"Diversity in the Workplace": Indonesian Muslim Migrant Workers' Experiences in Japan

Yusy Widarahesty
Ritsumeikan University

ABSTRACT

A rapidly shrinking and aging population has pushed the Japanese government to relax certain border regulations to let in more foreign workers. JICA predicts that by 2040, Japan will need to double its foreign workforce to more than 6 million. This is also in line with the Japanese government's policy plan which opens up opportunities for foreign workers to enter from various countries through technical intern trainee visas, specified skilled workers, professional workers, etc. As a result, under the Abe administration, the Japanese government launched the Diversity and Empowerment in the Workplace campaign to welcome international workers as one of the social integration policies to achieve harmony. Thus, this paper aims to analyze how the synergy of diversity in workplace policy toward Muslim migrant workers in Japan progresses by using ethnography and participant observation as a methodological approach. Qualitative data was collected between 2018 and 2023 through participant observations and semi-structured interviews. By looking at the stories conveyed, it seems that the 'diversity in workplace policies' cannot yet be adequately implemented for Muslim workers, especially those with semi-skilled visa categories such as trainees and SSW. Furthermore, social integration efforts through workplace diversity policies are hampered because some Japanese companies continue to have a bad working culture that promotes productivity by imposing long working hours. This has become a problem for Japanese workers and has prompted criticism and efforts to change.

***Keywords**: "Diversity in the workplace", Indonesian Migrant Workers, Muslim, Japan*

Populasi yang menyusut dan menua dengan cepat telah mendorong pemerintah Jepang untuk melonggarkan peraturan perbatasannya agar dapat menerima lebih banyak pekerja asing. JICA memperkirakan Jepang perlu meningkatkan jumlah tenaga kerja asing sebanyak empat kali lipat menjadi lebih dari enam juta pada tahun 2040. Hal ini juga sejalan dengan rencana kebijakan pemerintah Jepang yang membuka peluang masuknya tenaga kerja asing dari berbagai negara melalui berbagai jenis visa seperti pemagang kerja, pekerja berketerampilan khusus, pekerja profesional, dll. Oleh karena itu, untuk menyambut masuknya pekerja asing, pemerintah Jepang pada masa pemerintahan Abe telah mencanangkan slogan keberagaman dan pemberdayaan di lingkungan kerja sebagai upaya strategi integrasi sosial. Berdasarkan hal tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana sinergitas kebijakan keberagaman di tempat kerja Jepang terhadap pekerja migran Muslim di Jepang dengan menggunakan etnografi dan observasi partisipan sebagai pendekatan metodologis. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan antara tahun 2018 sampai 2023 melalui observasi partisipan dan wawancara semi terstruktur. Dengan melihat kisah-kisah yang disampaikan, tampaknya 'kebijakan keberagaman di tempat kerja' belum dapat diterapkan secara memadai bagi pekerja Muslim, terutama mereka yang memiliki kategori visa semi-terampil seperti pekerja magang dan pekerja Spesial Skill Workers/SSW. Lebih jauh, upaya integrasi sosial melalui kebijakan keberagaman di tempat kerja terhambat karena buruknya budaya kerja di beberapa perusahaan Jepang yang mempromosikan produktivitas dengan memberlakukan jam kerja yang panjang. Hal tersebut menjadi masalah bagi pekerja Jepang dan telah memicu kritik serta upaya untuk berubah.

***Kata-kata Kunci**: "Diversity in the workplace", Pekerja Migran Indonesia, Muslim Indonesia, Jepang*

The Japan Revitalization Strategy, published by the government in 2013, marked a significant shift in Japanese company policies towards diversity and inclusion. In this approach, the Japanese government recommended that promoting a diverse workplace and increasing employment opportunities for women and the elderly is crucial. In addition, the policy was updated to promote workplace inclusion for women, the elderly, foreign workers, and those with impairments (Alcantara and Shinohara 2023).

Historically, the term 'diversity' originated as a social and economic notion in the 1960s, when the United States passed the Civil Rights Act to combat discrimination against minorities. While the notion has subsequently been widely adopted in many countries and enterprises around the world, the majority of Japanese organizations have fallen behind in terms of comprehending the full meaning of diversity and executing actions to promote it. The term '*daibashiti*' (ダイバーシティ) has only recently gained popularity in Japanese media and society. Subsequently, the Keizai Doyukai, the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, included 'Diversity' into the Japanese economic agenda in 2004 as part of their Human Resources Strategy. Since 2012, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has released lists such as the Nadeshiko (Dianthus flower) Brand and the New Diversity Management Selection, which highlight organizations that invest in women's empowerment and 'Diversity Management'. Recently, Japanese businesses have also adopted the notion of 'Inclusion', which is a concept in and of itself but is commonly used in conjunction with Diversity (Yasuzawa 2021)

Nationality is one of the legal factors that falls within the category of diversity in Japan (Yasuzawa 2021). This is due to changes in Japanese immigration law that relaxed the admittance of foreign workers in 2019. This is in keeping with the increasing necessity to accept significant numbers of foreign workers of productive age, which is suspected by the drop in Japanese demographics, which has consistently resulted in a scarcity of productive labor requirements. In this way, the Japanese government opens up various opportunities for the entry of foreign workers with various types of visas, such as technical intern trainee, which was approved in 1993 and has undergone several adjustments, then specified skill workers or SSW, which is applied in 2019 and also

professional workers and others. As a result, in late January 2024, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW) reported that the number of working non-citizens in Japan exceeded two million for the first time by the end of October (MHLW 2024). The estimated number of Indonesians living in Japan in 2022 itself reached 98,865. Based on the type of visa, namely Technical Intern Training (45,919), Specified Skilled Worker (16,327), Student (7,321), Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services (5,195), Designated Activities (EPA) (1,450), and Nursing Care (703) (MHLW 2024).

According to the Japanese government report, we can see that the number of Indonesian workers increased by 192.2% in five years, reaching 121,507, and by 56% between 2022 and 2023. Indonesian citizens account for 56% of Japan's specified skilled workers, a category introduced in 2019 to address labor shortages in specific industries. It can be said that because of low salaries at home, many Indonesian workers continue to see Japan as an appealing destination (Masabuchi 2024). Aside from the fact that the number is growing, one of the reasons why Japanese companies are increasingly interested in hiring Indonesian migrant workers to fill the labor shortage in Japan is that they consider Indonesian workers to be good in performance and discipline. As stated by Masamichi Tanaka from Toyota Company in Japan; "Japanese companies are very satisfied with the performance of apprentices from Indonesia who are persistent, friendly, and very disciplined," (Prastyo 2020). Moreover, Motoki Yuzuriha, president of Mynavi Global, stated "I think it (Indonesia) could eventually surpass Vietnam in the role it plays in Japan's labor market" (Masabuchi 2024). Another interesting fact is that, aside from Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, most Muslim migrant laborers in Japan come from Indonesia.

Based on that condition, it becomes a challenge for Japanese society to be able to adapt to the increasingly diverse composition of their society. Meanwhile, Japan's workplace diversity challenge is well-known to be hampered by a rapidly aging population, persistent sexism, and a relatively homogeneous society. Many critics said that even though the Japanese labor force is diminishing, the gender and socioeconomic equity gaps are not (at least not quickly enough) (McIvor and Steele 2022). Yet, many Japanese

organizations have expanded their global presence. Japan is trying to open doors for a more diverse and flexible workforce including Muslim workers. Japan's government tries to create a working environment that is working towards realizing a society with an inclusive mindset with the basic principle such as: "While we all have different backgrounds, capabilities, and motivations, we can create a society that enables everyone to shine" (The Government of Japan 2016). As a result of the implementation of a diverse working environment, a growing number of Japanese companies are working to provide a better environment for Muslim workers. However, do they truly embrace workplace diversity? and, how is experienced by Muslims living in Japan, a demographic dominated by migrant workers? Thus, this paper aims to analyze how the implementation of Japanese diversity in workplace policies toward Muslim migrant workers in Japan is progressing, particularly among Indonesian Muslim migrant workers coming through the technical intern trainee program visa and specified skilled workers (hereinafter referred to as SSW) where currently the number is increasing and is in demand by Japanese enterprises.

Literature Review

As one of the religions considered rapidly developing, Islam in Japan has been the focus of many researchers. Lubis (2021), for example, looked into how Muslims live and raise their children in Japan. Her research noted that prior research was more focused on the parents' opinions. Still, it also covered the children's personal experiences at school, mainly how they maintained their Muslim identity at school and how they thought about their identity. However, emphasizing the children's perspective is also vital to gaining a better understanding of the support required for Muslim pupils in Japanese schools.

Meanwhile, Kojima (2023) revealed that Muslim migrants in Japan face a lack of burial places when 99.9% of the population is cremated. Muslims are frequently confronted with hostility from the local community when cemetery development is planned. His paper discussed how the policy prescriptions for the central government in Japan ensure the cultural rights of immigrant

minorities in Japan. Furthermore, Tanada from Waseda University explained that Muslims in Japan come from various backgrounds, including nationality, race, culture, lifestyle, and attire (Waseda University 2017). Some Muslims firmly adhere to rules and traditions such as prayer and fasting, while others enjoy greater freedom. As a result, those who have never met or interacted with a Muslim might have prejudices and misconceptions about them.

On the other hand, the Japanese government is targeting the arrival of 60 million tourists in 2030, with the number of Muslim tourists expected to increase by 1 million per year, or an increase of around 8.7% per year (Kunio 2002). This then led to the emergence of a lot of research related to the halal industry in Japan. Wahidati and Sarinastiti (2018) mentioned in their research that the common problems that are usually experienced by Muslim tourists when visiting non-Muslim countries are often related to the difficulty of finding halal food, the unavailability of places for prayer, and the difficulty of finding Muslim-friendly accommodation. Besides that, the other problem felt by Muslim tourists visiting Japan comes from language limitations. For example, on food packaging, the ingredients are only written in Japanese, so tourists who do not speak Japanese cannot determine whether the product can be consumed or not. However, for Muslim tourists, Japan still has its charm with its combination of modernity and Japanese tradition, so many Muslim tourists want to experience traveling to Japan. In this way, Thamrin and Virgianita (2019) said that the Muslim-friendly program initiated by the Japanese government has succeeded in increasing the number of Muslim tourists to Japan, including from Indonesia. There are many policies from the Japanese government related to the development of the tourism industry, such as (1) Visit Japan Project: Japan implements the Visit Japan Project which is a specific step of Visit Japan Promotion launched in 2003, (2) Easing of visa requirement, (3) Low-cost carrier policy, (4) Tax-free policy and (5) Halal Tourism Information Service.

In addition, the Japanese government has supported the Japanese Muslim Association (JMA) in providing halal certification for Japanese products to attract Muslim consumers. This certification has been acknowledged by several halal certification bodies, including 'Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia' in Malaysia and

'Majelis Ulama Indonesia' in Indonesia (Deniar and Effendi 2019). As a result, Japan has started to draw in Muslim visitors, particularly from Southeast Asian countries. As Japan prepares to host the 2020 Olympic Games, the government and local non-governmental organizations are working towards creating a welcoming environment for Muslims. However, a study conducted by Yulita and Ong (2019) which investigated the changing perception of Islam in Japan and the efforts made by Japan's civil society to counteract negative stereotypes propagated by the media, found that although Japanese society has become more accepting of foreign Muslims, there are still issues within the Muslim community that need to be addressed further to improve the relationship between Muslims and Japanese society. In addition, Rustam (2021) conducted a study on the experiences of Indonesian workers employed in the Japanese fisheries sector. The research specifically focuses on those who work in oyster cultivation in Hiroshima prefecture. The study sheds light on the challenges faced by Muslim workers in this industry. In the context of professional workers, Budianto (2024) illustrates in his research how professional Muslim workers' religious identities travel in a migratory milieu. This study looks at how Indonesian Muslim professionals reconcile their Islamic identity while working and living in Japan. It discovers that the image of Islam in Japanese professional settings is still good and proposes that working in Japan creates the path for Muslim Indonesians to promote cultural variety in Japanese professional settings, which also acts as a platform for introducing Islam.

The available research has supplied significant explanations concerning the situation of Japan and Islam. However, the existing literature on Islam in Japan has predominantly looked at the issue more from the halal industry and tourism, some research has focused on revealing the reality condition of Muslim migrants in Japan from work conditions from technical intern trainee, professional workers, and the struggle of the Muslim community to gain the trust of local communities. To date, research on this topic has not dealt with a broader area of analysis, where the current level of analysis is insufficient to provide a complete understanding of the matter on the ground, particularly on the implementation of social integration policy through diversity in the Japanese workplace policy toward migrant Muslims in Japan.

Thus, to broaden our understanding of migrant worker studies in general, as well as the implications for theoretical contributions in social integration theory, this study employs ethnography and participant observation to demonstrate how the implementation of diversity in workplace policy toward Muslim migrant workers in Japan is progressing.

The Historical Journey of Muslims and Indonesian Workers in Japan

Islam's spread has been notable for its rapid and peaceful diffusion across various parts of the world. Its arrival in Japan began at the end of the 19th century (Al Samarrai 2009). However, Japan's historical politics of isolation, known as *sakoku*, limited contact with only a select few countries. This was in line with the government's principle of unifying the country and avoiding external obstacles during the samurai era.

According to Salim, who was one of the first founders of Muslim associations in Japan (Al Samarrai 2009), Abdul Haleem Noda can be regarded as the first Japanese Muslim. Noda was a Japanese journalist who visited Turkey in the 1890s to raise donations for the families of disaster victims during a friendly meeting between Turkish and Japanese envoys. Soon after, Torajiro Yamada, the second Japanese to convert to Islam, also traveled to Istanbul in 1893 to give the collected donations to the martyrs' families in Turkey. After converting to Islam, he changed his name to Khaleel, or perhaps Abdul Khaleel. He lived in Istanbul for several years, conducting business and maintaining friendly relations with Turkey, only returning home upon his death. Furthermore, Ahmad Ariga, a Christian merchant who became interested in Islam during his visit to Bombay, India, in 1900, was the third Japanese to embrace Islam. The beautiful scenery of the mosque he saw there attracted his attention, and he declared himself a Muslim upon entering it. During this period, it was discovered that some Indian Muslim traders lived in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kobe. They are considered to be the first Muslim communities in Japan.

Japanese interest in Islam can be said to have started from 1920 to 1930. This year, the al-Quran was translated into Japanese by

Umar Mita, who also eventually embraced Islam. Then, in 1953, Umar Yamaoka, Umar Mita, Abdul Muneer Watanabe, Sadiq Imaizumi, Umar Yukiba, and Mustafa Komura gathered to form the first Muslim association in Japan (Al Samarrai 2009).

After that, the development of Islam began to develop slowly in Japan, and the arrival of students from Muslim countries also influenced this development. Muslim students from the Arab world and various Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia, arrived in Japan in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and founded the first Muslim Student Association in Japan. The organizing committee for this association includes Dr. Zuhal from Indonesia, Muzaffar Uzay from Turkey, Ahmad Suzuki from Japan, Abdur Rahman Siddiqi from Pakistan, and Salih Mahdi Al Samarrai from Saudi Arabi (Al Samarrai 2009).

Besides Muslim students, foreign workers also entered Japan in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, Muslim migrants were recognized by the state as *dekasegi* workers who were merely temporary residents of urban and metropolitan areas. Even while Muslims today are still concentrated in large cities, their settlement in Japanese society meant that the Muslim population grew in areas beyond the city and spread into rural regions (Kojima 2023). The growing number of Muslim workers is in line with the expansion of Japanese companies abroad, and it is a manifestation of Japan's beginning to transform from an agricultural to an industrial country. Most of the influx of foreign workers in these years worked in heavy industrial jobs that were filled by non-skilled workers, who at that time reaped many pros and cons. Many of these workers came from various developing countries such as China, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia.

This is where the entry of migrant workers who arrive from Muslim countries begins. Indonesia itself has sent workers with trainee visas to Japan under a cooperation agreement between the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, and the Japan Association of International Manpower (IMM Japan) since 1993 (JITC 2017). After that time, the number of Indonesian workers in Japan has continued to increase, both trainees and students adding to the diversity of cultural and ethnic richness in

Japan today. Based on that, it can be said that the development of mosques around the country reflects the growing number of Muslims and their geographical distribution. According to expert studies on Muslim migrants, there were only four mosques in the 1980s, the majority of which were built as state-sponsored projects in urban areas (Tanada 2015 in Kojima 2023). By 2017, the number of mosques had expanded to over 100, many of which were constructed by workers and students residing throughout Japan, often by repurposing flat rooms and remodeling existing structures into places of prayer (Kojima 2023).

Diversity of Japan's Workplace Environment as Social Integration

Migration and integration are inextricably linked. Immigrant integration is a political priority, however, at the same time, we see widespread media coverage of integration issues and a global boom in outspoken anti-immigrant political groups everywhere like in European countries, and Japan is no exception (Contucci and Sandell 2015). Politically, the Japanese government has been reluctant to allow large-scale immigration, particularly from unskilled laborers. However, as the population ages shrinks, and a labor shortage grows, many people from other countries have already been allowed to join through various schemes. In this way, the Japanese government tries to integrate society with the entry of migrant workers which is called *tabunka kyōsei*, or multicultural coexistence. This is also followed by the effort to transform the workplace into a more inclusive place for everybody by supporting the diversity principle.

The efforts of Japanese companies to promote workplace diversity, which create environments that accept workers with diverse characteristics and encourage them to play an active role, have been expanding their target from women to groups that also include seniors, people with disabilities, and foreigners. The "Diversity in the workplace" policy itself cannot be separated from the Japanese effort to ease the coming of foreign workers to fill the labor shortage. As mentioned above due to a labor shortage stemming from its aging population, Japan is increasingly looking

toward foreign nationals to boost its workforce. Another reason why companies have started to use the term "diversity" is that they want to organize their various efforts for different target groups, such as women, seniors, people with disabilities, and foreign workers, under the concept of diversity promotion (Yajima 2019). Historically, the development of the concept of diversity in the workplace in Japan is separated into three phases: (1) First-Generation Diversity in Japan: English Teachers (1980-1999), this is a diversification initiative run by the Ministry of Education to recruit young foreign talent into Japanese local governments across the country. Many of these young foreigners went on to become English language teachers, with the mission of bringing new ideas and diversifying through language acquisition; (2) Second-Generation Diversity: Womenomics (2000-2010s), the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Womenomics strategy was the next step towards more inclusive workplaces. This program aims to improve women's economic status, which will benefit the country's economy; (3) Third-Generation Approach: Unconscious Bias Training (the 2020s), specifically, a more basic program aimed at changing habits, prejudices, and behaviors (Steele and McIvor 2022b).

To this day, workplace diversity policies have become the Japanese government's primary program for accommodating the demands of arriving foreign workers and playing a critical role in addressing an emerging Japanese labor shortage. As stated by the prime minister of Japan on February 9, 2024, when Prime Minister Kishida attended the 17th meeting of the Ministerial Council on Acceptance and Inclusion of Foreign Human Resources held at the Prime Minister's Office. Prime Minister Kishida stated.

> "In today's meeting, we approved the government response based on the final report from the expert panel on the state of the Technical Intern Training Program and Specified Skilled Worker Program. The Government will push ahead with the review of the Technical Intern Training Program and Specified Skilled Worker Program in line with the policy we approved today from a perspective of realizing a cohesive society and making Japan a country that overseas human resources will choose as a place to work in" (Prime Minister Office of Japan 2024).

In line to the Japanese government's workplace diversity policy, previously the Japanese government established the Research Group to Promote Multicultural Coexistence in 2005 and published a report in March 2006. The report outlined how *tabunka kyōsei*, or multicultural coexistence, was to be realized locally through newcomers' communication support, livelihood support, and community development in cooperation with residents and civil society organizations. The term *tabunka kyōsei* is defined as follows: "Where people of differing nationalities or ethnicities, etc., live together as constituent members of local society while forging equal relationships as they recognize each other's cultural differences" (Yamashita 2021). All of these initiatives were designed to educate Japanese society to accept the influx of foreigners and accept their presence as an integral aspect of society.

Subsequently, as more Japanese nationals work alongside non-Japanese with different cultures and customs, some companies are modifying their working environments, including for Muslim workers. As a result, a growing number of Japanese companies are working to provide a better environment for Muslim workers, for example, Rakuten's cafeteria from Rakuten Company also provides halal menus, as well as vegetarian food mainly for its Indian staff. To enjoy the special food, workers were asked to register in advance. About 65 people have signed up for halal food, and roughly 100 for menus prepared for Indian staff (Honda 2016). It is undeniable that these conditions have brought many changes in the color of the workforce in Japan, including the development of Muslim workers and the Muslim population in Japan from year to year.

With the explanation above, we can conclude that the Japanese government as a social actor has constantly sought new integration tactics and prioritized their skills to capitalize on opportunities. Ethnic groups must adjust either actively or passively, such as through emigration, segregation, or living in isolated communities. Both minorities and majorities went through several processes conceptualized in various ways, such as adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, or integration (Beresnevièiûtë 2003). Integration refers to the process of connecting separate components into a larger social system, community, or unit. Integration is a key notion in functionalist theories. It describes how system

elements work together to prevent disruptions and enhance the system's functioning. Integrity is a key idea in multiple theoretical viewpoints, including consensus, solidarity, and correspondence (Beresnevièiûtë 2003).

Two-way harmony is necessary for migrants to achieve social integration. To reach this, a solid policy foundation is required to intervene in the development of this integration. The above-mentioned diversity in workplace policy is one of the Japanese government's efforts to promote harmony. Despite the realities in the field the opponents of immigration typically use cultural decay, dangers to national identity, and "us vs. them" rhetoric to justify their opposition. The intensity of these non-economic concerns is largely determined by immigrants' ability to integrate socially, which may be seen from two perspectives. For immigrants, it entails establishing a sense of belonging in their new society. This frequently entails accepting and adhering to that society's values and customs and, if necessary, developing the social capital required by the host country's institutions. The involvement of the native population is also essential because social integration is only possible if immigrants are recognized as members of society. Apart from boosting human well-being, such mutual acknowledgment promotes social cohesiveness and has significant economic ramifications, ranging from the supply of public goods and redistribution to collaboration and productivity in enterprises. However, if immigrants and natives differ in many social and cultural dimensions, social integration has become a challenge to achieve (Laurentsyeva and Venturini 2017).

Therefore, understanding the factors of social inclusion and how to promote it is crucial to implementing a policy-relevant research issue in the field. Thus, more research is needed to determine what conditions are faced in the field regarding the implementation of social integration through this diversity policy, particularly for Muslim migrant workers. The methodology for analyzing the implementation of diversity policy in the workplace will be outlined in the next section.

Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic data gathered over five years. In this study, the author focused on Indonesian Muslim workers in Japan from specific types of visas, such as technical trainees, and SSW to enrich the literature review in the study of Muslim migrant workers in Japan. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of 'Diversity in the Japanese Workplace policy', the most suitable approach for data collection was an ethnography with a qualitative method, using a naturalistic interviewing style and participant observation. The investigation focuses on how people communicate what they are feeling to make sense of their experience and understand a phenomenon from the perspective of people who encounter it. The academic literature in this area includes some in-depth ethnographic studies of Muslims living in Japan, focusing on Indonesian Muslim Workers under the technical Intern Trainee Visa and SSW in Kyoto, Shiga, and Osaka. In this study, a narrative study using oral narratives was conducted with two trainees who work in the food industry in the Shiga area, and two SSW from Osaka. To get a balanced perspective, the researcher also interviewed one of the representatives from the company, namely a Japanese company consultant who asked about his views regarding Muslim workers from the lens of the company.

Table 1.
List of Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Work category	Year of interview
PH	F	30	Trainee (Food Industry)	2018
SS	F	30	Trainee (Food Industry)	2018
DZ	F	28	University Student	2019
WH	M	24	Trainee (Welding)	2019
ND	F	28	SSW (Caregiver)	2023
NN	F	21	SSW (Welding)	2023
TK	M	38	Japanese Company Consultant	2023

Sources: Author

Interviews were conducted individually. The names of the participants are abbreviated to protect their privacy. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later by the author herself, and informants were recruited using the snowball method. The interview questions examined community responses to Muslim immigrants, Japanese society's treatment of Muslim migrants, and the experience of Muslim migrants in the workplace. Participant observation was conducted to study how the Japanese effort to integrate and learn about diversity, particularly in the Muslim community. The author also attended the Japanese 'community visit program' to learn about Islam and Muslim activity at An-Nur Notogawa Shiga Mosque in 2023 which was organized by the NGOs in Kyoto.

Deciphering Indonesian Muslim Migrant Workers Experiences in Japan

> "... it is one of my dreams to be able to go and continue studying in Japan, initially to smooth my Japanese-language skills, and after that, I also intend to be able to continue working to find the experience to add to my expertise, so that when I return to Indonesia, I already have more skills and experience." (DZ, Kyoto 2019)

From the perspective of a sending country such as Indonesia, Japan is recognized as one of the favorite countries to visit or live in. In the interviews with two trainee workers, both answered that, before their arrival and decisions to live in Japan, Japan represented a country with a positive image and was even their dream country. Then, how is the implementation of the 'diversity in the workplace policy' as social integration in fulfilling their needs for religious practice on the ground, particularly in the workplace while in Japan? Are their basic needs as Muslims living in Japan properly fulfilled and in line with the slogan and goals of Japanese Diversity Policy in the Japanese Workplace'?

> As technical trainees, SS and PH in Shiga tell their stories:
>
> "During work time, all of us who wear the hijab must take off the hijab, and we pray silently at break time,

> alternating with friends, watching each other because we don't tell our leader. We are worried that we will be prohibited because our work is tight and the time is long, sometimes 16 hours a day." (SS, Shiga 2018)
>
> "When we were fasting in the fasting month of Ramadan, we were worried that it would be prohibited because our boss asked during the month of fasting whether we were fasting. We answered yes. Then the boss said, 'Please keep the performance at maximum. Don't let work become slow" (PH, Shiga 2018).

WH, a trainee working in the Kyoto area, also experienced the same story. Apart from being asked to perform optimally during fasting, he also often received verbal abuse from one of his bosses, who often mocked him during fasting in Ramadan, and also asked him to stop fasting if it would affect his work performance (WH, Kyoto 2019).

Further, Japan created the "Specified Skilled Worker" or SSW status of residence in April 2019 to welcome competent foreign specialists to operate in specific industrial fields in Japan as ready-to-work workers without prior training. Philippines, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Indonesia are among the nations that can send employees with SSW visa status (Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency 2019). The following is one of the outcomes of an interview with SSW, ND participants who came to Japan in 2022, originally from Padang, as explained by ND:

> "I've worked at three different locales. So far, there is no prohibition on wearing a hijab. However, fasting and prayer while working on a farm might be challenging. The *Sachou* (leader) is refusing due to the difficulty of the task. But as long as Sacho is unaware, it is secure. And you can only pray within the designated time. Specifically, during the rest period secretly..." (ND, Osaka 2023).

ND has recently changed jobs to become a caregiver. However, in the new location, it was discovered that ND did not have free permission to pray either; everything was done in secret. Even though ND stated in the pre-employment interview that she is a Muslim and required to pray and fast, this was not easily

accomplished (ND, Osaka 2024). The same experience was also had by a worker from Cirebon who came to Japan in 2022 and worked in the assembly sector. In the interview NN said:

> "While I work, I am prohibited from wearing the hijab and I am also prohibited from praying. What's sad is there are 70 of my seniors work at the company and all of them are Indonesian and Muslim, but no one has ever tried to discuss the need for prayer with the company, even more the *kumiai* or liaison between us and the company is also Indonesian and Muslim but does not fight for these interests" (NN, Osaka 2023).

Becoming a Muslim is not only tough for foreigners, since Japanese Muslims also confront similar challenges. Hayashi's experience serves as one example. Hayashi is a university student. Hayashi chose to become Muslim while studying in the United States. When she went home in 2001, her parents said nothing, but when the September 11 terrorist attacks struck the United States, their expressions altered. "Give up Islam," they advised her. "You won't be able to get a job and marry," Hayashi warned. Hayashi then began seeking work; following an interview at a stationery company, the recruiting official approached her: "You've received a high appraisal. But if you continue to wear it, you may be in violation of our company's policies," the official informed her. Hayashi was covered with a hijab. "I'm only wearing it as a personal obligation," she added, adding that she had no intention of taking it off. The company never contacted her again (The Mainichi 2016).

Apart from the diversity policy itself, if we look at Japan's constitution, it already regulates religious freedom. Japanese nationals were granted freedom of belief under the Meiji Constitution. The Japanese Constitution, enacted after World War II, guarantees religious freedom to all citizens. Article 20 of the constitution specifically separates the state from religious practice, stating that "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all." Additionally, the same article prohibits compelling any person to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite, or practice. These provisions ensure that individuals are free to practice their chosen religion without any interference from the state or any other individual (The Constitution of Japan n.d). However, there are still many Muslim workers facing difficulties and barriers in

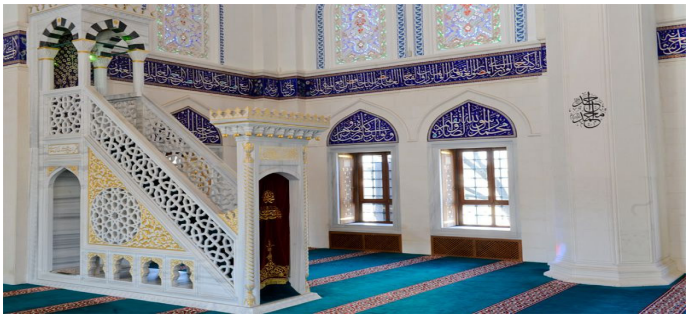
fulfilling their religious activities in the workplace. According to Hajis (2021), this is because basically, the Japanese government does not have a definite or clear policy regarding how to treat residents or foreign workers, especially Muslims in Japan. After all, these migrant workers are only treated as temporary visitors, which is applicable to Japan's immigration policy.

In an interview with Japan Times, Rochelle explained that the lack of diversity in Japanese companies causes a vicious cycle because these firms tend to resist change, "Since non-Japanese are just going to leave soon anyway, we'll just give them specialized or peripheral jobs." The non-Japanese workers then realize that they are not truly involved in the company's core activities, feel devalued, and see a lack of prospects for progress. This finally leaves, sustaining the high turnover rate and affirming the stereotype (Japan Times 2021).

However, many grassroots movements, NGOs, and local governments in Japan are working hard to promote understanding and learning about the diversity of foreigners in Japan, including Islam and Muslims. In this case, learning about Islam in Japan has become easier due to the increasing number of mosques in various regions. As mentioned earlier Japan is now home to more than 200,000 Muslims and there were 113 mosques across Japan in March 2021, up from only 15 in 1999. Although there is still a lot of distrust among the surrounding community about the mosque's existence, the Bangladeshi president of Ishinomiyaki Mosque example stated that he was concerned about public prejudice against Islam in Japan when he embarked on the mosque construction project. He had previously visited the city office and the local neighborhood association, assuring them that the facility "has no links with extremists or terrorists whatsoever" (Hideaki 2022). Yet a study conducted by Prof. Tanada stated that around 230,000 Muslims called Japan home as of the end of 2020 (Tetsuaki and Takai 2023).

Picture 1

Tokyo Camii, the Ottoman Style Mosque in Tokyo Japan



Source: Nippon (2023)

As part of efforts to promote diversity and understanding, some local governments, NGOs, and Non-Profit Organisations, hold educational activities for Japanese to better understand diversity. One such initiative is from one of the NGOs from Kyoto which created a program to educate people on Islam and Muslims. As part of the program, participants visit various mosques and engage in dialogue to learn about Islam. The author had the opportunity to attend one of these activities and engage in discussions with Japanese individuals who joined the program and were curious about Islam and Muslims. The event was attended by around 20 people, both men, and women who came from various professions including students, housewives, local government and corporate workers, and others. The activities included group discussions where Japanese participants were free to ask questions about Muslims and Islam. Most of the questions asked were about the Islamic obligation to pray five times a day, fasting, halal food, the hijab, gender equality in Islam, education for women in Islam, and terrorism. Through these discussions, many Japanese people gained a better understanding of Islam and Muslims. During the discussion, some of the participants emphasized the importance of a certain program. They pointed out that "most people's knowledge of Islam is limited to what they see in the media. Unfortunately, the media often portrays Islam in a bad light. However, after having discussions and making Muslim friends, the participant came to see that the media's portrayal of Islam is very different from reality" (Participant Observation, Notogawa Mosque, Shiga 2023). Below is a photo of the activity.

Picture 2

A group organized by one of the NGOs in Kyoto visited various mosques to learn about Islam and Muslims.[1]

Source: Author

Furthermore, from the perspective of the Japanese company, TK a Japanese who works as a consultant for Japanese companies that employ foreigners, particularly Muslims and Indonesians in an interview, explained that:

> "Many companies lack an understanding of Islam and Muslims, which often leads to the violation of their rights. Apart from that, many Japanese companies still implement bad working culture. However, some companies have started to learn about the culture of the countries of their prospective workers, including Islam. They are learning what companies should do, what they should avoid, and how to treat their Muslim employees. The main obstacle is their limited understanding of Muslims, which is often shaped by media stereotypes. In addition to this, Muslim workers in Japan can be less proactive in communicating their needs to their employers, which can lead to misunderstandings. For instance, fasting is often prohibited by Japanese companies due to concerns about reduced productivity, but some employers may also be worried about their safety during fasting periods as they may not be aware of the practice of *sahur* and breaking the fast. One other important thing to consider is that there is diversity among Muslims

1 The photo above depicts an activity conducted by an NGO in Kyoto that involved locals visiting mosques throughout Japan and engaging in discussion to learn about Islam and Muslims. This photograph depicts participants queuing for traditional Indonesian meals served by the An-Nur Notogawa Shiga mosque committee.

> in practicing their religious practices. For instance, some Muslims wear hijab while others do not. Some Muslims ask for prayer while others do not. While some Muslims follow the rule, others may not. This situation is also an important lesson for the Japanese who are not familiar with Islam. Overall, there is still a lack of understanding about Islam and its practices among the Japanese people and companies. Therefore, education is necessary from a two-way approach to promote mutual understanding" (TK, Kyoto 2023).

The Japanese government's efforts to create 'diversity in workplace policy' need to be appreciated as an effort to intervene in creating social integration in their society. However, it seems that the implementation of the diversity policy in the workplace for foreign workers still needs a more concrete policy standpoint to assist foreigners living in Japan or promote their integration into society particularly in the Japanese companies that hire Muslim workers which then produces a two-way understanding. According to Akihiro Shugo, a representative executive at Halal Media Japan, said "...Nevertheless, Japanese workplaces have often failed to meet the needs of Muslim workers...", in addition, He also suggests that companies start with small efforts, such as allowing Muslim employees to use an available meeting room for prayers. Businesses should be able to appreciate other Islamic practices, including gathering for prayer at mosques on Fridays, fasting during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, or strict rules about women's clothing (Honda 2016).

Conclusion

With the explanation above, it was discovered that, while Islam is not the predominant religion in Japan, However, it managed to become home to over 200,000 Muslims and it is predicted that the number will continue to grow. In addition, diversity in workplace policy plays an important part as a standing point and has contributed significantly to the emerging step in changing the Japanese working environment as a social integration strategy to create harmony between the natives with the immigrants in Japan.

However, by looking at the stories conveyed, it seems that the 'diversity in workplace policies' cannot yet be adequately implemented for Muslim workers, especially those with semi-skilled visa categories such as trainees and SSW. Furthermore, social integration efforts through workplace diversity policies are hampered because some Japanese companies continue to have a bad working culture that promotes productivity by imposing long working hours, which is also a problem for Japanese workers and has prompted criticism and efforts to change. As a result, this has an influence, particularly in the workplace. Devout Muslims who pray five times a day would struggle to adapt to a society in which constant hard work is expected and applauded.

Aside from that, two-way learning is hampered since the "temporary" status of a non-Japanese reduces the urgency of social integration practice. The impact, as explained by Rochelle, is that a lack of diversity in Japanese companies creates a vicious cycle because these firms tend to resist change, assuming that non-Japanese will leave soon, so they (the company) simply give them specialized or peripheral jobs. Finally, non-Japanese employees recognize that they are not fully involved in the company's main activities, feel undervalued, and see little opportunities for advancement. This finally leaves, perpetuating the high turnover rate and reinforcing the stigma.

If we look from the perspective of some Indonesian workers, particularly under the technical intern trainee and SSW, they are aware that their presence in Japan is also temporary, usually between one and three years, with a maximum of five years, so when they see that the company is not meeting their basic needs, many of them choose to ignore it or patient (Sabar) and consider how to survive until the deadline is determined for example, by finding solutions to fulfill the basic needs of prayer and fasting in secret. Ultimately, the absence of participation in attempts to integrate as a diverse community cannot be fulfilled. Nevertheless, several companies that employ Muslims have implemented these positive measures to accommodate their religious and cultural needs. These measures include providing prayer facilities, offering halal food, and consulting with experts who understand the culture of the workers' countries of origin, including Muslims but unfortunately, not all companies have the same initiatives.

Regardless of the fact as indicated by one of the firm consultants above, two-way learning and mutual understanding efforts will result in strong social integration. Companies receive optimum performance and productivity from employees, and employees express their thanks to the company for fulfilling their demands.

On the other hand, the conditions for realizing social integration do not only depend on the foundation of rules or policies; the role of direct involvement of natives is also crucial; interestingly, in this case, the efforts of several natives, especially NGOs and local governments, are more progressive and active in building social integration with foreigners, especially Muslims, than some Japanese companies that accept Muslim workers themselves. Based on the results of participant observation, we can see that local governments and nonprofit organizations have been working hard to fill the gap at the regional and community level in providing knowledge about diversity, including learning about Islam to gain understanding. Intra- and inter-ethnic interaction built-in interactive discussion experience might assist immigrants in hybridized cultural identity, place connection, and nurturing of local community bonds.

Ultimately, addressing the labor shortage by granting various sorts of visas is simply a temporary solution. However, what needs to be acknowledged is that deeper structural adjustments and transformations in values are needed so that society can achieve long-term sustainability, and most significantly, alter the narrative from seeing immigrants as guests to accepting them as part of society's diversity. In the end, two-way learning is essential as it leads to a sense of mutual understanding.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Reviewers and Editors of the Global Strategis Journal for their valuable feedback and editorial assistance.

About the author

Yusy Widarahesty has a Ph.D. in International Relations from Ritsumeikan

University Japan, is a lecturer in International Relations at Al Azhar Indonesia University, and currently working as a Senior Researcher at the Asia Japan Research Institute/AJI Ritsumeikan University, and co-founder of RUMI Japan (Rumah Masyarakat Indonesia di Jepang), a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering Indonesian migrants in Japan. Her study focuses on civil society, international migration, labor migration, and human security. She can be reached via email at yusy_widarahesty@uai.ac.id.

References

Books and Book Chapters

Alcantara, Lailani, and Yoshiki Shinohara. (eds.), 2022. *Diversity and Inclusion in Japan: Issues in Business and Higher Education* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Beresnevièiûtë, Vida, 2003. *Dimensions of Social Integration: Appraisal Of Theoretical Approaches*. Ethnicity, 96–108.

Collins-Kreiner, Noga, and Geoffrey Wall, 2015. "Tourism and Religion: Spiritual Journeys and Their Consequences.", in Brunn, D. Stanley, 2015. *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics*. New York: Springer.

Hassan, Muhammad Haniff, 2008. "Responding to the Idea of Hijrah (Migration).", in Kassim, R. Yang, 2008. *Strategic Currents:Emerging Trends in Southeast Asia*.

Jureidini, Ray, and Said Fares Hassan, 2019. "Introduction.", in *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalisation and Citizenship*. Brill.

World Tourism Organization, 2010. *Tourism and Migration: Exploring the Relationship between Two Global Phenomena*.

Journal and Online Journal

Asazuma, Takumi, 2015. ''Halal Tourism Activates Japanese Tourism Market", *Plus I*, **11**, 27- 30.

Budianto, Firman, 2024. ''Promoting Diversity, Introducing Islam: Muslim Indonesian Professionals in Contemporary Corporate Japan", *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, **22** (4).

Contucci, Pierluigi, and Rickard Sandell, 2015. ''How Integrated are Immigrants? Demographic Research", **33**, 1271–1280.

Deniar, Shannaz, and Tonny Effendi, 2019. "Halal Food Diplomacy in Japan and South Korea." *Journal of Social and Political Sciences,* **2** (3).

Laurentsyeva, Nadzeya, and Alessandra Venturini, 2017. ''The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy – A Literature Review", *Intereconomics*, **52** (5).

Kojima, Shinji, 2023. ''To Bury Or Not To Bury: Muslim Migrants And The Politics Of Funerary Rights In Contemporary Japan", *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, **21**(11).

Kunio, Katakura, 2002. ''Japan's Policy on Islam: Rethinkking the Dialogue Approach", *Gaiko Forum (summer 2002).*

Rustam, M. Rezza, 2021. ''Oyster Cultivation Betting on Foreign Workers: A Study of Indonesian Workers in Hiroshima*", IZUMI*, **10** (1), 131-142.

Yamashita, Yoko, 2021. ''Islam and Muslims in "Non-Religious" Japan: Caught in Between Prejudice Against Islam and Performative Tolerance", *International Journal of Asian Studies*, **19** (1), 81–97.

Yulita, I. Rachmi, and Susy Ong, 2019. ''The Changing Image of Islam in Japan: The Role of Civil Society in Disseminating Better Information About Islam", *Al-Jami'ah*, **57** (1), 51-82.

Wahidati, Lufi, and Eska N. Sarinastiti, 2018. "Perkembangan Wisata Halal Di Jepang." *Jurnal Gama Societa*, **1** (1), 9-19.

Thesis and Dissertations

Lubis, D. Novita, 2021. How Muslims Live in Japan and Raise Their Children. A Case Study of Five Families in Osaka. Master Thesis. Osaka: Osaka Jogakuin University Graduate

School of International Collaboration and Coexistence in the 21st Century.

Reports

Simon, Judit, Noemi Kiss, Agata Łaszewska, and Susanne Mayer, 2015. "Public Health Aspects of Migrant Health: A Review of the Evidence on Health Status for Labour Migrants in the European Region." WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Conference Paper

Thamrin, Muhammad, and Asra Virgianita, 2018 "Strategic Role of Japanese Government in Promoting Halal Market in Japan." in the 2nd International Conference on Strategic and Global Studies (ICSGS), 24-26 October. Central Jakarta: School of Strategic and Global Study of University of Indonesia.

Online Articles

Al Samarrai, S. Mahdi, 2009. ''Islam in Japan: History, Spread, and Institutions in The Country". [online]. in https://dr-samarai.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/58_History_of_Islam_in_Japan_english.pdf [accessed June 2020].

Hajis Hiji, 2021. "The number of Muslims in Japan is growing fast". [online]. in https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/01/07/the-number-of-muslims-in-japan-is-growing-fast [accessed September 2021].

Honda, Takahisa, 2016. ''Japanese workplaces learn to welcome Muslims". Nikkei Asia. [online]. in https://asia.nikkei.com/NAR/Articles/Japanese-workplaces-learn-to-welcome-Muslims [accessed September 2021].

Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency/BP2MI, 2019. ''Informasi Tentang Specified Skilled Worker (SSW)". [online]. in https://bp2mi.go.id/berita-detail/faq-ssw-jepang

Ishibashi, Hideaki, 2022. ''Mosque in northern Japan a lifeline for Muslim interns". [online]. in https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14715734 [accessed December 2023].

Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), 2022. ''Result of International Student Survey in Japan". [online]. in https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/en/statistics/zaiseki/data/2021.html [accessed September 2023].

JICA, n.d. ''Toward an Inclusive Society where Diverse People, Regardless of Their Nationality, Can Thrive Together: Research Outcomes Discussed at a Symposium on Foreign Worker". [online]. in https://www.jica.go.jp/english/jica_ri/news/topics/2022/20220203_02.html [accessed March 2024].

Masabuchi, Akinobu, 2024. ''Indonesians, Vietnamese form larger share of Japan's foreign workers. Nikkei Asia". [online]. in https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-immigration/Indonesians-Vietnamese-form-larger-share-of-Japan-s-foreign-workers#:~:text=Meanwhile%2C%20the%20num [accessed September 2023].

McIvor, McIvor, and Jackie F. Steele, 2022. ''Diversity in the Japanese Workplace Then & Now". [online]. in https://globisinsights.com/purpose/dei/diversity-in-the-japanese-workplace/ [accessed March 2024].

MHLW, 2024. ''Zairyū gaikoku hito tōkei (kyū tōroku gaikoku hito tōkei) [Statistics of Foreign Residents (Formerly Registered Foreign Residents Statistics)]". [online]. in http://bit.ly/4eSjDUO [accessed March 2024].

Nippon.com, 2013. ''Tokyo Camii: Japan's biggest mosque". [online]. in https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c01301/ [accessed September 2023].

Otaki, Tetsuaki, and Rikako, Takai, 2023. ''Japan Home to a Growing Muslim Presence as it Embraces Change". [online]. in https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14903765 [accessed September 2021].

Prastyo, M. Yoga, 2022. ''74 Warga RI Ikut Program Magang 3 Tahun ke Jepang." [online]. in https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5996157/74-warga-ri-ikut-program-magang-3-

tahun-ke-jepang [accessed September 2023].

Prime Minister's Office of Japan, 2024. ''Ministerial Council on Acceptance and Inclusion of Foreign Human Resources". [online]. in https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/actions/202402/09gaikoku.html [accessed September 2024].

Song, Y. Chresteena, 2008. "The Everyday Life of Muslim in Japan". [online]. in https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2008/06/the-everyday-life-of-muslims-in-japan.html [accessed June 2020].

Takahisa, Honda, 2016. "Japanese Workplaces Learn to Welcome Muslims". [online]. in https://asia.nikkei.com/NAR/Articles/Japanese-workplaces-learn-to-welcome-Muslims [accessed September 2021].

The Government of Japan, 2016. ''ABENOMICS: Diversity & Empowerment of People". [online]. In https://www.japan.go.jp/abenomics/diversity/index.html [accessed February 2024].

Japan Times, 2021. ''Japanese Organizations Can Better Utilize the Skills and Diversity International Workers Have to Offer". [online]. in https://info.japantimes.co.jp/jt-with-kintopia/06/ [accessed March 2024].

The Mainichi, 2016. ''Japanese Muslims Face Challenges at the Workplace." [online]. in https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20160104/p2a/00m/0na/014000c [accessed March 2024].

Study in Japan, (n.d.). ''The Summary of Result on an Annual Survey of International Students". [online]. in https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/en/statistics/zaiseki/index.html [accessed September 2023].

The Constitution of Japan, n.d. [online]. in https://web.archive.org/web/20230916004354/https:/japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html [accessed September 2023].

Waseda University, 2017. ''Ever Growing Muslim Community in the World and Japan". [online]. in https://www.waseda.jp/

top/en/news/53405 [accessed September 2023].

Yajima, Yoko, 2019. ''Promoting Diversity at Companies". [online]. in https://www.murc.jp/wpcontent/uploads/2022/10/201904_english_all.pdf [accessed June 2020].

Yasuzawa, Hayato, 2021. ''Reviewing the Cultural, Economic and Legal State of Diversity & Inclusion in Japan". [online]. in https://www.bmes.com/reviewing-cultural-economic-and-legal-state-of-diversity-inclusion-japan-1/ [accessed February 2024].