

LOCALIZING GLOBAL GOALS: BEKASI'S PARADIPLMACY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COOPERATION WITH JAPAN

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Abstract:

Indonesia-Japan collaboration on vocational education has been a strategic step toward increased labor demand and youth employment opportunities. Local governments are effective facilitators of such partnerships by connecting schools, industries, and foreign partners. It is a real-life example of the Indonesian city of Bekasi in West Java, where the local government facilitated the partnership of SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 and Japanese partners. Through partnerships with Japanese industries at the MM2100 Industrial Estate and Japanese training centers, students are furnished with industry-specific curricula, training in their technical expertise, and internship placements at home and abroad. This partnership not only endows students with hands-on experience of engineering and manufacturing but also improves their intercultural ability, linguistic skills, and adaptation to work environments worldwide. Japan brings its expertise by donating training modules, professional mentorship, and internship placements, while the government of Bekasi facilitates alignment of policy, provision of funds and coordination with local industries. This partnership is a realization of Indonesia's vocational revitalization program of closing education and labor market disparities. It is more fundamentally designed to generate socioeconomic results like youth employment minimization and local industry competitiveness enhancement. Also, it contributes toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), and Goal 17 (partnership for the goals). This example of partnership between Bekasi and Japan is evidence of the contribution of multi-level governance of education cooperation and can inspire other regions seeking strong foreign partnership-based human capital development.

Keywords: Indonesia, Japan, Vocational High School, Bekasi, Paradiplomacy, Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

Rising labor demand in Southeast Asia has compelled governments to bolster vocational education as a tool of economic competitiveness and youth employment. Indonesia, with its demographic surplus, is challenged by both making sure its youth possess appropriate technical and soft skills and lowering the rate of unemployment. Meanwhile, Japan, facing labor shortage and demographic decline, has increasingly looked toward partnerships with partner nations in building human capital. It has created room for both bilateral and subnational collaboration in vocational education. In Indonesia, vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) have become key players in this agenda when associated with industrial clusters and local government sponsorship. This trend is seen with the collaboration of SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 in Bekasi and Japanese industries within the MM2100 industrial park and can bring about global impact at the local level with training, internships, and transnational knowledge exchange.

In the Indonesian context, local governments are best placed to accommodate such international collaborations, acting as intermediaries between schools, industry players, and foreign



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partners. It is a manifestation of paradiplomacy, which refers to subnational governments' engagement with international relations and has often been characterized within fields of commerce such as trade and investment and education and cultural exchange (Cornago, 2010). Paradiplomacy has attracted academic interest with rising transnational collaboration by cities and regions independent of central government agendas, although not necessarily against them (Lecours, 2008; Kuznetsov, 2015). This new practice of diplomacy is seen in the example of Bekasi being involved in brokering collaboration between vocational high schools and Japanese industry players, where local governments take advantage of their autonomy and pursue international cooperation. This paper positions the Indonesia-Japan vocational education partnership within paradiplomacy and makes the contention that it is a useful example of subnational players' contributions both at the national development and at the global levels.

Paradiplomacy in Indonesia is still understudied relative to developed examples from Europe and North America, where regions and municipalities have long traditions of external outreach. However, the Indonesian decentralization reform since 1999 has prepared the ground for local autonomy, where districts and municipalities can pursue external cooperation within the limits of national legislation. In Bekasi, e.g., the local government facilitates connecting SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 with Japanese industries and ensuring alignment with local labor market demand and facilitating student mobility projects. These actions show that paradiplomacy can work both as a diplomatic practice and a development tool. Following Keating (1999), subnational international work often has the objective of attracting investment, acquiring capacity, and opening up chances to citizens and hence boosting local competitiveness. Here, vocational education partnerships are used by local governments to achieve their development mandate, but at the same time project their international footprint. Besides governance, the Indonesia-Japan vocational partnership is highly congruent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, it is congruent with SDG 4, focusing on inclusive and equitable quality education; SDG 8, focusing on sustained economic growth and decent work; and SDG 17, focusing on partnership and global goals. Through the incorporation of international cooperation into vocational training, local governments such as Bekasi achieve multiple targets of the SDGs at once. Students access industry-relevant education; communities access reduced rates of unemployment; and industries access a highly skilled workforce. According to Sachs (2015) and Fukuda-Parr (2016), multi-level governance is crucial for the realization of the SDGs, with local actors needing to take their part right next to what national governments and foreign institutions do. Therefore, the Japan-Bekasi collaboration exemplifies the way paradiplomacy can function as a local route of global development. The engagement of Japanese interest groups fortifies the credibility of this collaboration even more. Japanese firms based in the MM2100 Industrial Estate offer not only technical training and internships but also cultural and linguistic exchange, and prepare students for possible employment in Japan or Japanese-related industries in Indonesia. These programs are usually backed by Japanese institutions like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and private business networks that supply curriculum development, technology transfer, and human resource development. Tsunekawa (2017) says that Japan's international cooperation policy places greater emphasis on the development of human capital as the foundation of its Asian foreign policy. Hence, collaborations with Indonesian vocational schools may be regarded within a larger Japanese effort at ensuring a steady supply of skilled labor while at the same time advancing bilateral relations based on people-to-people understanding.

Notably, this collaboration addresses structural problems within Indonesia's education system. Even after heavy investment, vocational schools continue to suffer from limited resources,



The research uses a qualitative research approach based on document research and secondary data. It is based on academic sources, government sources, multilateral institution sources, and official Japanese and Indonesian policy documents. Through textual analysis, the study explores collaboration relations of vocational education, especially local governments' and vocational high schools' (SMKs) relationships with Japanese stakeholders. This type of qualitative approach enables it to explore institutional arrangements, Memoranda of Agreement, and practice without observation and interview.

Moreover, the paper employs the paradiplomacy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lenses to put the findings in a contextual perspective. Paradiplomacy is used to understand the local government's prospective role toward initiating international collaboration, and the SDGs (Goal 4: Quality Education and Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth) put the findings within the context of the global development agendas. Application of both theory framing and thematic document analysis enables the former to identify both the policy processes and generalizable findings of Indonesia–Japan vocational cooperation.

In addition, the study employs comparative analysis when analyzing the cooperation of Indonesia with Japan relative to other vocational collaborations elsewhere. This comparison is utilized when discerning the distinctive features of Japan's involvement, such as fervent training of a technical kind, internships, and incorporation within labor markets. By placing Indonesia–Japan cooperation within a comparative regional and international context, the study illuminates the manner in which bilateral undertakings offer adaptations used by other local governments and vocational schools aimed at improving youth employability. The study is aware of its limitations, specifically the utilization of secondary data sources instead of fieldwork. While document analysis is vast with information on policy platforms and institutional strategies, it may fail to reflect the lived experiences of students, teachers, or industry practitioners at the sharp end of these programs. Follow-up studies can adopt this work and integrate interviews and field-based observations, and utilize these data sets to improve understanding of the manner vocational cooperation is realized on the ground with tangible outcomes improving Indonesian youths' prospects in Japan and elsewhere.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Local Governments in Vocational Cooperation. Indonesian local governments have increasingly positioned themselves as key players in foreign collaboration, particularly in education and employment. Contrary to conventional diplomas undertaken at the national level, local governments use paradiplomacy, where they network with foreign entities directly. Bekasi has cooperated with Japanese companies to place SMK vocational high school graduates in industry internships. It is one expression of municipalities being able to bypass central red tape and decisively respond to labor market needs (Kuznetsov, 2015; Cornago, 2010). SMK MM2100 and the local government of Bekasi's collaboration is a strong illustration of local-level foreign engagement in vocational education. Since there are several Japanese facilities within the local industrial estate, the local government administration assumes a facilitation role where vocational schools of SMK MM2100 fine-tune curricula against Japanese industrial specifications. It elevates the employment of graduates and forms a sustainable agreement of partnership (Aldecoa & Keating, 1999). Local governments' interest in foreign education projects goes beyond the facilitation of administration and involves regulatory assistance. For example, incentives and common training centers are fashioned by Bekasi, where government policies and industry specifications are converged. Projects of this sort put central prominence on subnational diplomas in shaping global-local connectivity (Tavares, 2016).



This joint participation by Asia University showcases the institution's broader approach of global outreach by people-to-people diplomacy, helping Indonesian vocational students toward the acquirement of intercultural skills and linguistic familiarity –the skills exceedingly useful for interactions within globalized industries (SMK Mitra Industri MM2100, 2025). Even though the web story refers to "University Asia, Japan," Asia University (Japan) is a private institution from Musashino, Tokyo, which teaches majors like Business Administration, Economics, International Relations, and Urban Innovation (Asia University [Japan], n.d.). This participation is likely reflective of the university's larger move toward globalization. Though no one-sided collaboration with SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 is on public record, this participation is characteristic of Asia University's approach of global outreach through education exchange and is reflective of its motto of "Self-help and Cooperation." Wider trends within Asia would include institutional configurations such as the Study in Japan Global Network Project in ASEAN, deepening outreach toward ASEAN countries (including Indonesia), and with the intent of increasing student mobility and cultural exchange (MEXT, 2024). Even though it is possible that this very project may not feature Asia University specifically, it positions the Japanese Week within a larger trend of academic and Japanese higher education institutions' use of soft power.

Linking Cooperation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Indonesia's local governments' collaboration with vocational schools and Japanese stakeholders is a great contribution toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Particularly, SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) are facilitated with the execution of systematic employment placement and internship programs. These ensure increased industry-specific education access and equip students with sustainable employment readiness (UNDP, 2015). Through the Japanese standard penetration of Indonesian vocational training, the collaboration makes education not only accessible but industry-standard compliant. It facilitates SDG 4 by conducting itself toward inclusive and equitable education toward lifelong learning of all students (United Nations, 2017). SDG 8 is especially facilitated by these collaborations since they create access points toward decent employment for youth Indonesians. Internship and training with Japanese industries enable access to stable and skills-based employment and contribute to lowered rates of unemployment and higher economic productivity (ILO, 2020). Moreover, the collaboration facilitates SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), where multi-stakeholder partnerships are identified as essential tools toward sustainable development.

Schools, local governments, foreign enterprises, and local communities are synergistic partnerships promoting both education and economic values. It is also a partnership where gender equity is promoted so that female students at vocational schools equally access training and placements. It is consistent with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), where empowerment of men and equal participation of men and women are necessities (True, 2012). Further, the partnership is consistent with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by opening up opportunities for students from marginalized backgrounds. Various vocational schools cater to low-income families, and by matching them up with Japanese industries, the program bridges the socioeconomic gap of socio-economics. Local governments in Bekasi and other places carry out global goals with a direct bearing on their communities. It is a display of the potency of SDGs being implemented paradiplomatically. Emphases on sustainability in training modules, e.g., energy-efficient processes of manufacture, are consistent with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). It makes vocational education both economically viable and green.

At a broader level, the Indonesia–Japan vocational partnership illustrates how international cooperation can transform education into a driver of sustainable development. It highlights the



importance of contextualizing SDGs in local realities, ensuring that global goals translate into tangible community benefits. The integration of SDGs into this cooperation ensures that the initiative goes beyond economic gains. It creates a holistic framework where education, employment, gender equality, and sustainability converge, making the partnership a model for future international collaborations in vocational training. Such an explanation was proven through an event, "The Japanese Week 2025" program at SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 highlighted the strong educational and cultural cooperation between Indonesia and Japan in the vocational school context. Organized within the school environment, the event introduced students to various aspects of Japanese culture, including traditional arts, language exposure, and cultural performances. The goal was to strengthen students' intercultural competencies and prepare them for future collaboration with Japanese industries (SMK Mitra Industri MM2100, 2025). During the event, students enthusiastically participated in activities such as calligraphy workshops, traditional dance and music showcases, and interactive cultural learning sessions. These activities provided them not only with an appreciation of Japanese cultural heritage but also with a broader understanding of Japan's work ethos and communication styles—key skills for vocational students preparing to work in Japanese-related industries (SMK Mitra Industri MM2100, 2025). Japanese Week served as a platform for strengthening Paradiplomacy relations at the local level, as the collaboration was supported by Japanese stakeholders and aligned with the broader partnership between Indonesia and Japan in vocational education. Combining cultural training and industrial training is the ideal instance of combining soft and education-focused diplomas with skills training, and hence making the vocational training students more competitive at the employment level globally. Taking a cue from Camroux (2019) and Kuik (2020), grassroots-level exchange of cultures of this sort solidifies state-to-state relations and establishes long-term relations at the people-to-people level.

Eliminating Unemployment of Indonesian Young People through Vocational Cooperation. Youth unemployment is a chronic issue prevailing in Indonesia, especially caused by the mismatch between school offerings and labor market requirements. Vocational training is identified by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) as a significant factor in cutting youth unemployment by exposing students to industry-specific skills. Indonesia-Japan cooperation and especially vocational high schools such as SMK Mitra Industri MM2100 are examples of strategic efforts undertaken to bridge the gap. By combining Japanese disciplines of work, technology transfers, and internship placements, students are prepared for employment (Sugiyanto, 2021). It is consistent with the national interests of improving human capital development under the long-term Indonesian government program. One of the tangible steps is making school–industry linkages where Japanese industries operating within industrial estates near Bekasi offer in-plant training for students. Literature evidences that vocational schools with industry-partnership linkages show better graduate employment rates than schools without (Setiawan & Ardiansyah, 2020). Putting students in Japanese manufacturing plants directly exposes the graduates not only to technical knowledge but also to work attitudes and cross-cultural knowledge. These skills equip them with higher competitiveness both locally and globally, and hence cut the risks of employment (Yamamoto, 2019).

Table 1. Unemployment and Placement of Indonesian Young Workers in Japan (2023–2025)

Year	Youth Unemployment Rate (%)	Number of Indonesian Workers in Japan
2023	16.0	77,000
2024	15.2	84,000
2025	14.8 (est.)	90,000 (est.)



Source: Data compiled from Badan Pusat Statistik (2024), Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (2024), and Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan Republik Indonesia (2024).

In 2023, the unemployment rate was at 5.45%, revealing a moderate prevalence of unemployed persons since the country was revamping post-pandemic recovery. Up to 2024, the rate lowered further to 4.82%, revealing government initiatives to create employment opportunities based on vocational training programs, employment creation projects, and partnerships with foreign industries like Japan. Up to 2025, the rate lowered further to 4.69%, the lowest of the observation period. This gradual lowering suggests that Indonesia has been very effective in addressing unemployment, especially youth employment, based on strategic policy intervention, industry-specific internships, and education-to-employment linkages. However, the level—though lowered—is still revealing structural weaknesses like skills mismatching, geographical disparities, and limited absorption capacity of high-technology industries. Overall, the trend reveals promising development where Indonesia was successful in gradually bringing down the rates of unemployed persons within the three-year observation.

Subnational governments are equally important in supporting these partnerships by encouraging paradiplomatic relations with Japanese counterparts. Paradiplomacy enables subnational governments to advance economic cooperation and student exchange at the sub-state level (Keating, 2013). SMK MM2100, being assisted by the local government of Bekasi, is a classic example of this, where local governments bridge links with Japanese companies within the region. Regional governments are made effective agents of structural employment (Cornago, 2010) curtailment with these initiatives advancing the institutional framework of youth employment.

Additional Japanese partners like Asia University cement these programs by blending cultural exchange and academic partnership. Activities like Japanese Week at SMK MM2100 allow students not just to be technically qualified but instead go through Japanese values, culture, and language. This multifaceted preparation sufficiently prepares students for eventual work both locally within Japanese industries and elsewhere (Asia University, 2023). Books underline the point that linguistic and cultural training significantly improves the employment placement rates of vocational school graduates, particularly those within multinationals (Nakamura & Ota, 2018). Japanese industry contributions within the industrial belt of Bekasi are symbolic of the manner in which CSR can take head-on youth employment head-on. Educational programs consisting of apprenticeship training, scholarship awards, and work-based learning yield a supply of qualified young labor ready for work (Tanaka, 2020). For Indonesia, it not only reduces the volume of unemployed individuals but also improves industry productivity by making the workforce higher education relevant and responsive to foreign investor specifications. This collaboration is mutual, where Japanese industries are guaranteed skilled labor and Indonesian youth of steady employment chances.

In spite of these hopeful projects at scale, however, issues remain. Literature points out inequalities between vocational schools at urban hubs like Bekasi and those at rural locations with weak industrial partners (Rahardjo, 2021). Without balanced access to Japanese-launched projects like these, Indonesian youth continue to suffer from the threat of being unemployed or underemployed. Accordingly, the Indonesian government must scale up and replicate such collaboration projects by encouraging more Japanese businesses to collaborate with local schools at the provincial level. It is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on "Decent Work and Economic Growth," with a tilt toward participation and inclusivity (United Nations, 2015). Vocational education's contribution toward fighting unemployment is equally toward entrepreneurship. Some Japanese-launched projects are of entrepreneurship education where students can set up start-ups or small enterprises instead of taking up jobs (Ishikawa & Matsui, 2020).



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This entrepreneurial dimension broadens the career prospects of Indonesian youth and makes them independent of a few defined vacancies. Through Japanese managerial models' complementarity with local entrepreneurial fervor, these projects can contribute toward local economy stimulation and put endogenous unemployment aside.

Another dimension that indirectly supports youth employment is cultural diplomacy. Activities like Japanese Week at SMK MM2100 expose students to cultural literacy that enhances cross-border employability. In the views of experts, soft skills like knowledge of foreign languages, adaptability, and intercultural communication are no less significant than technical skills when it comes to garnering jobs within the global industries (Wang & Doz, 2019). Activities of this kind make Indonesian youth more competitive and attractive to Japanese employers weighing bicultural skills within their industries. From the Japanese perspective, too, youth employment within Indonesia is equally aligned with their strategic interests. Japan has experienced pronounced aging and decline of its labor force, and therefore, its local industries continue relying increasingly on foreign labor markets (Higuchi, 2020). Through training Indonesian youth, Japanese industries not only ensure labor supply within their Indonesian businesses but ready and qualified migrant workers who can legally and expertly contribute to Japan's labor market. This mutual dependability solidifies bilateral relations and enhances sustained cooperation. Youth employment within Indonesia, therefore, must culminate with innovative partnerships like those seen within Indonesia-Japan vocational cooperation. Through industry-school linkages, cultural events, local government paradiplomacy, and business engagement, Indonesian youth are provided with industry-specific skills applicable within a competitive labor market. Through the incorporation of both technology and cultural training and entrepreneurial training, these initiatives not only eliminate poverty but also facilitate sustainable development. Indonesia-Japan vocational cooperation hence emerges as a pillar when it comes to resolving structural problems of youth employment while solidifying bilateral relations (Setiawan & Ardiansyah, 2020; Yamamoto, 2019; Cornago, 2010; Nakamura & Ota, 2018).

Future Prospects of Indonesian Youth Employment in Japan. A future where Indonesian youth would work in Japan is very promising for alleviating domestic unemployment while enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two states. With visible signs of an aging population coupled with labor shortages growing, particularly in healthcare, manufacturing, and agriculture, the demand for foreign workers, among them Indonesians, is likely to increase (OECD, 2024). That creates a win-win situation: Japan gets the labor it desperately needs, leaving little choice behind for Indonesia but to find job absorption for its young workforce. By expanding employment opportunities for Indonesian youths through strategic cooperation programs like the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) visa scheme, remittances from Indonesian workers in Japan can economically benefit Indonesia's growth, especially in rural areas. Remittances are spent not just on consumption but for investing in education, starting small-scale businesses, and providing community development, which in turn multiplies economic benefits (World Bank, 2023). It is currently in line with Indonesia's strategy of promoting

However, the future also requires robust policy support to maximize benefits. Without adequate protection, Indonesian workers risk exploitation or limited career progression in Japan. Thus, Indonesia must strengthen pre-departure training, legal assistance, and post-return reintegration programs (BNP2MI, 2024). These efforts not only safeguard workers but also ensure that their overseas experience contributes productively to Indonesia's economy. Ensuring decent working conditions is also critical to sustaining Japan's reputation as a fair labor partner. Moreover, this collaboration contributes to Indonesia's achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),



particularly Goal 8 on “Decent Work and Economic Growth” and Goal 10 on “Reduced Inequalities” (United Nations, 2024). By channeling young Indonesians into stable overseas jobs, Indonesia not only addresses immediate unemployment concerns but also fosters inclusive growth. This dual alignment with global development agendas enhances Indonesia’s international standing as a country capable of balancing migration with socioeconomic development.

On the one hand, the inviting of Indonesian workers is going to affect the shape of the demographic picture of the labor market in Japan. More Indonesians joining the fabric of workforce would contribute further to stabilizing Japan's declining population issue. Workplaces are multicultural; for instance, a changed attitude and creating an environment conducive to the flourishing of cross-cultural collaborations and innovations that create better productivity across sectors (Nakajima, 2023). This development demonstrates the interdependence of labor mobility with sustainable growth in both sending and host countries. Long-term successful absorption of Indonesian youth in Japan could also stimulate other ASEAN countries to intensify labor mobility partnerships with them. What Indonesia experiences can be an instrument in setting the tone for managing migration-it reduces domestic unemployment and occurs simultaneously with regional cooperation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2024). Indonesia is not merely a labor-exporting country; it will certainly be a regional leader in labor migration policy management. The future of the Indonesian workforce in Japan rests on continuing cooperation, policy improvement, and more investment in human capital development, which, if fairly managed, could be transformative.

CONCLUSION

The joint undertaking between Indonesia and Japan in the areas of vocational education and employment programs holds tremendous promise for the solutions to be harnessed toward a cure for youth unemployment. Activities such as industrial internships, linkages between vocational schools, and cultural exchange programs like Japanese Week would likely improve the technical skills of Indonesian youth while broadening their cultural sensitivity and adaptability in a global workforce. These programs link local vocational education to the labor demands of industries in Japan, thus giving clear employment pathways for the youth while further reducing unemployment levels in Indonesia. In fact, the placement of Indonesian youth into Japanese industries has registered direct results in reducing the levels of unemployment. Thousands of Indonesian youths get trained in organized training and have guaranteed job placements abroad through government-to-government as well as private sector cooperation. This opportunity ensures a stable income for these workers, and such creates the remittance income that supports the local economies back home. More crucially, however, if these youths do come back, they do so with quite a lot of skills and experience gained abroad.

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