Analysis of Human Resources and Foreign Labor in Japan (Situation and Problems Related To Foreign Workers)

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Abstract

The number of foreign workers in Japan has been steadily increasing in recent years, especially in urban areas. Among them are international students working part-time and foreigners staying to work in Japan. In this article, we will discuss the actual situation of foreign workers and social conditions in Japan based on official data released by the government. Japan is currently experiencing a declining birth rate. It is estimated that by 2030, 1/3 of the country’s population will be aged 65, resulting in a significant shortage of productive labor. Moreover, strong international competition due to rapid globalization could create problems for Japan, unless the Japanese government expands the acceptance of foreign workers. That is why the Amendments to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (April 2019) introduced new residence visas namely, “Special Skill 1” and “Special Skill 2”. The introduction of these two special visas is an effort by the state to assist 14 specific industrial sectors that find it difficult to obtain human resources and require special skills but are not too technical and specialized. The goal is for foreign workers to be part of the progress of Japan’s manufacturing and service industries. However, these efforts still have not overcome the mountain of problems surrounding foreign workers in Japan. For example, the complexity of the procedure for applying for a work visa, fraudulent companies employing foreigners with low wages, problems arising from differences in culture and values, and various other problems.

Keywords: Foreign Workers, Problems of Foreign Workers, Acceptance of Foreign Workers

Highlights:

• Human resources are very important and cannot even be separated from an organization, both institutions and companies.
• We call workers who come from abroad foreign workers
• many illegal foreign workers wish to work in Japan legally, and also where they can earn more than their in home country
1. Introduction

In recent years, Japan’s labor shortage has become a serious problem for both small and medium enterprises. In particular, labor shortages have continued in manufacturing and related industries in nursing and public welfare. With the declining birth rate, Japan’s population will decrease in the future and it is the government’s urgent task to increase the number of foreign workers in Japan[1]. Currently, while trying to strengthen the workforce of elderly nurses in Japan, discussions are also underway between promoters and opponents regarding expanding the acceptance of foreign workers.

There are currently around 2.8 million foreigners in Japan. After World War II, Japan’s economy developed rapidly, and many companies expanded overseas, which is called Japan’s internationalization. As a result, the demand for recruiting foreign workers is increasing, and the increasing number of foreign workers[2] in Japan has caused concern among Japanese people. In Japan, various information can be obtained and shared through the mass media, and from there, only a negative impression is received that foreigners have several problems, such as employment of illegal immigrants, violating the law, and disturbing security and order. Many Japanese people think that “foreigners = fear”[3]. However, many foreign workers, especially foreign students, enter Japan only as migrant workers working in a work environment whose income is higher than their own country of origin and working hard for their families and relatives waiting in their own country. Before coming as a foreign student, I had lived in Japan for two years as a technical intern trainee, and I met various foreign workers. For example, most of them are technical intern trainees, foreign students, and foreign workers using family visas from the Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, China, Nepal, Vietnam, and others (of course there are many others)[4].

This final project is written about how the Japanese government handles the reduction of human resources and also the problems caused by foreign workers at this time, as what kind of cases appear as human rights problems experienced by foreign workers[5]. At the same time, I also want to analyze every problem related to foreign workers, such as, “illegal foreign workers”, “problems regarding the medical field (health insurance)”, “communication problems (Japanese language skills)”, and “abuse of licenses activities outside the qualification status (visa)” and think of countermeasures and steps to fix the problem in my way.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of a foreigner

Half a century ago, the Japanese image of foreigners was that of big white Americans. However, since 1985[6], the internationalization of Japanese companies and businesses expanding overseas have made progress, and as we enter the era called globalization, the image of foreigners among Japanese people has changed. "Furthermore, in the future, I will introduce "foreigners" advanced human resources in the field of nursing staff from Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. "Foreigners" are so diverse that they cannot be combined. The image of the foreigner in Japanese society, which spanned a very narrow range, expanded to a large and wide range as modernization progressed. In addition, the widespread image of foreigners will change the image of Japanese society." For example, Japanese people who marry foreigners and have children, whether the citizenship status of the child born is as Japanese or as a foreigner. We cannot 100% conclude that someone is a “foreigner” just because he or she looks different from himself or doesn’t take a common Japanese name. In other words, it can be seen that it becomes difficult to differentiate between “foreigner” and “Japanese” [7]. Be a Japanese person that is, a person who acquires Japanese citizenship and is legally recognized as a Japanese person or citizen[8]. And those who are not Japanese citizens but whose skin color and way of speaking use Japanese are still considered “foreigners".
2.2. Definition of foreign workers

Currently, many Japanese companies are planning and implementing business development, not only in Japan but also expanding to the world, which is called internationalization which is followed by an increasing people's economy[9]. Compared to periods of high growth, the number of foreign workers working in Japan tends to increase as they become more involved with Japanese companies. Foreigners working in Japan are called “foreign workers”. In Japan, there is also the problem of labor shortages in both small and medium enterprises. In addition, in Japan, some foreign workers work illegally[10]. Due to the large wage gap compared to working in their own country, lagging economic development, or increasing unemployment in the country themselves, they (illegal foreign workers) are forced to work in Japan or other countries whose economic situation is higher than their country[11]. In other words, if foreign workers are divided into two, they will be divided into two types: “employees who are legally employed as employees working for Japanese companies and “illegal foreign workers who live and remain illegally in Japan”. It is said that the number of these foreign workers will continue to increase proportionately in the future, and the declining birth rate and increasing population of elderly people will be a problem in Japan shorty decades from now.

2.3. Expanding the acceptance of foreign workers

The government’s rationale for expanding foreign worker acceptance is the labor shortage problem due to declining birth rates and an aging population. As of 1 February 2018, the total population of Japan is 126.6 million people[12]. And decreased by 1.5 million from 128.1 million in December 2008, and it is expected to continue to fall to 88.08 million in 2065. On the other hand, the labor population has increased since 2013 due to the increase in foreign workers[13]. Nonetheless, the working age population 15-64 years experienced a significant decline, and the population aged 15-64 in Japan as of October 1 2016 amounted to 76,562,000, a decrease 720,000 from the previous year. The ratio of the population aged 15-64 years to the total population is 60.3%, which has continued to decline since its peak in 1993 (69.8%), and is expected to continue to decline. Source: Bureau of Statistics and Communication, Ministry of Home Affairs, Estimation Population Statistics Data (Estimated value based on the 2015 November 2020 national census).

2.4. The aim of expanding the acceptance of foreign workers

The Government of Japan established the Basic Policy and Administration Policy of the new residence status policy implementation system namely “Specified Skilled Worker” which applies to Cabinet decisions based on the Amendments to the Immigration Control Act introduced in April 2019, with the sale of destinations of more than 500,000 foreigners by 2025. The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare supports the acceptance of foreign workers[14]. And the aim of the Japanese government to expand the acceptance of foreign workers is to overcome the decline in the productive workforce due to the declining birth rate and the increasing elderly population in Japan and to minimize the bankruptcy of small and medium companies due to a shortage of labor and expect the expected professional and skilled workforce. can work in Japan for a long or long period of time to support economic progress in Japan[15].

2.5. The benefits of foreign labor research

The benefits of this research academically are adding insight and knowledge in understanding the influence of foreign workers on the Japanese economy and understanding the importance of human resources in developed countries and also finding out the problems faced the emergence of foreign workers as an obstacle to the Japanese government’s policy of bringing in foreign workers in order to overcome the problem of the declining population of local productive workers[16].
2.6. Analysis of problems related to the increase in foreign workers

The Japanese government has taken steps to increase the number of foreign workers, and the number of foreign workers is currently increasing rapidly. While there are positive aspects such as securing the labor population and company growth, there are also problems caused by hiring foreign workers. In recent years, foreign workers have faced various problems due to the extension of their stay. There are many problems with foreign workers, but what makes me very interested in these issues are a number of things that I want to learn and discuss, including problems that can be divided into four categories, "illegal foreign workers", "problems regarding the medical field (health insurance)", "communication problems (Japanese language skills)", and "abuse of activity permits outside of qualifying status (visa)".

2.7. Types of problems regarding foreign workers

Problem regarding illegal foreign workers. The biggest problem for foreign workers is people who are called “foreign workers who work illegally”, in the sense of living illegally. The exact number of illegal immigrants in Japan is unknown. This is because those who live irregularly, who originally came to Japan on behalf of tourists, or came to Japan on behalf of language training, industry, and so on, then fled or did not return to their home country at that time set time. And some continue to survive as is. Because there is no accurate data, it is estimated from entry notes submitted when foreigners enter Japan or can be known from entry to Japan[17]. According to the Japanese Immigration Bureau, the number of illegal immigrants as of July 1 2019 was 79,013 people, an increase of 4,846 (6.5%) as of January 1 2019 from 74,167 people.

From these data it can be seen that the number of illegal immigrants from various countries has increased, especially from Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern countries[18]. Some of these countries include countries whose economic development is still below that of Japan’s economy, and they come from rural areas then work in other countries to earn higher wages than their home country. Once they found a job, they would use the money they saved while working to send it to families waiting in their own countries. Due to these factors, it is estimated that the number of people living or staying illegally in Japan is increasing.

Problem regarding field’s media. This also often happens to illegal workers. If it is not registered with the Japanese government’s health insurance, the hospital will provide high medical costs and even refuse the treatment. Because if the patient cannot pay for the medical expenses, the private medical institution will suffer a loss. If foreign workers are enrolled in Japanese government health insurance, for example, there are large medical expenses due to long-term hospitalization and so on, maybe get help from the local government on the condition that we have to follow the existing procedures. If someone has been registered as a foreigner with a residence permit in Japan, various systems related to health care will be implemented in the same way as Japanese society. On the other hand, many foreign workers meet the requirements to join but do not have health insurance[19].

Problem regarding communication. The main problem affecting the development of foreign workers is communication problems. The question is, is there no basic Japanese language learning before entering Japan? What language is most important for us to live in Japan? How can we live in a Japanese environment if we don’t speak Japanese? How do we hear superiors’ instructions while working? Why don’t foreign workers think about the most important things before living in the country we live in? Not only foreign workers, but accepting companies must also experience difficulties. Maybe it’s not too much of a problem for them, because it can be conveyed through body movements even without speaking. But it is a big problem for foreign workers, because with a lack of language skills, carrying out and receiving work instructions will be difficult, not least as a result the foreign workers have accidents at work. Supposedly, the Japanese should be considered the most important thing when you are going to live in Japan, whether as a worker or student. Also, Japanese companies are very demanding to have human resources who can understand communication in Japanese. Therefore, communication skills are very influential and related to the type of work in Japan.
Misuse of activity permits outside qualification status (Visa). Activities or activities outside the qualifications are defined as "other activities that are not recognized by the wishes obtained or activities outside of remuneration". Several activities or activities do not meet the requirements that are allowed, namely engaging in business customs, working in a bar, engaging in activities or activities that may result in looting and public morale, or violating laws and regulations. There is the term "MizuShoubai" in other words "night entertainment business in Japan", including arcade, pachinko, and mahjong (gambling) shops.

And the amount of time activities or activities outside the qualification status by the permits granted has a maximum amount limit. However, some foreign workers (foreign students) do not use it according to the stipulated amount of time. For example, many foreign students work part-time in pachinko bars and “gambling parlors” that undermine slavery and societal morals, and not a few foreigners work more than the set number of hours or activities. In this article, I will do some research on this[20]. The research subjects are part-time workers who live as “foreign students" and have lived in Japan for one year or more. Especially foreign students enrolled at universities or private Japanese language schools in the Chugoku region, Okayama Prefecture.

2.8. Research methods

Reveals that a qualitative research method is an approach used to explore and understand central symptoms. Central symptoms are obtained through an interview process with the result of the information in the form of words or text. Next, the information is collected and analyzed. The result of this research is a report in written form.

In the research method of this article, I use a qualitative research method. Directly asking for approval from foreign workers who will be interviewed, and because some aspects that are personal information, some data is asked not to be displayed in the data table. The author made observations and interviews with several foreign workers, especially foreign students. At the time of the interview, foreign workers were asked to fill out a questionnaire containing questions that the author would ask during the interview. In the data collection process, are several factors that influence research including: Japanese language proficiency, approval from interview subjects, licensing from the company where the foreign workers work, conducive conditions and situations.

2.9. Research constraints

The obstacles that arise in the implementation of research include: The lack of Japanese language ability of the interview subjects also hampered the smoothness of data collection. Because the data collection questions related to privacy and personal information, there was resistance from the interview subjects. Licensing from the company where the interview subject is also very influential in collecting data on part-time workers.

3. Method

3.1. Data source

This research was taken directly through observation, interviews, questionnaires, documentation studies, and literature studies. The form of this research is descriptive qualitative. The interview subjects were part-time workers who live as "foreign students" and have lived in Japan for a year or more. The observation was carried out from April 2 2020 to July 25, 2020. It took place at a private food company in the Chugoku area. The number of interview subjects was 15 people (men and women), from three countries of origin (5 people in each country). The time during the interview each question table is asked to answer questions in Japanese for about 10 to 15 minutes. (Because this is personal information, country of origin, personal data, and school name are not displayed). However, to maintain privacy and data information from interview subjects, name, school origin, and nationality are not displayed in the data table.
3.2. Data collection technique

Data collection techniques carried out by the author to obtain and collect data are as follows: Observation this method is carried out by directly observing the conditions and situations that occur in the field, both in the form of physical conditions and behavior that occur during the research. Interview are a means of proving information or data collection information through questions that have been provided by researchers, usually, the questions asked are in the form of fields that aim to support the data previously obtained. The interview technique used in qualitative research is in-depth interviews.

Before conducting the interview, I explained the purpose of this survey and matters related to research ethics using Japanese and obtained approval from foreign students to cooperate with the interview. In addition, there are (5) aspects of the questions in this interview for part-time foreign students in Japan, a simple tabulation is carried out focusing on the number of hours of part-time work, reasons for working part-time, the average amount of part-time job earnings, sending money or not, and plans for after school.

The observation was carried out from April 2, 2020 to July 25, 2020. The number of interview subjects was 15 people (men and women), from three countries of origin (5 people in each country). The target interview subjects are part-time workers who live as “foreign students” and have lived in Japan for one year or more. The time during the interview each table is asked to answer questions in Japanese for about 10 to 15 minutes (because this is personal information, country of origin, personal data, and school name are not displayed).

4. Results and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>country</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10 hours/week</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 10-20 hours/week</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On 20 hours/week</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1, the number of foreign students who have part-time jobs “less than 10 hours a week” is (0%), and the most common is the number of international students who have part-time jobs “more than 20 hours a week” (60%). In addition, there was one foreign student who chose not to answer. Judging from the number of students, foreign students from country A who choose “above 20 hours a week” is the highest compared to countries B and C. It can be said that many foreign students work part-time in Japan for more than 20 hours a week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>country</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For school fees</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for daily expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For language practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To save</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, in the questions of Table 2, “reasons to work part-time”, “for daily expenses” (46.7%) was the most common, followed by “for school fees” (40%) and “to save” (13%), and at “for language practice” (0%) almost no foreign students work part-time to practice Japanese. At the same time, it can be said that foreign students who enter the country do not aim to come solely because of their education.
The average amount of main income per month is highest for foreign students who choose more than 150,000 Yen i.e. (60%). As shown in Table 1, the more part-time hours, the higher the income. In addition, there are no foreign students who choose below 90,000 Yen” and “have no income”. Respondents to this survey show that foreign students who work part-time have a high monthly income shown in Table 3.

Based on Table 4 “Whether or not there is a remittance”, it is revealed that (100%) international students make remittances from Japan to their home country. In this survey, it is concluded that the questions in Tables 1 to 4 clearly show that the purpose of foreign students entering Japan is to earn or earn money while working part-time, then send them to their home country. On the other hand, it was found that foreign students who entered Japan were not only for educational purposes but also for "migrating".

Finally, Table 5 shows the “post-graduation plan”. When looking at this table, it is found that the number of foreign students who decide to work in Japan after graduating from school (86.7%) is quite large. In addition, two foreign students plan to continue their education in Japan. In other words, it is clear that many foreign students still want to live in Japan after graduating from school.
5. Conclusion

The issue of foreign workers that I have seen so far is only partial, and I think there are many more complex and interrelated issues. So how should the Japanese government handle the problem of foreign workers? The first thing that needs to be done is to make regulations to deal with illegal immigrants. Several things are regulated by law regarding foreign workers living illegally, but it is very difficult to regulate every foreign worker who is increasing from year to year because the Japanese government also understands very well that the presence of foreign workers is very necessary for Japan. Since Japan is an island nation, its border with other countries is the sea, unlike other countries. In addition, Japan has a much closed environment, so the culture of migrant workers is almost difficult for Japanese society to understand. However, I feel the need to handle it so that the Japanese government can accept illegal foreign workers who are in Japan. To at least reduce the labor shortage problem, to make the development of international industry and the smooth running of the Japanese economy further in the future. The point is not to accept all illegal foreign workers, but piecemeal, and I think also that the Japanese government should implement a system gradually to relax the restrictions that allow illegal foreign workers to work with legal status in Japan. Because, many illegal foreign workers wish to work in Japan legally, and also where they can earn more than their in home country. And it may also be used for new development in its home country and there is a good possibility that it will bring further economic impact.

First, with the current system, the existence of illegal foreign workers will not be clear, and the public's concern about illegal workers will remain unresolved. Therefore, once again regarding the system of accepting illegal foreign workers, I think it should be thought about further. Furthermore, I think it is important for Japanese people to change their awareness and thinking toward foreign workers. Unfortunately, discrimination, intimidation, and abuse of power against foreign workers still occur in Japan. Violations of human rights such as revocation of passports and prohibitions on marriage and pregnancy also occur. As a result, depression and (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) also called post-traumatic stress disorder can occur, and in the worst case, suicide. In particular, there is a lot of discrimination against foreign workers, especially against foreign workers from Southeast Asia. Third, it is important to take more thorough measures to eliminate (brokers) also known as criminal intermediaries. In the case of technical intern training which has been carried out for some time, exploitation by criminal intermediaries has become a major problem. Foreign apprentices and students incur large debts to pay fees before entering Japan. This was because he was required to pay a large sum of money to a brokerage in his home country before he was dispatched to Japan. For example, in the case of Vietnam, the minimum cost is a few hundred thousand yen, and a maximum of one million yen or more to come to Japan as an intern and foreign student. Many foreign apprentices and students work long hours but with low wages and some even earn (sexual harassment, power harassment, or workplace harassment) harassment or acts that are contrary to law, to pay off their debts in their country of origin before coming to Japan. In addition, it has been reported that there have been cases in Japan where supervisory organizations mediated the acceptance of technical intern trainees at exorbitant fees. As with the newly introduced system, it seems that the broker-related issues persist. In my opinion, the government also needs to take comprehensive steps to regulate the activities of criminal intermediaries in sending countries.

Fourth, support must be provided to simplify the system and minimize the company's burden. There are cases where companies provide financial support such as providing Japanese language education to foreign workers at the company's expense and providing housing with low-cost dormitories. This kind of support is not only borne by the beneficiary companies, but even the local government needs to consider it for the sake of the smooth running of the environmental economy rather than just burdening the beneficiary companies.
Authors' Declaration

Authors’ contributions and responsibilities – The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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