

Kumon's Contribution to SDGs

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1. Introduction of Kumon

The Kumon Institute of Education Co., Ltd., which was established in 1958, is a private educational organization globally disseminating the Kumon Method of learning developed by its founder, Toru Kumon.

Since it opened a center in New York in 1974 for the families of Japanese expatriates, Kumon has been expanding its activities overseas. As of the end of September 2016, there are about 4.3 million subject enrollments in 49 countries and regions.

At Kumon, Instructors do not teach how to solve problems but rather help students solve problems on their own. This develops students' self-efficacy. They become confident and develop self-esteem that allow them to explore the subjects that they are unfamiliar with. At Kumon, students start to learn from a level where they find easy to solve and continue to study at a level appropriate to their ability. As a result, students are able to advance beyond their school grade level. Kumon Instructors develop students' potential by determining each student's "just-right" level. They understand the learners' academic abilities, personalities and feelings and support them so that they can support students' study individually.

As the Kumon Method is not dependent on the specific educational system of any country but a universal method to develop students' capacities, it has been accepted in many countries. The Kumon method has been disseminated through franchising, but in order to reach people in more diverse situations, Kumon is also exploring collaboration with outside partners.

2. Collaboration with BRAC

BRAC is a global NGO headquartered in Bangladesh. BRAC schools have been established throughout Bangladesh and are widely known for their high-quality non-formal educational programs. In May 2013, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, BRAC's chairman, met with Mr. Akio Tsunoda, former president of Kumon. That was the start of the collaboration between BRAC and Kumon. Fortunately, Kumon received financial support from JICA to conduct a feasibility study through its BOP business promotion program. Thus, a joint government-private sector project among JICA, BRAC and Kumon began in March 2014.

During the initial three-month phase, the Kumon method was introduced to three BRAC Primary Schools as a pre-pilot project. During the second eight-month phase, the method was introduced to 17 schools as a pilot project. The purpose of the pilot was to verify whether the Kumon method would be beneficial to children attending BRAC Primary schools. In order to confirm this, the learning outcomes were evaluated by Prof. Yasuyuki Sawada, a professor at the University of Tokyo, and Dr. Mai Seki, a research fellow at the JICA Research Institute, using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) methodology, which produced good results. By widely disseminating these results, Kumon is preparing for the next step in its collaboration with BRAC.

3. Future tasks

For more than 55 years, Kumon has offered its method to people in diverse situations as well as those with various special needs in Japan and has produced good results. In order to contribute to the SDGs, it is important to study how this model can be expanded globally. Through our collaboration with BRAC and JICA, we have found that working with a partner that understands local situations and has a stable infrastructure and with JICA, which has a wealth of experience working in developing countries, is extremely valuable. At the same time, sustainable fundraising remains an important task for us. We will continue to tell the world of the benefits of the Kumon Method, network with many people, and develop new collaborative activities.