to care for older people who are not healthy—such as those with paralysis or other disabilities."* (P. E.).

Category 7: Facility-based caregiving

This category summarizes participants' understanding of the concrete tasks and work arrangements involved in facility-based care, including physical care, medication assistance, daily living support, mental care, and team-based or shift-based work.

One subcategory emphasized physical care. As one participant explained: *"In the morning we help them get up, take a shower, change*

clothes, and finally assist with toileting; we also help with meals—I know we have to do all of these." (P. A.).

Another subcategory concerned medication assistance. A participant noted: *"At the time for medicine, we make sure they take it."* (P. G.)

A further subcategory addressed daily living support. One participant stated: *"Cleaning, washing clothes—various things—basically everything"* (P. L.)

In addition, mental care and recreational activities were highlighted. As one participant described: *"So they can enjoy their time, we play games together and sing songs with the grandparents."* (P. C.).

Finally, participants recognized team-based organization and shift work. A participant explained: *"Care is not done by one person; we work together as a team. On night shifts, even if residents are sleeping, we must not sleep—we do rounds."* (P. P.).

Category 8: Attitude toward caregiving

This category reflects participants' perception that caregiving should be carried out with compassion, treating care recipients with respect and with a sense of familial affection.

One subcategory emphasized providing care with sincerity and empathy. As one participant expressed: "*Care must be done with a sincere heart and with compassion.*" (P. L)

Another subcategory highlighted the importance of treating care recipients like family members. As one participant noted: "*Even though they are not my real grandparents, I should treat them as if they were my own.*" (P. J)

Category 9: Positive perceptions of Japan

This category describes participants' admiration for Japan, including its development, culture, and social values, which motivated them to pursue opportunities there.

One subcategory emphasized the recognition of Japan as a developed country. As one participant remarked: "*Japan is a developed country, and I think it is an admirable place.*" (P. E)

Another subcategory highlighted the perception that Japan values order and discipline. As one participant explained: "*Japanese people are disciplined and work seriously, and I want to experience that.*" (P. C).

In addition, a subcategory addressed respect for older adults. A participant noted: "*In Japan, older people are respected. I want to learn from such a culture.*" (P. D).

Finally, participants admired Japan's technological and cultural advancement. As one participant stated: "*Japan has advanced technology and rich culture, which makes me want to go there.*" (P. M).

Category 10: Being needed

This category represents participants' awareness of the social and workforce demands surrounding elder care in Japan, which they perceived as giving significance to their role.

One subcategory emphasized the necessity of care facilities in Japan. As one participant observed: "*Japanese people can no longer take care of their parents at home. That is why they send them to care facilities, living apart from their families because of distance.*" (P. M)

Another subcategory highlighted the shortage of caregiving personnel and the resulting demand for foreign workers. As one participant explained: "*In Japanese care facilities, the number of caregivers is decreasing. That is why they need workers from Southeast Asian countries.*" (P. A)

Category 11: Perceptions of Myanmar's current situation and future

This category captures participants' awareness of the socioeconomic situation in Myanmar and their expectations for the future, including cultural values toward older adults.

One subcategory emphasized the recognition of limited opportunities in Myanmar at present. As one participant explained: "*In Myanmar there are few jobs and the salary is low, so we cannot earn enough.*" (P. F)

Another subcategory highlighted the cultural value of respecting older adults. As one participant described: "*In Myanmar, older people are respected. Even one year older, even one day older, we must show respect.*" (P. J)

A further subcategory reflected participants' wish to apply their experiences in Japan to Myanmar's development. As one participant shared: "*If I gain skills in Japan, I want to bring them back and use them in Myanmar.*" (P. F)

Discussion

This study explored the motivations and perceptions of Japanese language learners in Myanmar who aspired to become care worker technical intern trainees. Eleven categories emerged from the interviews, reflecting a multifaceted understanding of caregiving and positive perceptions of Japan. Participants emphasized the necessity of Japanese language proficiency, the desire to work and learn in Japan, the moral value of caregiving, positive perceptions of Japan, and awareness of both the needs in Japan and the sociocultural context of Myanmar.

Value framework

The participants' perceptions can be understood through three interrelated dimensions of value: moral, economic, and future-oriented. Moral value was expressed in viewing caregiving as a "good deed" and in treating care recipients as if they were family members, a perspective deeply rooted in Myanmar's cultural respect for elders. This aligns with previous reports that caregiving is regarded as a noble practice within Myanmar society, emphasizing respect and obligation toward older adults [10]. Economic value was derived from the expectation of higher salaries in Japan, and media reports also highlighted that care worker trainees could earn more than trainees in other occupational fields [12]. Future-oriented value reflected aspirations to gain skills and experiences in Japan that could later be applied to personal growth and to the future development of elder care in Myanmar. These three dimensions were not separate but overlapped and reinforced each other. For example, positive perceptions of Japan as an advanced and disciplined society strengthened both the moral worth and the future-oriented value of caregiving. Recognizing this multidimensional value structure provides a more comprehensive understanding of trainees' motivations and highlights the importance of tailoring support programs that address these intertwined dimensions. This interpretation is also consistent with international research on global care chains and moral dilemmas in caregiving, which has highlighted how caregiving responsibilities and values are shaped across transnational contexts [13,14].

Cultural and contextual considerations

Cultural and contextual factors strongly shaped the participants' motivations and perceptions. In Myanmar, respect for elders is a deeply ingrained cultural and religious norm, influenced by Buddhist teachings and long-standing social traditions. Previous studies have noted that filial piety and intergenerational obligations are central values in Myanmar society, guiding young people's attitudes toward caregiving [10]. These cultural underpinnings help explain why participants often described caregiving as a "good deed" and emphasized treating care recipients as family members. Similar moral framings of caregiving have also been discussed in the context of global care chains, highlighting how caregiving responsibilities and values are shaped across transnational settings [15].

At the same time, the Japanese context of rapid population aging and the chronic shortage of care workers provided an external backdrop. According to government projections [1,2], Japan will face a shortfall of approximately 250,000 care workers by 2026, a gap that could expand to nearly 570,000 by 2040. These demographic and labor market realities created a unique motivational landscape that shaped participants' aspirations. This perceived demand reinforced participants' belief that their labor would be valued and necessary. The intersection of Myanmar's cultural values with Japan's demographic and labor market realities created a unique motivational landscape. This reflects broader patterns discussed in the concept of global care chains, where migration flows are driven by demographic and economic imbalances across countries.

Practical implications

These findings carry important implications for policy and practice, particularly regarding pre-departure education programs for prospective care worker trainees. Prior research on EPA candidates has shown that insufficient preparation in language and caregiving skills contributed to high dropout rates and workplace difficulties [6-8]. Building on these insights, training programs should be tailored to address not only technical and linguistic skills but also cultural expectations and the moral perspectives of trainees.

Specifically, curricula should include scenario-based Japanese language education for caregiving situations, orientation to the structure and routines of Japanese care facilities (including shift work and team-based care), and training on cultural differences that may influence caregiving practices, such as attitudes toward dementia and end-of-life care. Bilingual training materials and culturally sensitive pedagogy could further support smoother adaptation. By aligning training content with the multidimensional values identified in this study, pre-departure programs can enhance both the quality of care in Japan and the long-term professional development of trainees.

Methodological and contextual contributions

This difference may partly reflect methodological and contextual factors. Previous surveys of EPA candidates often relied on structured questionnaires, which tended to highlight tangible motives such as income and career benefits. Our qualitative, interview-based approach allowed participants to articulate moral and cultural dimensions that are less visible in quantitative surveys. Moreover, the Myanmar context where respect for elders is deeply embedded in everyday life may have amplified the salience of moral value in caregiving.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while economic and career motivations are consistent across contexts, culturally embedded moral values also play a critical role. In line with Schwartz's value theory [16], the motivations identified in this study can be understood as moral, economic, and future-oriented values. Recognizing this multidimensional structure provides a more comprehensive understanding of why individuals in Myanmar aspire to become care worker technical intern trainees, and underscores the need for support programs that address not only economic and practical factors but also culturally grounded moral perspectives. In addition, given that the participants were relatively highly educated compared to the general female population in Myanmar, their interest in the caregiving technical intern training program may suggest that the program is perceived as valuable even among well-educated individuals.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected in 2018–2019, before the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Although the context has since changed, the findings remain relevant because the program has resumed and the need for effective pre-departure education persists. Second, the study drew on a small and relatively homogeneous sample of female students from two urban language schools in Myanmar, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve more diverse samples and examine how motivations and values evolve over time, ideally through longitudinal designs.

Conclusion

This study examined the motivations and perceptions of Japanese language learners in Myanmar who aspired to become care worker technical intern trainees. The findings revealed that their motivations were not limited to economic or career-related factors but also encompassed moral and future-oriented values, strongly influenced by Myanmar's cultural respect for elders and Japan's demographic realities. These results highlight the multidimensional nature of motivations among prospective trainees and provide important insights for the development of effective pre-departure education programs. Designing such programs to integrate not only language and technical skills but also cultural and ethical perspectives will be essential for supporting the successful adaptation of trainees and enhancing the quality of long-term care in Japan.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author's Contributions

The first author conducted the interviews and contributed to the conception and drafting of the manuscript. The second author provided guidance throughout the research process, collaborated on data analysis, and contributed to the refinement of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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