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Horenso As a Representation of Intercultural Communication Competence in A Japanese Drama

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Abstract: *This study examines the representation of Horenso (報連相) as intercultural communication competence in the Japanese drama Kono Ki Atatamemasuka. A qualitative descriptive method with an interpretive approach was used to analyse workplace dialogues across 10 episodes, totalling 510 minutes. Data were collected through observation, note-taking, and dialogue transcription, then categorized according to the three components of Horenso: houkoku (reporting), renraku (communication), and Soudan (consultation). The analysis identified 64 instances: 14 of houkoku, 30 of renraku, and 20 of Soudan. These occurred in situations involving work progress reports, information sharing, product discussions, requests for guidance, work progress reports, information sharing, product discussions, requests for guidance, evaluations, and the presentation of considerations. The findings suggest that the portrayal of Horenso is associated with aspects of Japanese workplace communication, and adaptation to situational demands. The study suggests that Horenso, as portrayed in the drama, can represent aspects of intercultural communication competence, encompassing cultural knowledge, communication skills, contextual sensitivity, and adaptability.*

Keywords: *Horenso, Intercultural Communication Competence, Japanese drama, Japanese workplace communication*

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to organizational life. It supports information sharing, accountability, coordination, and workplace relationships. In Japan, workplace communication is closely associated with wa (harmony), collectivism, hierarchy, politeness, and high-context communication, in which implicit meaning and situational context play important roles (Shen et al., 2024; Widianti, 2021; Sari, 2025; Haryanti, 2020; Snape, 2025). Therefore, effective Japanese communication requires not only verbal ability but also an understanding of social relationships, hierarchical positions, situational context, and cultural norms.

One practice that reflects these characteristics is HORENSO (報連相), which comprises *houkoku* (reporting), *renraku* (information sharing), and *soudan* (consultation) (Handayani et al., 2024; Nishfullayli et al., 2025; Kuswara et al., 2024; Kuswara et al., 2026). HORENSO functions as an organizational communication system that connects individual responsibilities with collective interests, coordination, and decision-making. It is also associated with Kaizen, leadership, ethics, discipline, and knowledge management (Kuswara et al., 2024; Kuswara et al., 2026). Its application becomes more complex in multicultural workplaces, where differences in language, understandings of hierarchy, time orientation, communication styles, and social relationships may affect communication effectiveness (Nishfullayli et al., 2025; Nguyen & Pham, 2021; Diner et al., 2025).

These challenges are closely related to Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), which involves understanding cultural differences, adapting communicative behavior, building relationships, and responding

appropriately across cultural contexts. ICC encompasses cultural knowledge, communication skills, attitudes, linguistic ability, psychological sensitivity, behavioural adaptation, and perspective-taking (Kobayashi, 2019; Gao, 2017; Y. Yang, 2024; Djafri & Hasanah, 2025; Razdorskaya, 2025). Applying HORENSO requires more than grammatical proficiency. Individuals must also understand *ningen kankei* (human relation), uchi-soto (in-group-out-group disticntions), keigo (honorific language), hierarchy, indirect communication, and culturally appropriate expectations (Nishfullayli et al., 2025; Kuraesin & Amalia, 2026). Differences between direct and indirect communication may lead to pragmatic mismatches, underscoring the importance of cultural understanding and behavioral adaptation (Kuraesin & Amalia, 2026; Razdorskaya, 2025).

The development of ICC is supported by language and cultural learning, intercultural experiences, mentoring, organizational training, and institutional support (Risda, 2026; Risda et al., 2025; Nagashima, 2025). Research involving Indonesian workers and students indicates that an understanding of Japanese communication does not necessarily extend to an understanding of Japanese workplace discipline, hierarchy, and organizational contexts (Diner et al., 2025). HORENSO can thus be examined both as an organizational communication practice and as a framework for identifying ICC.

Japanese television dramas provide relevant material for examining these issues. Through narratives, characters, dialogue, and depictions of everyday life, they represent cultural values, social norms, identities, and social relationships (Ito, 2021; Kottmann et al., 2022; Respati, 2022). Related research on Japanese cinema examines identity, tradition and modernity, human-nature relationships, and cultural meaning through narrative and visual symbolism (Nogueira, 2025), as well as identity negotiation and intercultural encounters (Li, 2026). Viewers may interpret these differently depending on their cultural backgrounds and experiences (Quan & Rui, 2023).

Although digital distribution has expanded the role of Japanese dramas in cultural exchange across regions, audiovisual representations may also involve standardization, hybridization, stereotyping, and tensions between cultural authenticity and market demands. Japanese drama can therefore be examined as cultural texts in which communication values are constructed and represented through dialogue, actions, relationships, and social situations.

Previous research on HORENSO has primarily addressed organizational communication, work performance, Japanese work culture, Kaizen, leadership, training, knowledge management, and adaptation in multicultural workplace. Research on ICC, meanwhile, has emphasized cultural knowledge, communication skills, attitudes, psychological sensitivity, behavioural adaptation, and cross-cultural communication abilities (Handayani et al., 2024; Kuswara et al., 2025; Chau & Nacharoenkul, 2023; Kitamura, 2021). Although these studies provide important foundations for understanding HORENSO and ICC, the two concepts have rarely been examined together within an integrated analytical framework. In particular, limited attention has been paid to identifying HORENSO practices un representations of Japanese workplace communication and interpreting them in relation to specific ICC indicators.

Existing studies on Japanese television dramas have examined cultural values, identity, gender, interpersonal relationships, and social life. However, these audiovisual representations have not been sufficiently connected to HORENSO practices and ICC dimensions (Ito, 2021; Kottmann et al., 2022; Respati, 2022). A gap therefore remains in understanding how *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* are represented through dialogue, character interactions, workplace situations, and other audio-visual elements, and how these representations relate to ICC indicators. This relationship warrants examination because HORENSO involves culturally situated practices that require individuals to interpret hierarchy, context, interpersonal relationships, and appropriate communicative behaviour. Examining these practices through the lens of ICC may offer a fuller understanding of culturally appropriate communication in Japanese workplaces.

This study examines the representation of HORENSO in a Japanese television drama and analyses how *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* correspond to relevant Intercultural Communication Competence indicators. It addresses three research questions: (1) How is HORENSO represented in the drama? (2) What Japanese cultural values, norms, and communication patterns are reflected in its representation? and (3) How do these representations demonstrate intercultural communication competence?

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with an interpretive approach to examines the representation of HORENSO in the Japanese drama "Kono Koi Atatamemasuka". The drama was treated as a cultural text in which dialogue, character interactions, actions, and situational contexts represent cultural values, communication patterns, and workplace relationships. The analysis focused on workplace communication, including communicative acts, relationships between characters, conversational contexts, and relevant verbal and nonverbal cues. The interpretive approach guided the examination of HORENSO in relation to hierarchy, social relationships, contextual sensitivity, indirect communication, and politeness in Japanese workplace communication (Shen et al., 2024; Nishfullayli et al., 2025; Kitamura, 2021).

The data source comprised all 10 episodes of the drama, with a total running time of 510 minutes. All workplace dialogues were screened, and those meeting the operational criteria for HORENSO were included through total sampling. The units of analysis were individual utterances or dialogue sequences representing reporting, information sharing, or consultation. These included communication concerning instructions, work progress, problems, and decision-making. Each unit was examined within its scene, taking into account the character's interpersonal relationships organizational positions, work situations, and accompanying actions.

The analytical categories comprised the three compontens of HORENSO: *houkoku* (reporting), *renraku* (information sharing), and *soudan* (consultation). These categories were operationalized according to their dominant communicative functions. *Houkoku* was identified when a character reported work progress, results, ideas, conditions, or work-related developments to a relevant party. *Renraku* was identified when a character conveyed relevant information, decisions, assignments, changes, or organizational developments to other parties who needed to be informed. *Soudan* was identified when a character sought advice, guidance, consideration, feedback, or approval before or during a work-related action or decision (Kitamura, 2021; Handayani et al., 2024). When a unit contained more than one communicative function, it was classified according to its dominant function.

The HORENSO categories were subsequently interpreted in relation to selected indicators of intercultural communication competence (ICC). These included cultural knowledge, communication skills, contextual sensitivity, awareness of social relationships and hierarchy, and communicative adaptation, including verbal and nonverbal flexibility (Gao, 2017; Kobayashi, 2019). Attention was also paid to indirect communication, language use of appropriate to social relationships, the management of differing opinions, and contextual demands of HORENSO, including uchi-soto (in-group-out-group distinctions), hierarchy, and indirect communication (Nishfullayli et al., 2025; Kitamura, 2021). The ICC indicators served as an interpretive lens for examining the intercultural dimensions represented in the drama, rather than as measures of the characters' actual intercultural competence.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by an observation sheet and a coding table. Data collection involved five stages. First, all episodes were watched in their entirety, Second, the episodes were reviewed with particular attention to workplace communication. Third, HORENSO-related dialogues were recorded and transcribed with their timestamps, Four, the data were entered into a coding table and grouped into *houkoku, renraku*, and *soudan*. Fifth, contextual information was documented, including the communicative purpose, relationships between characters, work situation, and recipients' response (Kitamura, 2021; Chau & Nacharoenkul, 2023). The coding table recorded the episode, timestamps, characters, dialogue excerpt, workplace context,

HORENSO category, relevant verbal and nonverbal cues, and associated ICC indicators. Silence, facial expressions, interpersonal distance, gestures, and displays of deference were documented when relevant to the interpretation of the dialogue (Widianti, 2021).

Data analysis proceeded through four stages: data reduction, classification, contextual interpretation, and synthesis. During data reduction, workplace dialogues were screened against the operational criteria for HORENSO, and relevant units were selected. The selected units were then classified as *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *Soudan* according to their dominant communicative functions. Contextual interpretation examined the relationships between speakers, organizational hierarchy, communicative purpose, linguistic forms, and verbal and nonverbal behaviour. It also considered Japanese communication characteristics such as wa (harmony), hierarchy, indirectness, and politeness (Shen et al., 2024; Kuraesin & Amalia, 2026). Finally, the interpreted communications patterns were related to the selected ICC indicators, and the findings were synthesized across the three HORENSO categories.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

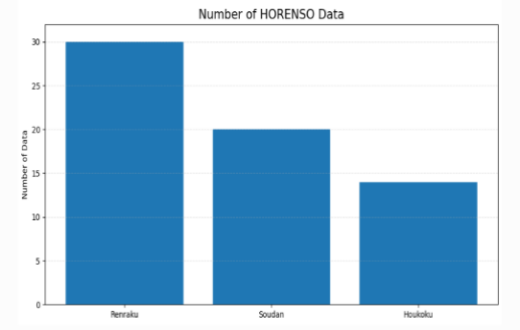
Results

1. Distribution of HORENSO Categories

The analysis idedentified 64 workplace dialogue units representing HORENSO in "*Kono Koi Atatamemasuka*". table

Horenso Category	Communciative function	Numebr of units
Houkoku	Reporting	14
Renraku	Information sharing	30
Soudan	Consultation	20
Total		64

Graph 1. Distribution of HORENSO Data by Category



Renraku was the most frequently represented category, followed by Soudan and houkoku. The following section examines representative examples, focusing on their communicative purposes, workplace contexts, relationships between characters, and subsequent responses or actions.

2. Houkoku: Reporting Work-Relation Information, Ideas and Proposals

The houkoku category included the communication of work progress, results, ideas, conditions, and developments to relevant organizational members.

A representative example appears in Episode 1 (Data 4, 27:05–28:07), when Kiki communicates her idea to Asaba concerning the cream puff product. She states, "If we're making cream puffs, I'd like to start by changing the

cream," followed by a request for another opportunity. The interaction occurs between a subordinate and a superior and concerns a work-related proposal. The data therefore demonstrate that *houkoku* can involve presenting an idea or work-related proposal to a person who has a relevant organizational position.

Another example occurs in Episode 9 (Data 62, 38:32–38:42), when Asaba presents the potential of the mobile sales business to Director Kamiko and states that although the company is outmatched in capital by major companies, it can compete through its know-how. The utterance "Please be sure to consider this" accompanies the presentation of the proposal. In this study, the dialogue is classified according to its dominant communicative function, namely presenting a work-related proposal to a relevant decision-maker.

These examples illustrate how *houkoku* is represented through the presentation of information, ideas, and proposals to organizational members responsible for evaluating them or determining subsequent action.

3. Renraku: Information Sharing and Organizational Coordination

Renraku encompassed the communication of information, decisions, assignments, changes in responsibility, and organizational developments.

One representative example is Data 2 in Episode 1 (13:39–13:42), in which Asaba communicates a decision concerning product development: "I've decided to revamp our dessert lineup. First, please replace the classic cream puffs with a new version." The main function of the utterance is to communicate a decision and ensure that the relevant employee receives information about the next work activity.

Other examples in Episode 1 include Asaba informing Kiki that Dolce Kitchen is a vendor specializing in sweets (Data 5), informing her that she will work with another person from that point onward (Data 6), and communicating a change in her position as section chief (Data 7). These examples demonstrate that *renraku* encompasses different forms of organizational information, including business information, work assignments, changes in responsibility, and organizational decisions.

A further example is found in Episode 10 (Data 64, 09:42–10:01), when Asaba returns to headquarters and communicates with members of the confectionery department. The exchange confirms Asaba's return and functions as information sharing between members of the organization.

Across these examples, *renraku* enables characters to remain informed about decisions, responsibilities, and developments relevant to their work.

4. Soudan: Seeking Gudance, Feedback, and Evaluation

Soudan involved seeking advice, guidance, evaluation, consideration, or other input concerning a work-related matter.

A representative example occurs in Episode 1 (Data 1, 11:33–12:03), when Kitagawa addresses Ichioka by saying, "Manager Ichioka, please help me." The subsequent interaction involves a discussion of the product and guidance from the superior concerning oven temperature, baking time, and adjustment of the cream. The dialogue demonstrates that consultation can involve not only asking for assistance but also receiving specific guidance for improving work.

Another example is Data 9 (Episode 1, 34:05–34:15), in which the characters discuss the results of a taste test through questions concerning whether the product was tested and how the result was perceived. The interaction involves the exchange of evaluations concerning the product.

Data 10 (Episode 1, 35:00–35:07) provides another example. Kiki asks, "How's this?" and receives the response, "Fix it up and bring it back next week." The exchange represents a consultation in which an employee presents work for evaluation and receives direction concerning the next stage of the task. The *soudan* data therefore show a recurring pattern of seeking input and receiving guidance or evaluation before continuing or modifying work.

These examples show a recurring pattern in which characters seek input and receive guidance or evaluation before continuing or modifying their work. Compared with the information transmission represented in renraku, soudan more visibly involves exchanges of questions, responses, and directions.

5. Patterns of HORENSO Representation

Across the three categories, several patterns emerge from the workplace dialogues. First, HORENSO is consistently associated with work-related responsibilities and organizational roles. The dialogues involve employees, supervisors, managers, directors, and other relevant parties, indicating that the function of communication is influenced by the participants' positions within the organization.

Second, the three components perform different but interconnected communicative functions. *Houkoku* primarily involves presenting work-related information, progress, ideas, or proposals; *renraku* involves transmitting information, decisions, assignments, and organizational changes; and *soudan* involves seeking guidance, evaluation, or consideration. These functions frequently occur as part of a continuing workplace process in which information is communicated, discussed, evaluated, and followed by further action.

Third, HORENSO is represented through both one-way and interactive communication. *Renraku* is frequently realized through relatively direct information transmission, whereas soudan commonly involves interaction between two or more participants through questions, responses, evaluation, and guidance. Houkoku can similarly involve the presentation of an idea followed by evaluation or a decision from another party. These patterns provide the empirical basis for the cultural interpretation presented in the Discussion section.

Discussion

1. HORENSO as an Integrated Communication System

The findings suggest that HORENSO is represented as a set of interconnected practices that support the organization of work. Houkoku brings work-related information and proposals to relevant parties, renraku circulates information among organizational members, and soudan creates opportunities for guidance and evaluation. These functions are consistent with descriptions of Horenso as a system of reporting, information sharing, and consultation within Japanese organizations (Handayani et al., 2024; Kitamura, 2021).

The examples also show that these functions are not always entirely separate. Kiki's proposal to Asaba combines the presentation of an idea with a request for another opportunity. Similarly, Asaba's proposal to Director Kamiko includes a request for consideration. Although both exchanges were classified as houkoku according to their dominant functions, they also involve seeking a response from someone with decision-making authority. The categories therefore distinguish the principal functions of the exchanges while allowing for overlap within individual interactions.

Viewed together, the three components connect the communication of information with its evaluation and subsequent action. Information shared through renraku may provide a basis for consultation, while consultation may produce decisions or information that must be communicated to others. Houkoku likewise introduces developments and proposals that may require further consideration. This interpretation is consistent with the role of horenso in connecting individual responsibilities with broader organizational processes (handayani et al., 2024; Kitamura, 2021).

The prominence of renraku highlights the visibility of information sharing in the drama's portrayal of workplace coordination. This pattern is consistent with research emphasizing the role of information flow in organizational effectiveness and knowledge utilization (Kuswara et al., 2024; Wanjala, 2024). Across the examples, communication allows characters to remain aware of changing assignments, responsibilities and organizational developments. Horenso is thus represented as a recurring process through which organizational members coordinate their work.

2. Hierarchy, Social Relationships, and the Value of *Wa*

A second major pattern identified in the representation of HORENSO concerns the close relationship between workplace communication and organizational hierarchy. The findings show that HORENSO interactions frequently occur between characters occupying different organizational positions, including employees, section chiefs, managers, and directors. These differences in position influence not only who communicates with whom but also the purpose, direction, and manner of communication. In *houkoku*, employees communicate work-related information, ideas, developments, or proposals to individuals who hold relevant organizational authority. Similarly, in *soudan*, employees seek guidance, evaluation, or consideration from individuals who have the authority or

experience to influence the continuation of their work. This pattern demonstrates that the communicative function of an utterance is closely related to the organizational relationship between the speaker and the recipient. Razdorskaya (2025) explains that Japanese organizational communication is influenced by hierarchy and power relations, making the identities of the speaker and recipient, as well as the manner in which messages are conveyed, important elements of workplace interaction. The findings from the drama are consistent with this perspective because the HORENSO practices represented in the workplace are shaped by the participants' positions and responsibilities. Therefore, communication in HORENSO does not occur independently of organizational structure but operates within a social framework that influences how employees report information, communicate decisions, and seek guidance.

The relationship between HORENSO and social relationships is also evident in the way communication connects individual responsibilities with interpersonal coordination. The characters do not communicate only to complete their own tasks but also to ensure that other members are informed, involved, or able to respond appropriately. *Renraku*, for example, facilitates the distribution of information concerning decisions, assignments, and organizational developments, while *houkoku* allows employees to communicate work-related developments or proposals to relevant parties. These practices demonstrate that workplace communication is connected to the maintenance of relationships among organizational members. Kitamura (2021) associates HORENSO with communication, responsibility, coordination, consensus, and the value of *wa*, or harmony. From this perspective, HORENSO can be understood as a communication practice that connects individual actions with collective organizational processes. The importance of social relationships is particularly visible when employees communicate with superiors or other members whose responsibilities differ from their own. The appropriateness of communication therefore depends not only on the content of a message but also on the relationship between the participants. Razdorskaya (2025) emphasizes that hierarchy and power relations influence Japanese workplace communication, supporting the interpretation that social position is an important contextual element in HORENSO interactions. Thus, the findings suggest that HORENSO helps maintain both information continuity and relational coordination within the workplace.

The value of *wa* provides another important cultural dimension for interpreting the HORENSO representation. *Wa*, understood as harmony, is reflected in communication practices that consider interpersonal relationships and organizational coordination rather than focusing exclusively on individual intentions. In the drama, employees communicate ideas, seek guidance, and share information within relationships that require awareness of their positions and responsibilities. Such communication can contribute to maintaining an orderly and cooperative workplace environment. The value of *wa* is also associated with politeness, indirect communication, and pragmatic strategies that help maintain social relationships and hierarchical structures (Kuraesin & Amalia, 2026). This perspective is relevant to HORENSO because the communicative effectiveness of reporting, informing, and consulting depends partly on how the message is delivered in relation to the recipient. The representation therefore suggests that workplace communication involves both task-oriented and relational considerations. Employees need to communicate the necessary information while simultaneously maintaining appropriate interaction with other organizational members. This dual function makes HORENSO culturally meaningful because communication becomes part of maintaining relationships and workplace harmony. Consequently, *wa* helps explain why HORENSO can be viewed as more than an administrative communication procedure.

The role of *soudan* further strengthens the relationship between HORENSO, social relationships, and harmony. Consultation provides employees with an opportunity to request opinions, guidance, evaluation, or consideration from other organizational members before continuing with a particular task or decision. This process allows other parties to contribute their perspectives rather than leaving decisions entirely to an individual. Such a pattern is consistent with the concept of *nemawashi*, which emphasizes discussion, the exchange of views, and consensus building before formal decisions are made. In this context, consultation becomes a relational process through which employees involve others in workplace activities. The importance of *soudan* therefore extends beyond obtaining an immediate answer because the process can facilitate communication and consideration among people with different responsibilities. This pattern also corresponds with Kitamura (2021), who positions consultation as one of the central components of HORENSO within Japanese organizational communication. Through *soudan*, employees can recognize the knowledge, experience, and authority of other organizational members while simultaneously creating opportunities for discussion. This makes consultation relevant to the maintenance of workplace relationships and coordination.

Overall, the representation of *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* demonstrates that HORENSO is closely connected to hierarchy, social relationships, responsibility, and harmony. The three components perform different communicative functions, but they operate within the same organizational and relational structure. *Houkoku* connects employees with those responsible for evaluating work or making decisions, *renraku* maintains the circulation of information among relevant members, and *soudan* facilitates guidance, consideration, and participation in decision-making. These practices indicate that Japanese workplace communication, as represented in the drama, cannot be separated from awareness of social position and interpersonal relationships. The findings are therefore consistent with the view that Japanese organizational communication is influenced by hierarchy and relational considerations (Razdorskaya, 2025). At the same time, the emphasis on coordination, consultation, and harmony reflects the cultural significance of *wa* within HORENSO (Kitamura, 2021). Thus, HORENSO can be understood as a culturally situated communication system in which accomplishing workplace tasks is closely connected with maintaining appropriate relationships, respecting organizational roles, and supporting collective coordination.

3. Context, High-Context Communication, and Indirectness

The third theme concerns the importance of context, shared understanding, and indirectness in interpreting HORENSO communication. The findings indicate that the meaning and function of workplace dialogues cannot always be understood solely from the literal content of individual utterances. Each HORENSO interaction occurs within a particular workplace situation involving specific participants, organizational roles, communicative purposes, and ongoing activities. This characteristic is consistent with the high-context nature of Japanese communication, in which context, relationships, and shared understanding contribute significantly to the interpretation of messages (Febiyana & Turistiati, 2019; P. Yang, 2020). In the drama, the characters communicate information, request guidance, present ideas, or respond to instructions within situations where the participants already possess knowledge about the work being discussed. Consequently, understanding the communicative meaning requires attention to the relationship between the speakers and the circumstances surrounding the interaction.

This pattern also corresponds with Nishfullayli et al. (2025), who demonstrate that Indonesian workers may experience difficulties in selecting appropriate Japanese expressions because of differences in understanding *ningen kankei* and *uchi-soto*. The finding suggests that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for interpreting or producing appropriate workplace communication because communicators must also understand the social and cultural context in which language is used. Razdorskaya (2025) further highlights the psychological and relational dimensions of Japanese communication through the concepts of *kyōkan*, *iwakan*, and *kyoriskan*, which emphasize the importance of interpersonal perception and relational understanding. Kuraesin and Amalia (2026) similarly identify differences between direct and respectful communication in the Indonesian context and Japanese practices involving *keigo*, indirect directives, ritual apologies, and hedging. Therefore, the HORENSO representation demonstrates that Japanese workplace communication requires sensitivity to context, social relationships, hierarchy, and appropriate communicative forms. This contextual dimension is important because the effectiveness of HORENSO depends not only on whether information is conveyed but also on whether it is communicated appropriately within the particular social and organizational situation.

Furthermore, the representation of HORENSO indicates that indirectness can function as a strategy for maintaining appropriate workplace relationships while accomplishing communicative purposes. In *soudan*, for example, seeking advice or evaluation creates an interactional space in which another person can provide input without the initial speaker directly imposing a decision. Similarly, *houkoku* can involve presenting an idea or proposal in a manner that acknowledges the position of the recipient and leaves room for evaluation or consideration. Such communication reflects the importance of interpreting what is implied through the relationship and situation rather than focusing exclusively on explicit linguistic forms. In high-context communication, shared knowledge may allow speakers to communicate efficiently because certain meanings are understood through the surrounding circumstances (Febiyana & Turistiati, 2019; P. Yang, 2020). This characteristic also explains why the same expression may have different pragmatic functions depending on the participants and workplace context. For intercultural communicators, recognizing these contextual differences is essential because direct translation of an utterance may not fully convey its intended interpersonal meaning. The difficulties experienced by Indonesian workers in selecting appropriate expressions further demonstrate the importance of understanding relational concepts such as *ningen*

kankei and *uchi-soto* (Nishfullayli et al., 2025). Thus, the HORENSO representation illustrates that effective Japanese workplace communication requires not only understanding what is said but also recognizing why, to whom, and under what circumstances it is said.

4. Interpreting Horenso through ICC Indicators

The fourth theme concerns the relationship between HORENSO and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). In this study, HORENSO is not treated as direct evidence of the characters' measurable ICC; rather, its representation is interpreted in relation to selected ICC indicators. ICC is understood as a multidimensional ability involving cultural knowledge, communication skills, attitudes, sensitivity, adaptability, and the ability to understand other cultural perspectives (Kobayashi, 2019; Gao, 2017). The findings show that the use of *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* is closely related to workplace context, organizational position, social relationships, and communicative purpose. This relationship indicates that effective HORENSO communication requires more than linguistic competence because communicators need to understand the cultural and organizational context in which communication occurs. Nishfullayli et al. (2025) similarly emphasize that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for successful communication in Japanese workplace contexts.

The representation of HORENSO is particularly relevant to the ICC dimensions of cultural knowledge and contextual sensitivity. Cultural knowledge is reflected in the understanding of the different functions of *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* and in recognizing when each practice is appropriate. *Houkoku* requires employees to communicate work-related progress, results, or ideas to relevant parties, *renraku* requires the selection and transmission of information needed by others, while *soudan* requires seeking guidance, evaluation, or consideration from an appropriate person. These practices demonstrate that communicators need to understand organizational hierarchy, workplace roles, and social relationships before selecting an appropriate communicative action. Gao (2017) identifies Japanese cultural values, organizational hierarchy, business etiquette, indirect communication, perspectives toward others, and behavioral flexibility as relevant components of ICC. Similarly, Kobayashi (2019) emphasizes the ability to understand cultural differences and adapt communication according to context and interpersonal relationships.

The findings also indicate that ICC involves the ability to adapt communication to the specific social and organizational environment. HORENSO communication requires individuals to consider who should receive information, what information is relevant, and whether a situation requires reporting, informing, or consultation. This contextual adaptation is important because the same workplace situation may require different communicative actions depending on the participants and their organizational positions. Diner et al. (2025) identify a gap between understanding Japanese communication aspects and understanding Japanese work culture, suggesting that knowledge of communication should be accompanied by an understanding of the broader workplace context. Kobayashi (2019) likewise argues that successful business communicators require a dynamic understanding of cultural differences and the ability to adapt communication as contexts and interpersonal relationships develop. Therefore, the representation of HORENSO can be related to ICC through cultural knowledge, contextual sensitivity, awareness of hierarchy and relationships, and communicative adaptation. The significance of HORENSO for ICC consequently lies in demonstrating that culturally appropriate workplace communication requires individuals to adjust their communicative behavior according to the social and organizational environment in which interaction takes place.

5. Implications of HORENSO for Intercultural Workplace Communication

The fifth theme concerns the implications of HORENSO for intercultural workplace communication and language learning. The findings suggest that understanding HORENSO can help individuals recognize that effective communication in Japanese workplaces involves more than accurate linguistic expression. An employee needs to understand when information should be reported, what information should be shared, when consultation is appropriate, and which person should be involved in the communication process. This implication is particularly relevant for Indonesian employees and learners who interact with Japanese colleagues because differences in workplace communication norms may create difficulties in selecting appropriate expressions and communicative strategies (Nishfullayli et al., 2025).

Understanding *ningen kankei* and *uchi-soto* is therefore relevant to the ability to communicate appropriately within Japanese workplace relationships. The findings also indicate that *houkoku*, *renraku*, and *soudan* can be used to illustrate how cultural knowledge is applied in actual workplace communication rather than being

learned only as abstract cultural information. The three HORENSO components require different communicative abilities, with *houkoku* requiring appropriate reporting of work-related information or ideas, *renraku* requiring the selection and transmission of relevant information, and *soudan* requiring the ability to seek guidance or consideration from an appropriate party. These communicative requirements are related to ICC because they involve the ability to adjust verbal and interpersonal behavior according to context and relationship (Gao, 2017; Kobayashi, 2019). HORENSO dialogues can consequently be utilized as learning resources in Japanese language instruction for workplace purposes and in the development of ICC (Kim, 2025; Risda, 2026).

The use of drama is particularly relevant because workplace interactions are presented within contextualized situations involving characters, relationships, organizational roles, and communicative purposes. Therefore, the findings contribute to the understanding of HORENSO as a culturally situated communication practice while also demonstrating its potential relevance to intercultural workplace communication and Japanese language learning. Overall, the study connects HORENSO, intercultural communication, and cultural representation through the analysis of Japanese drama, extending previous research that has primarily examined HORENSO in organizational contexts or ICC as a broader intercultural construct (Kuswara et al., 2024; Kuswara et al., 2025; Kuswara et al., 2026; Kobayashi, 2019; Gao, 2017; Y. Yang, 2024; Djafri & Hasanah, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study identified 64 instances of HORENSO in workplace dialogues in "Kono Koi Atatamemasuka", comprising houkoku (reporting), renraku (information sharing), and soudan (consultation). Renraku was the most frequently represented category, followed by soudan and houkoku. Across activities such as reporting work progress, sharing information, discussing products, seeking guidance, and exchanging evaluations, these practices were closely connected to workplace coordination and organizational relationships. Their representation was interpreted in relation to hierarchy, wa (harmony), social relationships, contextual understanding, and situational adaptation. These features suggest a relationship between the portrayed Horenso practices and selected dimensions of intercultural communication competence, particularly cultural knowledge, communication skills, contextual sensitivity, and adaptability. The study contributes to research on language, culture, and workplace communication by connecting representations of Horenso in a Japanese drama with these dimensions of competence. The contextualized dialogues may also serve as a resource for Japanese language learning focused on workplace communication. Future research could compare representations across dramas or examine their relationship with actual workplace practices, investigate nonverbal behaviour and keigo (Japanese honorific language) in greater dept, and explore interpretations among audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this work the authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o in order to enhance readability and perform grammar checking. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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