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# **Japanese Language Skills as an Economic Resource in New Zealand Business**

A comparison of the perceptions of tertiary students of Japanese regarding the value of language skills with the perceptions of students of international business and employers in tourism and trade in Canterbury

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## ABSTRACT

Foreign language education in New Zealand has traditionally focussed on European languages. Asian language programmes are relatively new and have largely been introduced within the existing system, which allows few learners to reach high levels of proficiency. A survey of firms involved in exporting and tourism in the Canterbury region was conducted regarding the way companies communicate with their Japanese clients and associates, to what extent staff possessed Japanese language skills, where and how these were used and how they were valued. The results were then compared with results of a survey of a sample of students in the Canterbury region who were studying either Japanese or International Marketing.

Findings revealed that the more important the Japanese market was to a business in either tourism or exporting, the more likely they were to see language skills as a valuable resource and to invest in persons with these skills. In exporting language skills were commonly utilised at middle and top management level, whereas in tourism they were more commonly used in customer liaison and lower level activities. Language skills were generally ranked after functional and technical skills in terms of importance, although this varied depending on the importance of the Japanese market. It would appear that increasingly, language skills are viewed as an economic resource when combined with other skills.

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