

Initiatives on Performing Lesson Study in Egypt–Japan Schools (EJS) –Towards Realizing New Professional Development Scheme

Yasmine Mostafa, University of Fukui, Japan

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Abstract

In an unprecedented step towards developing the quality of education after decades of neglect, the government of Egypt established Egypt-Japan Schools (EJS) under the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP), in 2018 (Mostafa and Hambara, 2018; Mostafa, 2021). So far, 51 schools have been established all over the country. These schools embrace the new curriculum “Education 2.0” designed by the government of Egypt that aims at developing the 21st century skills in children while implementing the special activities, referred to as ‘Tokkatsu’, which symbolizes schools in Japan. *Tokkatsu* is a holistic educational curriculum model that focuses on nurturing agency and collaboration in children to be effective members of their society. Teachers in EJS are faced with many challenges within the new curriculum and the *tokkatsu* concept and its application. Therefore, Lesson Study has been introduced for the first time in Egypt in EJS after its launch in 2018. The purpose of the Lesson Study is to cultivate teachers’ capacity and ability in a sustainable professional way in order to be able to implement the new curriculum and the new concept of *tokkatsu*. However, as an unprecedented initiative, Lesson Study is still immature and unorganized in EJS. This research studies the current situation of the Lesson Study and the reasons behind this situation in four EJSs with whom the researcher is collaborating. Furthermore, the researcher will explore some possible systematic structures of a sustainable Lesson Study cycle based on the situation of each school.

Keywords: Lesson Study, Tokkatsu, Sustainable Professional Development, Evaluation

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Introduction

Background and Literature Review

After decades of low-quality education due to several internal and external factors, the government of Egypt has taken a fundamental step toward educational reform and initiated a new system of education called “Education 2.0”. “Education 2.0” aims to realize the 21st century skills in children by transforming the teaching method from teacher-centered transmission mode to student-centered mode, which focuses on nurturing students’ agency and creating an attractive and stimulating learning environment for the students. In accordance with that move, Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016, and under this partnership, Egypt-Japanese Schools (EJS) were built. So far, fifty-one schools are distributed throughout Egypt. These new schools embrace the new curriculum “Education 2.0” while implementing the Japanese special activities, referred to as *tokkatsu*, which symbolizes schools in Japan (Mostafa & Hambara 2018; Mostafa 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d). Figure 1 illustrates the changes that occurred to the new curriculum.

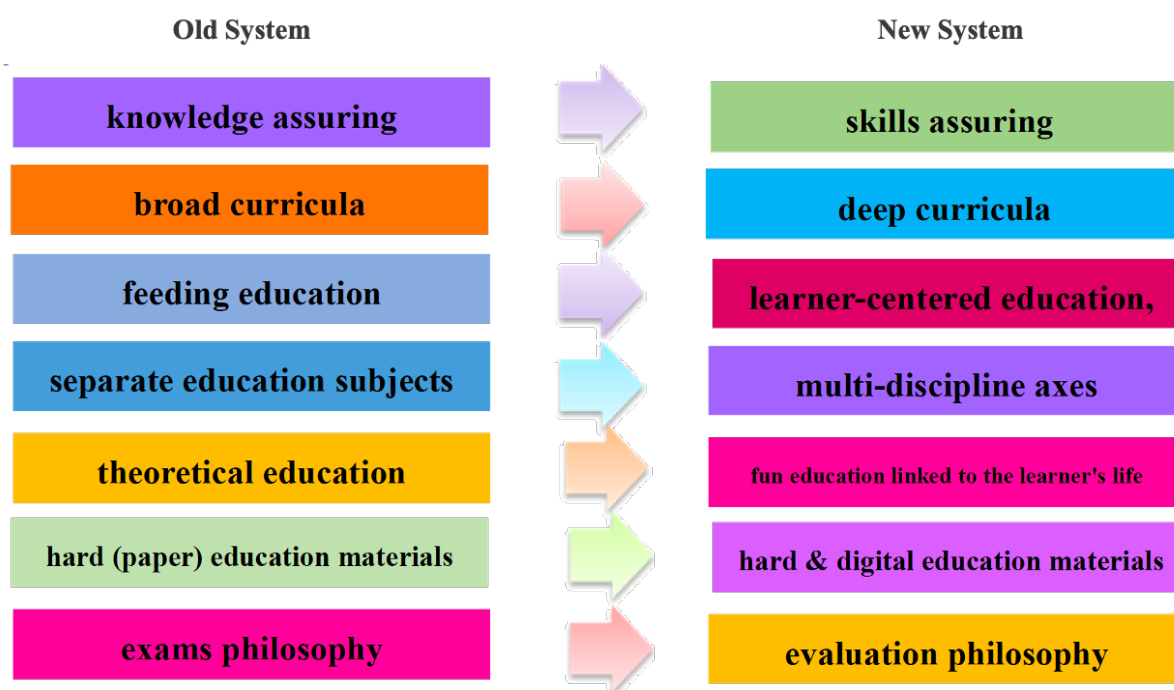


Figure 1. *The Changes that Occurred to the New System of Education*
 Source: *Special Activities [tokkatsu] Guidebook 2018*

The new curriculum also adopts the internationally approved twelve skills that should be nurtured in the students to develop their life skills, values, tendency, and citizenship to prepare them to face life and the continuously changing society (JICA, Center for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development, 2018). Table 1 shows the targeted skills in Education 2.0.

Education dimensions	Targeted skills in light of education dimensions (14 skills)			
Learn to be	Resilience	Communication	Accountability	Self-management
Learn to live	Participation	Sympathy	Respect diversity	
Learn to work	Cooperation	Negotiation	Productivity	Decision making
Learn to know	Critical thinking	Creativity	Problem solving	

Table 1. *Targeted Skills in Education 2.0*
 Source: *Special Activities [tokkatsu] Guidebook 2018*

Tokkatsu has drawn the world's interest as a holistic educational curriculum model that raises the well-being of children by focusing on nurturing students' agency and collaboration to be effective members of their society (Tsuneyoshi, Sugita, Kusanagi, & Takahashi, 2020). However, this concept is new to the system in Egypt and the teachers are not familiar with it. As a result, the teachers are faced with many challenges and *tokkatsu* is not well-applied. Raising independent and collaborative children requires skilled teachers who are capable of absorbing, understanding, and adapting to the new concept. To do this, Lesson Study was introduced for the first time in Egypt in EJS after its launch in 2018. The purpose of the Lesson Study is to cultivate teachers' capacity and ability in a sustainable professional way in order to be able to implement the new curriculum and the new concept of *tokkatsu*. However, as an unprecedented initiative, Lesson Study is still immature and unorganized in EJS. Teachers are faced with many challenges and Lesson Study does not seem to be achieving its goals.

Lesson Study started in Japan one hundred and forty years ago in the early stages of the Meiji era as a collaborative learning approach between teachers in schools. Its aim is to create and organize sustainable collaborative communities between teachers to support children's learning. Cultivating communities of practice and shaping teachers' capacities is not a solo job. Different aspects and different opinions are essential to follow and understand children's learning through collaborative inquiry (Kimura & Kishino, 2019). Collaborative learning or collaborative inquiry is a process where educators look into questions and ambiguities that arise during their practices and utilize their experience and repertory to find solutions to their challenges together (Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen, 2018, p.120).

This research studies the situation of Lesson Study and its development over the past four years in four EJSs and explores the reasons behind this situation. The research will also shed light on the effect of Lesson Study on the aimed continuous professional development of teachers in EJS.

Target and Methodology

Since 2018, the University of Fukui has been entrusted with the EJEP Teachers' Training Program which is held under the EJEP partnership and aims to develop the teachers' capacity and ability and raise their knowledge on *tokkatsu*. This research started in May 2021. The target is four EJSs where some previous trainees belonged. The schools were chosen based on negotiations with the EJS Project Management Unit (PMU) with certain criteria to guarantee the facilitation of the research. The schools were chosen from different regions to

maintain credibility, fairness, and precision. From each school, the principal or the vice principal and a teacher were assigned core members of the school. The process of acknowledgment from the Ministry of Education in Egypt took almost eight months; therefore, we started our collaboration practically in March 2022. Most of the core members are ex-trainees who have observed many Lesson Study classes in Japan and have gained some beneficial experience and information on the purpose and the method of implementing it. In addition to the core members, other teachers from each school who are interested and willing to cooperate with us were also welcome to join and participate at their own pace (the researcher will hereby call all the participants ‘collaborators’).

Since the target schools are located in Egypt, frequent communication is held online. The collaborators record the preliminary sessions of the Lesson Study, the Lesson Study classes, and the discussion sessions and share them with me. If time allows, the researcher sometimes observes the classes and the sessions live. Then, we all sit together and discuss, via Zoom, the school situation, the practice of the Lesson Study, the evaluation sheet, and how to improve teachers’ professionalism through Lesson Study.

Study

Lesson study was introduced in EJS with the launch of these schools as a professional development approach for teachers to increase their knowledge on *tokkatsu* and develop their skills and professionalism that are needed to implement it. However, this was the first attempt of Lesson Study in Egypt. There were no previous examples, no manual, no guidebook, and no training when it started which brought up many issues. Teachers rejected the idea and considered it an additional unnecessary burden. They saw it as a means of comparison and evaluation rather than a professional development approach.

As a result, the practice of Lesson Study became quite different from one school to another. Some schools managed to do Lesson Study in one way or another regardless of the difficulties they face, some schools would do it only very few times, and some schools would neglect the practice or do it unwillingly. Lesson Study deviated from its purpose and created an unfavorable atmosphere at schools (based on the data gathered during the meetings and interviews with the collaborators). After four years of its introduction, the meaning and the value of Lesson Study are still unknown to the teachers, and there is a gap between schools in the process and the frequency of implementing the Lesson Study.

In the following part, the researcher will trace the progress of Lesson Study since it was introduced up till now, look into the related issues, and discuss how Lesson Study as a professional development approach should be.

The Situation of Lesson Study in the Early Stages

When Lesson Study was first introduced in EJS, the aim was unclear and its implementation was unorganized (it is still unorganized, though some schools are managing to organize it in their own ways). In a culture that does not adopt collaboration in teaching, and where competition and comparisons are dominant between teachers, Lesson Study was nothing but a criticism of the teacher’s practice. When a teacher does a Lesson Study, the main focus is always on the teacher. All the observers do not even bother to recognize the positive side of the teacher’s performance, and they target only the weak points and the faults. In the post-lesson discussion, they critically raise these negative points and compare their practices to the

ones they observed to prove themselves better, which would sometimes lead to a fight and deviate from the original goal. The class teacher feels hurt when criticized since it is their class and they believe they know the content better than anyone else.

Another issue is that Lesson Study has become a burden since it is very time-consuming. Teachers spent a long time before the lesson in the preparation process and after the lesson in the post-lesson discussion which exhaust the teachers and put them under unbearable pressure. Moreover, the evaluation process is very strict and is focused only on the teacher's performance in the form of a checklist and does not consider the students' learning. As a result, the Lesson Study lost its essential goal which is improving the quality of the learning for the students by raising the teachers' professionalism through collaborative learning and turned into a big burden on the teachers. It also affected the normal flow of the lessons and worsened the relationships between the teachers since they considered it a contest with winners and losers.


The following Figure 2 is the evaluation checklist form that was used at the very beginning (since it is written in Arabic, it may be unreadable to many readers. However, it shows what the evaluation sheet looks like). The form consists of seventeen items that evaluate the teacher's performance from one (being the lowest) to four (being the highest). Each observer marks a tick on the number adequate to the teacher's performance from his/her viewpoint. In the end, the total number is calculated and it represents the evaluation level of the teacher. Some of the items listed in the evaluation sheet are: 'brilliantly following teaching methods', 'time management', 'interacts with the students during the activities', 'uses the textbook and other guiding aids', etc.

The cycle consists mainly of three stages (Plan, Perform, Reflect (Feedback)). In the planning stage, the teacher and the previously-decided participants plan the lesson collaboratively and create a lesson plan. In the performing stage, the teacher delivers the class as planned. In the reflection stage, the teacher and the participants (the principal sometimes participates as well) reflect on the class by confirming whether the class was performed as planned and the goals were achieved. They also provide feedback and comments to the teacher for future improvement.

3. Performing a Lesson Study

3.1. Remarkable Progress in Teachers' Collaboration

Compared to how things started, teachers now collaborate more. Critical opinions and comments are less and are replaced by constructive feedback that aims to the development of teachers' capacity and ability. In the reflection session, the participants start by thanking the teacher for opening his/her class for observation, then they discuss the good points, what they learned from the lesson and the teacher's practice, and what left a great impression on them, and they appreciate the teacher's strong points. Then, they give some advice to the teacher for future development and improvement. If the teacher has a certain issue or a problem, they try to find solutions together. Figure 3 shows the new observation and feedback form.


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EGYPTIAN JAPANESE SCHOOLS
 المدارس المصرية اليابانية

استمارة متابعة الحصة البحثية

٢٠٢١ / ١١ / ٢٧	تاريخ المتابعة		اسم المتابع
مناقشة ك. ت. ص. ح. ح.	الموضوع التي تتم متابعته		الفصل/الصف
			اسم المعلم الذي يشرح الدرس

ملاحظات على المعلم	ملاحظات على المتعلمين	الوقت
- التفاعل الجيد مع تلميذ المعلم مع التلميذ - استماع المعلم الجيد للتلميذ	- تفاعل التلميذ واستنادهم بالمنهج التوجيهي - ابداء التلميذ لرأيهم والإبداع فيه.	٩١ - ٩١:٤٥
استفسارات	نقاط تحتاج الى تحسين	نقاط إيجابية
	- تنظيم البورد أكثر من أجل وضوح الخط.	- التحضير الجيد والمعلم متفاعلاً مع تلميذ المعلمين

Figure 3. New Observation Sheet of Lesson Study

The new form provides more space for the observers to share their opinions and feedback in a more non-evaluative form. It is divided into five parts: comments on the students, comments on the teacher, positive points, areas to improve, and questions. This means that the observers now will have to focus on both the teachers and the students. The reflection did start to include the students as well. However, unfortunately, most of the comments address the superficial attitude of the students and do not dig deeply into what students learn and how they learn, how they develop their thinking, how they engage in the activity, what kind of conversation takes place between the students, etc. For example, students are (not) actively participating, students (do not) follow the rules, students (do not) communicate well with the teacher, etc. Therefore, the teacher is still the center of the observation. Kimura and Kishino (2019) argue that when the focus is always on the teacher and the teaching methods, the ultimate goal will always be searching for methods that make the children learn well to achieve the teacher's targets (Kimura & Kishino, 2019, p.12).

3.2. The Lesson Should be Delivered as Planned

The researcher observed many lessons during the investigation process. It became clear that the teacher always fears how he/she will be evaluated by the observers; therefore, they only care about performing the lesson as planned. As previously mentioned in section 2, during the planning stage, the teacher and the observers plan the lesson together in detail and they even decide on the scenario and the flow of the lesson. Kimura and Kishino (2019) state that in order to create an engaging environment for the students that enables them to face their learning and problems autonomously and inquire into them to deepen their understanding, the teacher should follow the students' learning through the class and grasp their inquiry process and flow of thinking, study the design of the class, and explore different approaches to redesign their class in a way that enables the children to deepen their thinking and learning (Kimura & Kishino, 2019, p.13). However, in the case of EJS, the conversation between the teacher and the students, the content of the activity, the method and its duration, the aiding tools that will be used, etc. are all decided in advance in detail with no space to change. As a result, the teacher becomes situated in a very rigid frame, and they lose their freedom and agency to lead their class. This is by turn reflected on the students as well. They lose their freedom to think and their agency to engage. They become bound by the teacher's instructions; they only follow but they cannot lead their activity nor create new methods to engage. The teacher only cares about how they are observed, the strategies they use, the time management, following the plan, and all the points that are related to their evaluation. This puts the teacher under great stress and makes students' learning very superficial.

Some Examples of the Comments Raised during Reflection Sessions

Comments on the Students: actively engaged, sharing their opinions, listening to the teacher, behaving well, concentrating, sitting in a good shape.

Comments on the Teacher: interacting well with the students, listening well to the students, encouraging all students to participate, well-prepared, able to deliver the information, covering the lesson well, audible, use the whiteboard effectively, uses many strategies.

Areas to Improve: using the whiteboard, making the board more visible, work on engaging all the students.

It is obvious that the comments on the students are all related to their appearance and attitude in class, and they do not address their learning process or the development of their understanding and skills. On the other hand, the comments on the teacher are still teacher-centered in a superficial way that hinders their professionalism and freedom.

Conclusion and Areas to Improve

In EJS, Lesson Study is a tool to evaluate teachers' performance rather than to improve the quality of education for students and create an engaging environment for them. The feedback the teachers get addresses only the performance and appearance and do not address any academic issues which makes it a stressful evaluation process rather than a tool for sustainable professional development.

The researcher created a questionnaire to measure the teachers' perception of the Lesson Study and its goals. Based on the data gathered from the questionnaire, the researcher will

address the issues raised by the teachers and collaborate with the four schools to establish an organized system for effective Lesson Study, based on the situation in each school. A Lesson Study that aims to cultivate and develop teachers' abilities and professionalism and not to evaluate their performance.

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Contact email: ymostafa@u-fukui.ac.jp