The Role of Administrators in Facilitating the Implementation of Tokkatsu in EJS: Learning from EJEP Trainees' Practices towards Egypt Vision 2030

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Abstract

This proposal is part of an ongoing research that started in 2019 by an analysis of the first batch of trainees of Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP). It is a partnership for a professional development training program that was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016. This program is based on Japan's holistic educational curriculum model, known as "Tokkatsu" or literally translated to special activities. A comparison of the program's modifications and developments towards batches two and three was made in another research. Consequently, this research did a convenience purposeful sampling of batch two trainees to analyze how the EJEP program has contributed to cultivating the capacities of administrators. The research looked into the reports sent by those trainees before the training. This is to identify their practices and challenges while implementing *tokkatsu* within the new education system "Education 2.0". Also, the weekly reports that were submitted by the trainees during the training were investigated. Lastly, the research examined the new practices and initiatives these trainees have implemented upon their return to Egypt following EJEP to examine how the program is contributing to developing new methodologies and strategies through *tokkatsu*. Results showed new initiatives and collaboration between administrators and teachers, which has contributed to the implementation of new learning methodologies in teachers' practices acquired from EJEP. These new methodologies contributed to developing student's agency and enhancing a self-learning atmosphere. Students became more engaged in school life through *tokkatsu*. Moreover, a new professional learning community for teachers was created in the school.

Keywords: Agency, Collaboration, Inquiry, Reflection, Professional Learning Community

Introduction

Educational development in Egypt has been neglected for decades due to several internal and external factors, which have led to the deterioration of the quality of education as a whole (Mostafa and Hambara, 2018 & Mostafa, 2021). It led to Egypt being placed out of world ranking in elementary education quality in 2014-2015 (Egypt's Ministry of Education, 2017). Realizing how crucial education is for building societies, Egypt has developed a new Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030, and a new system of education called "Education 2.0" was initiated in 2014.

Under this new strategy, Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016 to build the capacities of the young Egyptians and promote peace, stability, development and prosperity in Egypt (JICA, 2017). An offshoot of the project is the establishment of Egypt-Japan Schools (EJS) in 2018[1]. These new schools adhere to the new national curriculum "Education 2.0" while incorporating the Japanese concept, known as *tokkatsu* or special activities. In EJEP, Egyptian teachers and principals of EJS will attend a four-week professional development training program at the University of Fukui, Department of Professional Development of Teachers. This training program focuses on Japan's holistic educational curriculum model, *tokkatsu*. The first batch of training started in early 2019, and we have received three batches of trainees so far.

EJEP is a professional development training program aiming to cultivate competencies and capacities of Egyptian teachers and principals to create and design new methodologies and techniques while implementing *tokkatsu* in EJS within the new system of education. The training is based on continuous co-inquiry and the establishment of professional learning communities of teachers. The key concept of co-inquiry learning approach is "learning by doing" and "project-based learning" which promote student's agency and longitudinal learning. During the training period, trainees visit many Japanese schools and kindergartens, and observe classes and activities. They inquire into how children learn by playing and doing, and they observe how children engage in activities independently and collaboratively and attain new discoveries by continuous co-inquiry and repeated trial and error. Furthermore, they look into how *tokkatsu* is implemented in subjects as well as activities. The implementation of *tokkatsu* is explicit in project-based learning where students decide on a theme, set a design for it, construct the approach, perform and reflect on their practice. This kind of learning promotes student's agency, collaboration and the spirit of longitudinal learning.

Trainees also observe the role of the teacher in facilitating the learning process of children and students. They look into the skills and capacities a teacher should have in order to create an inviting learning atmosphere for children and students. Moreover, the principal trainees look into how Japan's school principals are directly involved in the learning process of the students by creating a proper learning atmosphere in schools. It is the principal's duty to support the professional development of teachers by organizing professional development training courses at school which aim to cultivate teacher's competency and capacity. It is also the principal's duty to set the school plan and

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[1] In 2018, Egypt established the first 35 EJS and distributed them in all prefectures. In 2019, 5 more schools were opened. Up to this point 43 schools have been established (Egypt's Ministry of Education).

coordinate the collaboration among school, home and social community. In addition, Teachers and principals observe lesson studies and participate in teachers' discussions after the lesson study to learn new approaches for creating co-inquiry-based professional learning communities in their respective schools.

This research aims to answer the following question: *how the program is contributing to developing new strategies for administrators to create a learning environment at school, and to support teachers' agency as well as students' agency by following new methodologies through tokkatsu.* An initial analysis of batch one trainees was made to examine how the training program met their needs (Mostafa, 2019). A comparison of the program's modifications and developments towards batches two and three was made (Mostafa, 2020) in another research. *Tokkatsu* is a new concept that has been introduced to Egypt through EJEP professional training program in 2019. Therefore, literature from Japan is the sole means of understanding *tokkatsu*. EJEP and the new system of education were launched a few years ago, therefore, the research is still premature in this field. The materials used in this research will rely mainly on the previous researches done by the author, and the analysis of the reports that were sent and shared by the trainees prior to, during and after the training.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative inductive content analysis approach as well as an online interview. During data analysis, the researcher looked into the old system of education and the new system of education "Education 2.0" (Mostafa and Hambara, 2018; Mostafa, 2021) in order to consider the differences and the changes that occurred in the new system in addition to the data gathered from EJEP participants.

The data was gathered from two EJEP administrators with whom the author had direct contact, even after the program in Fukui through social media and emails. Moreover, they are actively implementing projects related to EJEP. The final target administrator (Principal S) was chosen based on recommendations from the Project Management Unit (PMU) of EJS within the Ministry of Education, Egypt. The target administrator is a principal of one of EJS schools and a former trainee of batch two (2) that took place from June to July 2019. She graduated from the faculty of Education in 2000 with major is early childhood education. She worked as a kindergarten teacher and a vice principal for five years, and had conducted professional trainings for 2000 kindergarten teachers. She played active role in supporting and educating the teachers through the ministry of education and was assigned as EJS principal in 2018.

The study involves three stages. The first stage was looking into the principal's report prior to the training to identify the challenges as a principal of a school that implements *tokkatsu* in the new system of education "Education 2.0" for the first time. This report is submitted by all trainees before the training. It helps the University of Fukui staff members know the current situation of each trainee in their schools, and understand their needs. The report consists of three main questions; the practices they have done so far, the challenges they are currently facing, and their future prospect at their schools. The second stage was following the weekly reports that were submitted by the principal during the training to observe her comments and reflections on her practices and her future prospects as a principal. The third stage was analyzing the report that was sent after the training to look into her role as a principal in facilitating the implementation

of *tokkatsu*, and supporting the teachers to develop new methodologies and raise their capacity through school-based professional training.

Literature Review

Education in Egypt has deteriorated remarkably over the past decades as a result of socio-economic factors like low salaries of teachers, limited resources for professional development, overpopulated classrooms, among others. Such realities led to the spread of unqualified teachers which subsequently resulted in Egypt being ranked 141 of 140 countries in the world ranking in elementary education quality in TIMMS & PIRLS 2014-2015 (Mostafa and Hambara, 2018; Mostafa, 2021; Misr Alarabia, 2019; Alyoum Alsabe', 2017). For decades, the teacher was the center of the learning process in the classroom while students were mere receivers. This traditional way of cramming knowledge into students' minds changed schools from a learning place to a studying place. This traditional one-way method approach lacks the crucial components of the next century skills needed for students like interaction, collaboration and critical thinking.

The government of Egypt realized how crucial the situation is, and discerned the deficiencies in the educational organization in general. Hence, Egypt has developed a new Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030 in 2014 as a fundamental reconstruction of the educational organization in order to address the current problems in different sectors, one of which is the education sector (Egypt Vision 2030). In the education sector, Egypt has started a transformation journey towards actualizing the 21st century skills by designing a new system of education called "Education 2.0". This new system embraces the modern approach that promotes student's agency in the classroom by using interactive methods. Table 1 shows the major transformation in the curriculum reform that occurred in light of the new system of education "Education 2.0". Egypt Vision 2030 towards actualizing the 21st century skills is aligned with the learning framework 2030 of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Old System	New System
Knowledge Assuring	Skills Assuring
Broad Curricula	Deep Curricula
Feeding Education	Learner-centered Education
Separate Education Subjects	Multi-discipline Axes
Theoretical Education	Fun Education Linked to the Learner's Life
Hard (paper) Education Materials	Hard and Digital Education Materials
Exams Philosophy	Evaluation Philosophy

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

In the new curriculum reform, the student becomes the center of the learning process, and the aim of learning changes from knowledge absorption to raising and cultivating competencies and skills in students. Active learning which promotes students' agency through interaction and collaboration in the classroom will be utilized. Students will engage in various activities in an inviting atmosphere to enhance their creation, observation, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Table 2 shows the targeted

skills in light of "Education 2.0". The table includes the internationally approved 12 skills, in addition to 2 more skills (in bold) that distinguish the Egyptian education system.

Education Dimensions	Target 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 2. *Targeted Skills in Education 2.0*
Source: Special Activities [tokkatsu] Guidebook 2018

Japan's Special Activities "Tokkatsu": Definition and Application

The majority of the special activities *tokkatsu* that are linked to the current school activities in Japan, like graduation ceremony, sports day, field trips, etc. were introduced during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). After World War 2, Japan realized the important role *tokkatsu* plays in students' daily school life by fostering their non-subject educational side; in other words, their 'human side'. Hence, *tokkatsu* became acknowledged in the course of education in Japan, and the non-subject practices that are considered crucial to students' experiences in life were placed under *tokkatsu* (Takayanagi, 2017). According to the Course of Study in Japan (2017), *tokkatsu* aims to raise and nurture the quality and capacity in children who will build their society and future by working together as a team. *Tokkatsu* enhances children's autonomous and practical initiatives, and creates opportunities for children to express their good values and possibilities in front of each other, and engage in life problem-solving situations individually and with their peers.

Tokkatsu may be sometimes misinterpreted as referring to the extra-curricular activities, like fun day-trips. However, *Tokkatsu*, as a part of the school curriculum in Japan, contributes to nurturing the noncognitive skills of children as well as the cognitive "academic" subjects. Noncognitive skills refer to interpersonal skills, motivation, self-control, leadership, the ability to concentrate, etc. within the daily school activities like, cleaning, serving food, students' assembly, class instruction, among others (Tsuneyoshi, Sugita, Kusanagi, Takahashi, 2020). Therefore, *tokkatsu* has been recently gaining the attention and appreciation of many countries as a whole-school and a whole-child learning model.

Implementation of *Tokkatsu* in EJS before EJEP and the Rising Challenges (Learning from EJS Principal S's Report)

Tokkatsu was activated with the launch of EJS in 2018. However, as it is the case with any new concept when it is introduced, and due to the lack of knowledge and experience in the implementation of *tokkatsu*, schools faced many challenges. The first stage of the study was to look into principal S's report prior to the training to identify her challenges

as a principal while adopting the new concept of *tokkatsu* in her school. The analysis revealed big challenges on both the academic and the social sides. On the academic side, the teachers did not receive the proper training on *tokkatsu* and did not acquire the basic knowledge necessary to proceed with this new curriculum. The sole means they had was the *tokkatsu* guidebook issued by JICA as their reference. However, theoretical instructions should be accompanied by application and methodology. Therefore, they faced many problems, and this was reflected on children and their performance. She said, "Children were confused and did not know what was needed from them". *Tokkatsu* is a means to promote independent learning and collaboration between students with the least interference from the teacher. However, as the teachers did not know the proper means to create such an atmosphere and facilitate students' learning, students were hailed by instructions. This increased their confusion and limited their agency. The challenge that faced principal S was the lack of professional development training of teachers that was obviously reflected in their practice. Furthermore, she said, "The parents were always doubtful about the quality of education their children were getting". This is because the new education system does not involve a lot of homework. Instead, it focuses on student's participation in the classroom.

On the social side, the analysis revealed that the parents' uncooperative attitude towards school and their disapproval of some of the *tokkatsu* practices were major challenges. She said, "There was lack of knowledge and awareness on the new concept, and the parents did not receive proper briefing from the school." These were the underlying factors. As previously mentioned, *tokkatsu* is a way of life, and is known as a whole-child education approach. In Japan, students clean their own schools and serve themselves food as a part of their daily life education in school, this goes under *tokkatsu*. There are no maids for house-cleaning in Japan, therefore, children learn from an early age how to keep their living place clean and neat. On the contrary, the majority of the people in Egypt rely on maids for house-cleaning. There are always maids in schools for cleaning, even more there are cleaners for the streets. Under this social and cultural background, cleaning as a *tokkatsu* practice was faced with surprise and discomfort from the parents. They were against the idea of involving their children in school cleaning. Some of the parents felt it was humiliating, while others were worried about hygiene.

Another problem was the parents' refusal to volunteer or directly involve themselves with school activities. In Japan, parents are involved to a great deal in school life. For example, patrolling the children while they commute to school, serving in the school library, participating in school events, etc. This contribution strengthens the ties between the school and the community, and nurtures in children a sense of contribution to their community. In EJS, although it is considered a voluntary contribution, the school had to assign a number of hours for each parent to achieve fairness. In this social contribution, parents are asked to participate in some school events from the preparation day till the execution day. They may also be asked to contribute to other activities based on the needs of each school. Such a new practice was not welcomed by Egyptian parents; since normal national and international schools do not accommodate such a practice. Parents felt they were pushed and obliged against their will which led to the increase of the complaints.

Principal S's Learning Trajectory

The second stage of the study was following the weekly reports that were submitted by the principal during the training to observe her comments and reflections on her practices and her future prospects as a principal in her school. The reports revealed principal S's wide vision and capability to observe and analyze. Principal S observed some classes for the primary stage, and observed children's learning by playing in kindergarten. Her observation and analysis focused on two major axes: the student's axis and the teacher's axis. In the student's axis, she focused on co-inquiry, discovery and problem solving as the core for student's learning. Moreover, she repeated, "Students' collaboration and mutual respect are the keys to creating a successful learning environment in the classroom." During the primary school visit, she watched closely the development of the learning process of students in a science class through sharing and communication. She noticed how students were actively engaged, and how the learning was facilitated for them. She added, "The least interference from the teacher encouraged students to communicate with and learn from each other by sharing and comparing each other's work in order to find a solution for the problem in hand." Students were always keen to look at their work, find the problems and work on solving them by applying a repeated reflection-in-action process (Schon, 1987). In the kindergarten, she said, "Children were very organized and very motivated. Safe and easy-to-use materials were available for children to use however they want to broaden their thinking and engage them in more playing." She also noticed that during the reflection time, the children shared what they created and how they created them in front of each other. She added that children were organized in their talking and waited for their turns in an environment full of respect and excitement. All this reflects how *tokkatsu* is implemented and promoted in academic classes and not only in school events.

In the teacher's axis, Principal S's main focus was on the teacher's positive role in the classroom and how the teacher facilitates the learning process of the students, and creates an engaging learning atmosphere. Principal S emphasized that in all the classes she observed in primary school and the playing she saw in the kindergarten; the teacher did not dominate the learning nor the classroom. Good planning, time management and classroom management were the primary factors that promoted students' co-inquiry learning and enhanced students' motivation. Furthermore, in her report principal S wrote, "The teachers were resourceful and well-prepared, they supported the students when they needed help by providing some hints and clues to stimulate the students' curiousness. Repeated verbal and written reflection sessions at the end of the class or the activity promotes constant thinking and inquiry in students. It also gives the teacher an idea of the students' understanding and how he/she should develop the next class to deepen the students' learning."

Principal S looked into the student's learning process and the tools and approaches that were utilized to deepen and develop that learning. It was obvious that students were well-motivated and well-engaged in all the learning and the activities. Students worked in groups in most of the activities which strengthened their sense of responsibility and independent thinking to pursue any challenge. Principal S admired students' mutual respect and compromise to solve any problem. As originally a teacher with major in early childhood education and a current principal, principal S has longed for creating a learning environment that would contribute to realizing a comprehensive development

for children. In her report, she insisted on the importance of nurturing the skills and talents in children to provide them with the necessary tools to create and develop in the future. However, students would not be able to create or be motivated to challenge with anything new without the constant support from the teacher. Principal S noticed how the teachers in Japan provide the tools for students and let them utilize them by practicing different methods and approaches.

Future Prospect within an Applicable Action Plan

Principal S reflected into the current situation in her school in order to look for potentials and possibilities to start from. After discussing the strong points and the weak points in her school, she planned to design a professional development training for school teachers to develop their co-inquiry learning on *tokkatsu* and curriculum management, and to enforce the concept of learning by doing. This will be an initiative to start a community of practice where teachers can share and reflect on their practices and write their own practice records. Moreover, she also planned to hold some briefing sessions for the parents to explain the new concept of *tokkatsu* and its positive influence on children academically as well as socially.

Initiatives after EJEP towards Implementing New Approaches of *Tokkatsu*

The third stage in this research was to analyze the report that was sent by principal S after the EJEP training to look into her role as a principal in facilitating the implementation of *tokkatsu*, and supporting the teachers to develop new methodologies and raise their capacity through school-based professional training based on what she had acquired from the training.

The 'Academic Project' for Grade 1 as a New Approach towards Reflection

Project-based learning is one of the pedagogical approaches that supports the continuous learning of students and promotes agency. The attached primary and junior high school of the University of Fukui is a leading school in this student-centered approach. This school was the main destination among others where the practical part of the training was conducted. During the school visits, principal S observed the students' continuous learning through projects and how the projects were linked to the subjects. Inspired by this engaging method, principal S initiated a new academic project as a new approach towards reflection for grade 1 students during the last academic year. Since reflection is still a new concept for both teachers and students, this academic project is expected to be the start of the new reflection culture in the school.

In this project, students are divided into four groups of four different subjects: Arabic language, Maths, English, and Discover[2] according to their needs. Students of each group prepare some plays, conversations, and use a smart board to introduce some activities that are linked to their learning. During the preparation time, students involuntarily review all that they had learned during the first term to apply it into the activities they decided on. This project explicitly implements *tokkatsu* within students'

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[2] Discover is a new branch that has been developed by the *Center for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development* in Egypt for grades 1 to 3 in accordance with the new system of education 'Education 2.0'. It includes many interactive activities for students as an approach for *tokkatsu* in Egypt.

learning, and creates new methods for students to recall what they had learned and reflect upon it. This project enables students to take the initiative to decide on the activities they will do and enhances their agency and sense of responsibility. Moreover, it promotes communication and collaboration between students and deepens students' understanding of the subject. On the other hand, parents are invited to watch the students' performance. This is an approach from the principal to eliminate the parents' doubts about the insufficient learning of their children within the new system of education. This attempt was a successful approach towards building mutual understanding with the parents based on mutual confidence.

The Start of Reflective Sessions

"Reflection" is one of the main practices that EJEP focuses on as a tool for cultivating the capacities of teachers and administrators. Principal S observed and experienced different modes of reflection on different levels during the training. She noticed and learned the crucial role a principal plays to create a sustainable learning institution for students as well as teachers. Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, 2002). Therefore, she started a weekly 45-minute reflective session of teachers and implemented it after the end of school day as an initial step towards establishing a professional learning community of teachers. In these sessions, teachers from different subjects and levels share students' learning and development and discuss new approaches to support those in need. They also share their concerns regarding the social attitudes of some students and the problems they face in their practices. Apart from this weekly formal assembly, teachers are free to discuss with each other any issue whenever and wherever they meet. This reflects the dynamic community the principal is cultivating at school by securing both a public space and a private space. These informal, backchannel discussions where teachers can share their visions and concerns in a more relaxed atmosphere, strengthen the relationship between community members, and are the key to successful meetings (Wenger, 2002). As a principal, S does not isolate herself from teachers' practices as the case in all the traditional schools in Egypt. She participates in the reflective sessions to support the teachers in this new challenge, to seek every possible measure to create a learning environment for both students and teachers, and to perceive the needs of teachers. She utilizes these reflective sessions as a practice-based professional learning and development of teachers to raise their capacity and performance by sharing and learning from each other's practices.

Furthermore, she initiated four supporting groups as a comprehensive development of the school professional learning community: 'Teachers' Professional Development Group' which discusses the teachers' needs and problems, 'School Management Group' which focuses on other groups' problems and how to solve them, '*Tokkatsu* Group' which deals with the school yearly plan and students' suggestions for learning, and lastly 'Physical and Health Group' which follows up on students' health condition and raises the awareness of health. Teachers choose where to go provided that each group should consist of teachers from different subjects and levels for a more comprehensive, collaborative and lively community. The teachers of these groups meet every day, while the principal participates in their meetings every other day.

Conclusion

Principal S has always desired to create a learning atmosphere that enables character education programs as well as academic education for children. *Tokkatsu* as a whole child model of education that aims to nurture the child as a whole being made that desire possible to realize.

By starting a professional learning community for teachers and project-based learning for reflection for students, S has proven that EJEP training program is contributing to developing new strategies and generating advanced measures for administrators to create a learning environment at school through *tokkatsu*, and to promote both teachers' and students' agency. She used what she learned from the program and modified it according to the current context at her school, which implies resilience and perception of her school's situation. The new approaches facilitated the implementation of *tokkatsu* by creating new possibilities for students to plan, organize and perform events that are linked to their subjects. Moreover, they also supported in creating a learning community for teachers where different-subject teachers collaborate, share and learn from each other. This learning community will raise the teacher's capacity to design new methods to incorporate *tokkatsu* within the subjects.

Principal S showed that the role of a principal is beyond monitoring teachers and paper work as the case in the majority of the traditional national schools in Egypt. She has proven that administrators play a crucial role in creating a learning atmosphere in schools for children and teachers, and facilitating the means for teachers to develop their capacities and skills.

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