

【Questions and Answers with Keynote Speakers】

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Hiroshima University, Japan)

Thank you very much for your keynote speeches within the allotted time. Now, I would like to spend the remainder of the morning on the question and answer session. Would those with questions please raise your hand and provide your name and affiliation when you address the keynote speakers. We would like to provide many people with the opportunity to ask questions, so please limit your comments to three minutes. Those with questions, please raise your hand.



Question 1

Satoko Okamoto (System Science Consultants, Inc.)

I have a question for both of the keynote speakers. First, Prof. Seddoh, you said that due to the lack of quality, children have repeated or dropped out and I certainly agree with that but it must be difficult to measure this quantitatively. Could you explain how the statistics on repeaters and drop outs were analyzed? Second, many child laborers can only experience education in non formal programs. I would like to ask what you think about the bridge between these non-formal programs and formal education. Finally, I am interested in the language of instruction. In sub-Saharan Africa, the language of education is French so for students whose mother tongue is neither French nor English that must really be a challenge. Could you comment on that? As for Prof. Kajita, you talked about student-centered learning in the 1990s as having failed. However, in the area of development assistance, lessons and classes which are student-centered have proved to raise the interest of children and I would like to hear your opinion on that.

Question 2

Myagmar Ariuntuya (Hitotsubashi University, Japan)

Thank you very much for this valuable opportunity. I have a question for both keynote speakers. Prof. Kajita talked about child centered learning that went too far and had a negative impact on Japan and thus caused problems. However in many developed countries, student centered learning is not only emphasized but in fact is pursued through teacher education at the policy level. However, based on your experience, it seems that you are reversing the trend the other way. Therefore, I would like to ask what are the lessons to be learned from those bad experiences so that developing countries do not repeat the same experience of Japan? Also, for Prof. Seddoh, you said that there are a lot of problems especially in Africa and some are very relevant to my country Mongolia. So I would like to ask which problem do you assign the highest priority as it is difficult to solve all of them at once.

Question 3

Muzibur R. Howlader (Embassy of Bangladesh)

Thank you to the organizers of JEF and this gathering as it is a really effective meeting. As you know, the world economic forum is involved in solving the economic problem the world is now facing and at this moment it is the responsibility of the Japan Education Forum to inform the world of the standard of education regarding universalization and the education gap in quality between the developing countries. However, there is also a big difference among the developed countries such as the US, UK and Japan. When we come to the discussion of mathematics you can see the

signs and how a standard of quality can be obtained. Each country should have such standards and so my question is how can this be accomplished throughout the world to have a unit system for quality standards? A second question is that we are quite aware through the 2008 World Report that especially in areas of East Asia, it has been suggested to concentrate not only on the economy but also on development. From this viewpoint, some ODA aid to developing countries should be concentrated in urban areas rather than the distant rural areas. The first keynote speaker referred to decentralization in Togo and I would like to ask him to comment on the World Bank Report. My third question is that ODA in Japan has been cut down yet on the other hand we see commitment in the G8 conference which is doubtful for African nations to meet without the leadership of Asia. So what do you think will be the outcome of the financial crisis affecting Japan for JOCV volunteers working in mathematics in various countries. What will be their fate?

Response from two keynote speakers

Komlavi Francisco Seddoh (Former Minister of Education and Scientific Research, Togo)

In response to the first question, we consider dropouts and class repetition as one of the weaknesses in the efficiency of the education system. Unfortunately, the rate of dropouts and repetition is very high in the education system in Africa and even in some of the organizations of the school system which are mostly French speaking at about 18 percent and sometimes 20 percent. If you want to consider the cost of the dropouts we see that this rarely improves the learning of the student so that measures should be taken to reduce this trend. How we measure it is through statistics and we know the level of pupils at the beginning of the 5th and 6th term and that helps measure the dropouts and to see the efficiency of the system.

Child laborers are provided some programs to help these children but what I can say is that the best learning is the one received at school. But if they can't receive this training, some NGOs and non formal programs can help in what is not the best situation. What we should fight for is really to reduce child labor as there is an age where instead of working 16 hours a day, children should be at school. We need to fight for these children to benefit from formal schooling.

There are indeed language issues. When teaching is done in the national language results are better but what we are facing in Africa is that it is easy to say that is better but how to organize it is the problem. And that is why in many countries we have been teaching in French and English not because it is more efficient but it is very difficult to organize otherwise. You have to select the language for teaching and arrange the teachers themselves so that teachers are not posted in the area where they do not know the native language so the easiest way for them to perform is in the French or English language. We need to move to teaching in national languages at the primary level.

As to which problem has the most priority, the difficulty for developing countries is that everything is a priority. If I have to answer this question, I will say that what is the most important to see results in teaching is the teachers. For me I consider that teacher training solves half the problem. In addition, we should concentrate on the curriculum and who can change all this are the teachers. If you don't have good teachers there is no chance to perform in education. In particular to make the quality aspect, governments can implement policy but it is the teachers who make the education effective in the classroom.

Quality standards are sometimes considered as world standards and are applied in every region but we also think that some standards are still particular to regions. So if you want to target a particular problem of one region, you need not only an international standard but also the regional standard which will help you get closer to the problem you want to study and develop.

As for the last question with regard to the reduction of aid and development of the economic system, what we see is that aid is stagnant. If we consider the level of the aid in 2000 and 2004, it is increasing, but from 2005 we have been

going through a reduction of aid. What we have to fight for is that people should not consider this as the time to reduce EFA aid. There is now even more need for this aid. Commitments to basic education for low income countries increased from US \$2.7 billion in 2000 to 5.1 billion in 2004 before declining to US \$3.7 billion in 2007. The amount will have to be tripled to reach the estimated US \$11 billion required annually. So there is still need to support this aid. We agree that this aid should go along with better governance and better management will have more efficiency but there is another difficulty we should think of. You have problems in Japan as we have in Africa but still we need this aid and the current economic crisis should not be the reason to reduce the support developing countries are given. If you want to build a global world education everywhere, aid is what I think is needed.

Eiichi Kajita (President, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan)

Thank you for your excellent questions on these important issues. I'd like to address the three issues that have been raised: student-centered learning, universality and the unique local features of education, and the situation in Japan, especially in regard to international aid in education. With regard to the latter two, I'll be very brief.

Student-centered learning in the true sense is very important. Children's ability to think is limited by the level of their development. In order for children to learn abstract concepts, they have to reach an age at which they can understand such concepts. So it is important to teach young children through hands-on activities or by using tangible examples, because if you make things too abstract, you are not going to get anywhere. You must get down to the level of the children in order to understand how they work and how they study. Explaining in words may not be enough. You have to let children have hands-on experience so that they understand and feel things for themselves.

Therefore, in principle, student-centered learning is vital to education. However, in the 1970s Western countries experienced student-centered learning which was somewhat more superficial, with an emphasis on letting children do what they wanted to do. In Japan too, a similar sort of one-dimensional student-centered learning was advocated in the 1990s, and it has led to the current problems. For example, in addition to letting children work on what they want to learn, there is also a need to give them instructions and support them. If adults don't discipline them, children tend to be lazy. Students must develop the habit of focusing their attention. Furthermore, in the 1990s, as Japan became affluent, people became more lax. Education too became lax as "education with latitude" was introduced. That was a mistake.

While it is good to respect children's thoughts, children are not always right. Think about the history of science. What people thought was right often proved to be wrong after it was tested. Think about the sun and the moon, for example. Children may think that the sun moves around the earth, but we have to teach them what is correct. If we just agree with what they think, children may be misled. Student-centered learning must not be misunderstood, and student-centered learning in the true sense of the word must be pursued. For more than 10 years people have observed the declining quality of education, and so it has been decided that education must restore academic competency. Responsible people are emphasizing the importance of teaching. We must value the expertise accumulated in Japanese education over the years.

Now, regarding the unique features of education of different countries and local people, in the case of Japan, the new Japanese course of study will introduce "minimum standards." This is a departure from the current course of study that sets "standards." According to the new course of study, in addition to the minimum educational content, which is taught across the country, schools can teach unique content that they consider relevant to the needs of local people and communities. We proposed this in a report issued in October 2003. In this way, most classes can include "advanced learning" or additional content. By combining "universal" and "unique" educational content, schools will be able to teach more about the traditional culture of their communities than before. This must be encouraged at the local school level.

As I am not a politician, I don't have any clout, but I do think that international aid should be increased. People I know also say so. Japan must provide more assistance. At the same time, Japanese people must go overseas and see things for themselves. Last year, our university created a new program in the graduate school to promote international cooperation. Our university trains teachers of languages, social studies, mathematics, science and other subjects. Students can go to developing countries and provide support, making use of their expertise in their specific teaching fields. We have created this special program, but I believe that more Japanese people must visit developing countries and get involved in these activities. For example, the NGO organized by my wife saves money and send its members to Latin America every year to support schools by donating teaching materials. They went to Peru and built two schools in slum areas outside the capital city. These Japanese people understand local needs by actually going there, meeting people and working with them. After they figure out what teaching materials are needed, they provide the necessary textbooks and education. Of course, there are financial issues, but in Japan, we must pay more attention to the situations and needs of developing countries. We must not impose what we think is necessary, but we must listen to them and find out what is actually needed. I myself visit developing countries every few years. I have learned a lot through these field studies. By visiting local communities, I have gained extremely valuable experiences.

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Hiroshima University, Japan)

I would like to return to the audience and ask for one more round of questions, please.

Question 4

Kentaro Fukuchi (Japanese Red Cross)

I actually have three questions for Prof. Kajita. In regards to the revised curriculum, you said it depends on the regional situation for the child centered curriculum to be viable. To what extent do structures exist to meet the needs of the different regions? For example, foreign students or students with disabilities, or others? How could you cater to these children and how do you support the teachers so that the curriculum can be applied to these children? The second question is also about the curriculum. How do you assess it? I'd like to hear about the performance ability. In math and science this may be easy to assess but when it comes to moral education or traditional culture, how can you assess the performance? And thirdly, I'd like to ask about the future of Japan which is the future of its children. To look to the future through education, what is the Japanese society that one would envision for the future? Is there a vision of Japan in the future to which education will be catered? And if so, what is the priority? Do you have a vision for the future Japanese society? For Prof. Seddoh, I'd also like to ask about education for minorities. According to statistics, of the 17.5 million out of school throughout the world, many belong to minority groups or have disabilities or linguistic issues. According to some, 2/3rds have some kind of disability. I am wondering if there are any plans or vision in your country to provide education to these kinds of children.

Question 5

Demis Kunje (University of Malawi)

I have one question for Prof. Seddoh. First of all, thank you for outlining the challenges facing the developing world and it was quite comprehensive the way you presented. But I want to find out is there any progress in addressing these challenges? Have you learned anything in the way the developing countries are addressing the challenges you have outlined?

Question 6

Kumi Shibata (Aoyama Graduate School)

When I was in primary school I was wondering why one has to go to school and why one has to get an education. Many teachers taught us how to write but nobody taught me why I have to go to school. What can you say to children to explain why they have to go to school?

Question 7

Karamu Harii (Egypt Embassy Culture Counselor)

Prof. Kajita stressed the need for traditional Japanese culture study and moral education. From the viewpoint of someone who came to Japan 30 years ago as a student and this time is here as a diplomat, I sense that the culture has changed over time. Unfortunately, watching TV there are so many programs not worth watching. I was really surprised after a 25 year absence, that there are no longer dramas like NHK's Oshin which was a superb program. Because of such dramas, media has educated the people thanks to those kinds of programs. So I believe it is not just improving the curriculum that is needed but I wish for Japanese TV programs of much higher quality like in the good old days. Through these dramas Japanese culture and morals can be appreciated. Japan has a wonderful culture of the samurai and it should be preserved. Please forgive me but I was really surprised this time to learn about bullying at school and I think it is really really sad that not only adults but also children are committing suicide. Really sad.

Response from two keynote speakers

Eiichi Kajita (President, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan)

Thank you. You made an excellent point. People tend to think it is enough if they can just enjoy the present moment. This is true for both adults and children. As a matter of fact, we exchange views with people in the news media. NHK has started to air programs on Japanese history. This is good. We should also read Japanese classical literature, which is excellent and of high quality. Japanese people don't appreciate the good aspects of Japanese culture. I hope Japanese people will take a greater interest in their traditional culture.

Let me briefly answer the three other questions about the national curriculum, how we incorporate unique local features into education, and education for students with disabilities. This depends on the approaches of mayors and governors as well as discussion among local leaders. I was born in Shimane and raised in Tottori. The former governor of Tottori was very enthusiastic about education and increased the educational budget for the poor so that additional teachers could be deployed for students who need extra support and for those with disabilities.

As for the assessment of the curriculum, there are three types of results. First, there are results that can be seen immediately after educational activities, such as knowledge and cognitive skills. Second, there are results that may not be apparent at the beginning but gradually appear over time. The abilities to think and to express oneself are included in this category. Third, we may not know how or when some results manifest themselves. It depends on individual students. These three types of results are all important. We must keep them in mind when we discuss education.

As for the future of Japan and of Japanese society, honestly, I don't think the Japanese government is seriously considering the future of Japan. The members of the Central Council for Education include representatives of major companies and labor unions, but we don't have that kind of discussion. It is essential that we think seriously about the future of Japan so that Japan will not become corrupt or go bankrupt.

Komlavi Francisco Seddoh (Former Minister of Education and Scientific Research, Togo)

Just to answer some of the questions. In regards to minorities, there are many measures in order to improve the situation of minorities' participation. Thanks to the government in many countries education is free and reorganizing of funds for school meals has been introduced to help at least some of those children who are coming from very poor families to have at least one meal a day. We also try to get the schools closer to the child so construction of new schools is also a priority. But what I can say is that if you want to solve the minorities' problem, the best way is to reduce poverty. All of the poverty reduction policies are increasing participation of minorities in school. Disabled students still have difficulty even in developed countries where a teacher is expected to take care of 40 students in a normal school so to take care of additional needs students is difficult in all parts of the world. The UNESCO meeting in Geneva focused on these issues in order to get all children to school. As for the question from Malawi, when we are presenting on education in developing countries we are doing this in a short time and we are focusing on difficulties. There is a lot of progress in basic education, secondary, and higher education. The statistics are there. In primary education, the global net enrolment ratio rose from 83% to 87% between 1999 and 2005, faster than from 1992 to 1999. From 2000 to 2006, the global adult literacy rate in developing countries increased from 76% to 84%. Survival rate to the late grade of primary school improved between 1999 and 2004 in most countries.

Initiatives of Jomtien and then Dakar have improved things a lot but still progress has to be made. Access has improved and what we need to do now is to make access and quality go together. That is the next challenge and from now to 2015 the world will be better in the field of education at all levels of the system.

As for why we have to go to school, I have been asked this question once in my country by someone who went through difficulties to send children to school and after that they didn't find a job. So why do we have to send those children to school if they don't get a job? There is no better opportunity than school to give a future to a child. The only thing you can do to give him a chance is to send him to school. I'd like to quote Nelson Mandela who said that "the school is the only way a child of a peasant can become the president of a nation." This is impossible if you don't have schooling.

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Hiroshima University, Japan)

I am sure you have more questions but the time has come to close the morning session. I hope you will all return to participate in the afternoon session.

