

Open Floor Discussions, Questions and Answers

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. I would like to welcome back Professor Abe to join the panel. We are going to take some responses for questions that some of you wrote down. After we have done that, we can take some more questions from the floor. We have an hour, so hopefully we can cover as much as possible. I would encourage the presenters to be as brief as possible so that we can get some of you to also ask some questions. Starting with Professor Abe, if he would like to respond to the questions that you have.

Prof. Abe

I received three questions. One is – When a class size is large, how to implement active learning? Very good question, I must say. To the extent possible, the class size should be 30 or smaller. It is good outreach. However, of course, every school has a different situation, it could be as many as 60 or 70 in a single class, but I still believe it is possible to conduct active learning, in a different way, but I think it is possible.

I teach at the university, but in a class with more than 100 students, I still do incorporate active learning in the Japanese language class. I divide the class into groups of 20 or so, so that groups can discuss internally and then get back to the whole hundred students, and then get back to a group of 20. Of course, there is a limit to time, and there is a limit therefore to how much one can cover, but every time there is a critical juncture in the course, we make sure that there is active learning element. With creativity, innovativeness, I think it is possible to do it in elementary and secondary as well.

Second question, how many days of active learning in a year? I cannot give you an exact number of days, but for a single course or learning, let us say it takes 8 hours to read through a particular work or text, not everything can be covered by active learning. In other words, there needs to be time to read, to look up words and such, some things cannot be done through active learning. But for critical components, there will be more active learning within 8 hours of work. Initially, active learning can be incorporated at the outset, and then eventually children will take the initiative to engage in a discussion, to think for themselves. There will be more weight in terms of time given to active learning. As Mr. Inoue said, as students get used to generating questions, inevitably, there will be more time spent on active learning, and the teachers must go with the flow.

Third question – What if there is no leadership among the teachers? That has happened; there is no single driver of active learning. In that case, borrow from the outside, look to the outside. In Akita, we have an advisor with education committee, and there are also university professors like us, but there are other teachers elsewhere in other schools with expertise in active learning. These people are invited as guest lecturers to propagate active learning, to spread awareness about active learning. It can be through training as well, so do not make your school insular, make sure that you look to outside - external sources as well. Not just in Akita but it happens in other parts of Japan with good results. I did speak for some time. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

I think, Mr. Inoue, you have some questions?

Mr. Inoue

This is again Inoue from Nada Junior and Senior High School. I have two questions. One is as follows. I talked about the IB, International Baccalaureate program. IB is an elite program, perhaps not for everyone, as a comment. The second question is, 'education for all' means we are achieving a certain level of competency, but every country may have a different level of competency, or different school has a different level of competency in terms of assessment.

I agree with the first point that the IB program is not for everyone. For example, I do not wish that all Japanese schools become an IB school, but what I would like to achieve, as I mentioned in my presentation, is not to introduce IB program because Nada is an elite school. My previous employment was at Senri International School which is very different from Nada, and even after I transferred to Nada I continued with my research. That's how I brought TOK with me to Nada, but even if it is a very challenging school, but I still think TOK is applicable.

When the standard value (hensachi) is less than 50 or 60 academically, there are schools which incorporate IB or TOK. It is not a question of whether students are smart or not, but what I wanted to say is that adopting TOK can be a mirror or measurement to understand what is missing or something. By doing so, I can separate my own teaching style influenced by the Japanese public educational style and relatively evaluated myself. Indeed, there are not many systematized methods of extending critical thinking skills in Japanese language classes. In that sense, question making and TOK's question becomes very helpful.

About assessment, I did not have much time to talk about this in my presentation, but TOK assessment in the real IB program is done externally. IBO receives a TOK essay, 1500 words, about 3000 words in Japanese, with a question and rationale for that question and what approaches were taken to answer that question. So, that is 40 points. But there is also an internal assessment through the presentation. The students must present the question and the rationale for that in front of teachers which is about 20 points. This is not possible at Nada, my school, which has 55 students in one class. So, one way of applying it is to apply the question part and then using rubric perhaps for assessment. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

Mr. Kunieda also had some questions to answer.

Mr. Kunieda

Yes, I received a few questions. Thank you very much for asking the questions. If I sort them out, one is – Not just schoolteachers, but how can you involve the parents, and how do you do that? Second question – In different countries, the quality enhancement and support of the schoolteachers, are there any community involvement? If there is such an effort to enhance the quality of the teachers – Well, how important is it to raise the level of quality of the teachers? And a few others – For the involvement of private companies, private sector, is that possible, how is it possible, what are some of the options?

Let me address one by one. First, how to involve the parents? Well, parents or the local community members can do certain activities, but that is rather limited. But at least what I can say is that they are not going to serve as teacher in the classrooms. That is for sure. So, what other activities can there be for them? Well, as I mentioned earlier, extracurricular supplementary classes may be organized with community's support – by providing the learning space or learning materials, and also facilitating pupils' self-learning activities.

I called this facilitator earlier. They do not have to be a qualified schoolteacher and are expected to make sure that the children come to the learning space and to help the pupils to mark the exercises. Anybody interested and available may be asked to provide some time out of their schedule to work as facilitator for extracurricular supplementary class.

But, overall, supporting the schoolteacher is what we expect of the parents as well. In some African schools, for instance, I have seen the cases where the schoolteachers are dispatched to remote rural areas. For those teachers dispatched, some parents or local community members may provide lodging and provide food, meals. In short, their role is to support the schoolteachers to do their job and also to do something that non-teachers can do outside the classroom. In order to do that though, it is important that people are motivated to do that. Before the remedial activities actually take place, the level of understanding is assessed by giving pupils a placement test. The parents and community members then understand that the children in the community are not learning, they are not really doing that well. So, having that awareness at the beginning is very important for the parents or the community members.

To address the second question that had to do with the enhancement of quality of teachers, what are some of the measures undertaken? In our 'School for All Project', we do encourage schoolteachers to participate in community-supported activities. We provide training for teachers on what is a school management committee or SMC, what sort of activities can be undertaken by SMC, how they can support extracurricular remedial activities. We do not want to exclude them but rather want them to be involved. We just do not put every responsibility and work on to the schoolteachers.

In all the countries that we are active in, our trainings target SMC members including schoolteachers and community representatives. Whether schoolteachers or community volunteers play the role as facilitator, they are expected to help pupils to learn effectively during extracurricular supplementary classes. During the training, the participants learn facilitation tips and share good practices. For example, qualified teachers gave advice to community facilitators on how to teach the addition with carryover. This kind of communication enabled both teachers and community members to work together to support pupils' learning.

Regarding the quality of teachers, we believe that is very important. In our 'School for All Project', the priority is given to what approaches to take to tackle the situation where the pupils are not learning as much as they should. Well, one would be a long-term approach, in other words, changing the teaching in the classroom for the future through teachers' training. For this to happen, you would have to do something about the curriculum and then the textbooks. This would require a long-term effort. As it is time-consuming, we also need to take

short-term measures that can bring about immediate results. In some countries, the population increases by more than 3% every year, and so in 20 years' time, the number of children will double and you will still have to ensure quality learning for all these children. So, you need to mobilize everybody available, not just teachers to make improvements wherever possible. I would like to emphasize that enhancement of teachers' quality is very important.

How can private sector be involved? Well, this is something I cannot really answer myself, but as for myself personally, the learning crisis we are facing, it needs to be understood. In the African context, for example, mobile phones are widespread, but still there are infrastructure and electricity supply issues. Let us suppose, you distribute tablet PCs with applications for learning to all the pupils, will they learn well automatically? We would like to have this kind of discussions with the private sector and to see what to do.

Another aspect may be information gathering and knowledge management. Between the Central government and the schools, there may not be regular and reliable communication or information sharing. This could be helped by using some applications on cell phones. That is my personal view. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much for your responses. We would now open the floor for any further questions for presenters here. If you could state your name and then your organization or institution.

Prof. Masato Noda (Ibaraki University)

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Thank you very much, Professor. Please allow me to speak in Japanese because the majority of them are Japanese.

Thank you very much for the presentation. My name is Noda from Ibaraki University. I have two questions. First of all, since we are talking about SDGs, it is no longer the issue only for the assistance to developing countries, but global development goals. I would like to ask both who are working for developing countries and Japan, developed country to respond possible to the following questions.

My first question is 'Quality education.' FOR WHOM, FOR WHAT? Mr. Kunieda said that it would be no issue if everyone is looking at the same direction. I would like to show a case in Japan based on my teaching in university as well as statistics. I myself conduct active learning method in my class. While, I wonder whether Japanese students are really expecting and wanting active learning. According to Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, comparing 2008 and 2016, number of students who just want to get credits easily increased by 10 percentage points even without much interest in a subject, on the other hand decrease in 10 percentage points for students who want to take classes which are interesting although more difficult. According to the statistics, 80% of students responding to the survey still want one-sided, one-way lecture. It seems that those majority do not want active learning.

As policymakers and members of the academia and educators very much commit to incorporate active learning, but what about the students and their parents? I wonder that they, might be, just want to pass the entrance exam, not to have quality education. It could be the same for developing countries. Rather than ICT and STEM

education for industrial human resource development, the students and parents might prefer life skill and practical skills for agriculture. So, I think the question, quality education for whom, for what is critical.

Another point – Again, in the context of SDGs, the well-known motto is ‘Leave no one behind’. Japan's proposal for ‘Human security’ concept was incorporated into this ideal. Regarding to this, there should be various people who are left behind and have difficulty to access to quality education in Japan. For example, we have 2.4 million people who are of foreign descent in this country and also students with special needs. Looking to developing countries, what about the issue of child labor? In my own research, many Cambodian children leave school and work in Vietnam and Thailand. What about the African continent? There must be people who are left behind. How not to leave them behind is the question, based on the SDGs motto. I expect the answers both from Japan and the international delegates. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

These are very, very important and good questions. I think I would ask Professor Abe and Professor Kunieda to respond to the questions that deal with Japan. Then, I can ask my fellow presenters to see if they can also address some of those questions. But if we can make it brief, so I am sure we can get some more questions. Professor Abe.

Prof. Abe

I work for the Akita University, and I look at the education situation in Akita prefecture. In Akita, children like the enquiry-based learning or active-learning, , and it is very well received. This is “school improvement new plan” a plan that I was the central figure in developing, and this annual report is results of analyzing Akita prefecture’s national academic achievement learning situation survey. In the 10 years’ time, active learning is increasing in Akita.

The ratio used to be high to start with, but it did not cover all the schools. But, right now, the number of schools increased and most of the elementary and junior high schools’ active learning is incorporated. In the past 10 years, for 5th and 9th graders, we ask, “Do you like mathematics and Japanese language classes?” And ‘yes’ answer has been increasing over the years. Children who say “I can follow or understand the class instructions” increased. This is depending on how you do it and there are different statistics. However, active learning, this is something that really excites the children or the students because they get to understand what they did not understand, so they overcome the hurdles and they can aim higher, and they can see clearer where to go and strive for. That is the situation in Akita prefecture.

When we asked the students at Akita University, they prefer the active learning type of learning to think for themselves. The thinking, the preferences, the locality, and area of expertise, it might determine that, but also it depends on the way you deliver the class. So, it is important that we collect various kinds of data. In other words, we have to do more researches as to think of the preference of the students. I have limited data unfortunately, but my senses tell me that for elementary school, junior high school, high school, university level, I think active learning is well received and supported by the students. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much, Professor Abe. Mr. Kunieda, would you like to say a few words?

Mr. Kunieda

Thank you very much. Let me talk about the situation in Japan from a different perspective. My son's junior high school in Tokyo is designated as a pilot school to introduce an "active learning" approach. Just the other day, I had a chance to participate in the final presentation on the pilot project. Active learning was really practiced in the classroom.

I asked my son about his impressions and he said he wished that the teachers were always doing like that. That is, it will take some time for this new approach to take root. It seems that the students have come to realize what kind of classroom activities are interesting. I think the feedback was felt by the schoolteachers as well. So, I think it is important for the newly introduced approach to take root and become part of the daily routine.

I mentioned this in my presentation as well, but you always have to have motivation to do something. The effectiveness of the education may surface only after years. However, by introducing active learning or any other approach, whether it is the student or the teacher, if something that they can feel as a positive impact and if you can really have that evaluated and understood and been aware of, then that leads to the next step I think.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. I do not know Maitree and then Rasheda, would you want to add something to that?

Prof. Inprasitha

Yes, I can share some of my experience. Even I, under the umbrella of the term 'active learning,' but as I just mentioned, what the focus is, the student idea is very important. Especially when we teach mathematics, when one started the project 15 years ago, usually our teachers just only teach the content, deliver the content to the student, but they tend to ignore or take for granted the student problem. For example, as a teacher, I bring a lot of problems and distribute to the students. Hopefully, they can cope with the student's individual differences. But what I have learned from Japan and then tried to adapt this, instead of distributing a lot of problems, we try to create a problem situation in which when students engage in, then they can have their own problem. That is very important. If the students would have their own problem, then they will solve the problem. This is the lens and the windows that go to a more higher level of the contents as I just mentioned. Even then they learn nine platforms, it will be focused – nine platform equals something, then the students focus on the answer. But how to make sense nine platforms? Is this the student just only divide one from and four and then making tens? If they become aware of these two – Oh, I can bring 6 from 9 and then add to 4, and then there is also ten three. This is addition. It is not just counting by finger, by hand. How we encourage the students to engage from the point of view is very important. It is the meaning of active learning.

As Kunieda and Abe said, it is not dependent on the size of the class, because even in Thai, we have only 10 or 15 students in a class, looking from the other sides, but still the teachers just deliver the content. It does not matter, the size of the class or the number of the students. This is very important. The aspects of – I do not

know how to say, the metacognitive levels of the content has been changed for the 21st century already. Even we say in the math context, in the sci context, the point is, if we or the teacher can create a problem situation which is closely associated to the real world, I agree with you that if closer to the real world or the daily life of student, then they can start meaningful learning from their experience.

But on the other side, we usually start from the mathematical world in the case of mathematics. We say some definition, and then blah-blah-blah, through application goes to the real world. This is usually what will not work. But if we start the other side, reverse from that, then the student can actively engage in the situation. That is what we have done during the last 15 years.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. I will take some other questions. Yes, professor?

Prof. Kuroda (Hiroshima University)

I am Kuroda. I used to be with Hiroshima University and to work on the reform of developing countries' classroom activities mostly with JICA for 20 years. I am not an expert on teaching subjects, but together with science and mathematics education experts I have been participating in these kinds of projects.

As Dr. Akyeampong mentioned, I am sure classroom activities in Japanese schools have implications for the SDGs which is the theme of today's forum, and thus I will try to ask a question linking these two things.

Well, I think the speakers on the floor have so far mentioned basically two topics. First Dr. Inoue and Dr. Abe presented studies on Japanese classroom activities including active learning, which may be said to be advanced practices. That presentation was quite inspirational.

But, on the other hand, as Dr. Akyeampong and also Dr. Kunieda from JICA mentioned, there are many challenges in education that developing countries are faced with. For instance such new ideas as active learning introduced into developing countries may be rejected simply because it is something alien to them, and they may not be ready for implementing such kind of new concept. The challenges are not only related to the problem of large class size but also lack of teachers' motivation to teach, and there is no sufficient infrastructure and facility such as staff room to facilitate teachers' collaboration for active learning. So, there is some reality that we have to face to make it happen.

While we may have such an excellent practice in Japan,- at least from my experiences it would not be done overnight to introduce such a practice into overseas countries.-It might be regarded as something foreign or alien, and also imposed. So, people do not welcome it with open arms. So my question is what would be the initial clue or breakthrough to introduce such a new idea. I would like to hear responses from both parties, the international participants and also the Japanese speakers.

To give you an extreme example of developing countries' reactions, one African university' s professor said clearly that even if you try to introduce an advanced example of Japan into my country, it would simply not work.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very, very much. That is a very, very good and important question. I would say a few things and then ask my panelists to also contribute. The issues around active learning, there is enough evidence from what we have heard that it is effective, it works. I think what we have to ask ourselves is how can we scale this up, how can we get this to have an impact. Not only in Japan, there may be communities, students whose motivation for learning might be slightly different, and even teachers who wholeheartedly embrace it. That is sometimes where we need to think about.

In Africa, I think there is always the risk that the pedagogy of these active learning approaches – another form of imposition of ideas and practices that have not been – we used the word ‘bottom-up,’ have not been really developed from the context as I was saying earlier. The same old question is that how do we get teachers and students to embrace this way of learning, which we know is effective. We have had in Africa since the 60s a lot of these active learning. What we are talking about is not new. If you look into the history, you find that these have been going on in different forms and different shades. But in many of African countries, these things have not stuck after some years. Teachers revert back to what they are used to. And this has been the problem. Those who have managed to benefit from it, like I was saying in my presentation, are people who have certain economic or social capital who can connect with these kinds of approaches, and we need to think really about how we can make this much more accessible to teachers, to students, right across the world, so that it does not only benefit people who are in the developed systems but can benefit every child. So, this would be my initial response to that. I do not know whether Rasheda or anybody has - yes?

Ms. Choudhury

Thank you. I would like to echo what Professor Akyeampong has said that it is easy to understand for us, particularly academia and others, and education practitioners even, this type of a wonderful model, this active learning. These types of models were tried in many other countries, even in our country, in the year 2004 or 2005. DFID started helping one particular group for this interactive child-centered learning in mainstream primary schools, which is based on the Montessori method of teaching/learning, but in mainstream schools in very deprived areas. It started working very well because it was homegrown by a teacher who was trained in England. Herself, she was a teacher for 12 years in English schools based in England when her husband was doing Ph.D. But she started it, and it started growing to be very popular. But then what happened – there was resistance as it happened everywhere. Resistance from the mainstream schools and teacher unions, they started talking about it because it is a lot of work for teachers, that is what they understood, and that is why it did not work that way.

The other point that I would also like to make, many donor agencies sometimes make it so much project-oriented. The project is finished, the program is gone. It is not sustainable. That one still is going on, but there has been a review, and it has shown to yield good results. But maybe adapting these kinds of models, according to the local context, to suit the local context, particularly involving the parents and communities to start working inside the classroom, at the primary and secondary level I am talking about, it can really work. But not as an imposition

but as a lesson learned from other countries or other areas where similar situation exists.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. I would ask my Japanese panelists to reflect on the question again and to see if there are any things that they can share with us about how they think some of these can transfer into other context. If I can start with Mr. Kunieda because of the exposure and experience in working in Africa to see if some of these ideas that can be transferred adequately.

Mr. Kunieda

Thank you. Well, I am sure there are personal opinions as well. I myself have been involved in education projects in Africa for about 15 years or even more. What I have been mindful of in doing that was when something new is introduced, not necessarily from Japan but from other African neighbors, we try not to impose something. It is important for the local stakeholders to become aware of the problems they have. For example, the children of my country or my village, even 5th graders cannot solve simple addition problems. If that is a problem and if that is understood or awareness is raised, then we can go to the next step of what should we do. Then, we can share with them how things are done in Japan or their neighboring countries and ask “Would you like to try?”

You cannot just go right into the policy or do it from the policy level. Instead, you had better start with a pilot. Then, if it is effective, you can scale it up. Otherwise, you may just give it up, because it does not work in that country. You got a chance to do a project which may bring about remarkable results with innovative approaches. Based on the trust-based relationship among the stakeholders involved and with shared understanding of the problems, why don't you try something new? It can be successful as I have seen in a few countries. But, again, you must be careful, because you might face situations where people say, “Oh, we are not in Japan or Country X. We are in a different country. It would not work here.”

So, it is important that you may start with a small-scale pilot project based on the trust with local stakeholders and with shared awareness. Thank you.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. Any more questions from the floor? Professor Abe would speak.

Prof. Abe

Please allow me to reflect on Professor Kuroda's question. As we have been discussing, the situation in Japan, the situation in Akita were not just the scope of my presentation. I meant to address a wider scope. I think active learning is a viable pedagogy in countries where literacy rate needs to be improved. I do not think active learning should be a phased approach. I think literacy rate can be worked on a while incorporating active learning. Of course, teachers, students, and parents need to accept this new method of pedagogy, active learning. But once it is done, I think it will be proved to be effective. Whether it may be in Japan or Akita, it should be done well.

If active learning is introduced in a poor manner, one may as well go back to the one way lecture style. In order to encourage students to generate the right question and to gain problem solving and critical thinking skills, that is where active learning really would shine, and those skills cannot be obtained through a one-way lecture.

We need teachers of course, wherever it may be. Maybe simultaneous interpretation can be used as well. I will not mention the actual names of countries. Akita does it. I also go abroad. I bring teachers from school attached to a university, colleagues, and we do math and language classes in other countries through simultaneous interpretation. The local teachers are surprised how motivated their students are. They ask us, how do we do active learning? I think that is one way. Of course, the problem of literacy, enrollment are tied very much to discrimination, but I do not think active learning should be introduced as a phased approach.

I very much empathize with what Ms. Choudhury said. It should not be a one-off project. In order to embed active learning, there should be a collaborative research so that class or course quality in that country overall would be improved. It should not be a one-off project. Active learning should not be a project. It should be a more structural approach to train teachers and to implement curriculum.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much.

Prof. Inprasitha

I also have experience in introducing Japanese lesson study in Thailand during the last 15 years, I also agree with Mr. Abe. I myself have planned a long-term project, a 30-year project, started in 2000. For the first 10 years, we invested a lot in human resource development where I tried to cultivate our students in undergraduate levels. Later, now they become the university professors and try to work as my university works to support the school. Now, we are in the mid of this project. It is 15 years already, and we do not have expert teachers like in Japan, so we started with teacher education programs in 2001 and 2002.

Then, in 2006, I started the whole school approach, introduced the lesson study idea to start to change the school culture by forming lesson study teams. I tried structuring the lesson study team at the school level. For example, the first, second and third grade teachers, S1 team. Then, fourth, fifth, and sixth, add another team. Then, we change the way we do lesson study not like in Japan, but we do as weekly cycle in order to encounter as a new school culture. Then, every team plans the lesson by themselves and then teaches at the normal class. Later, at the end of the weeks, we ask the school head, the school principal to do reflection. We do like this.

At the beginning, the quality of the lessons was still very low, but year by year, at that school when I started 12 years ago, the national score allows 13 from the 100. But after 5 years, it has climbed up to 17. It is the main thing. Then, we started 2 schools, 4 schools, and 22 schools, and now after 15 year we can have this kind of schools nearly 100. I agree that it is not just only the project, but we have to think how we sustain what we are going to do in our country. That is an example from my experience.

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much for your responses. I saw a hand up. Yes?

Mr. Keisuke Ichino (Corporate Study Institute)

My name is Ichino. I am from an NPO called Corporate Study Institute. I have three hats. One thing that I do is involving various people in school education involved in school classrooms as well as providing textbooks. This is part of CSR, and this is provided to the schools, but actually the schools do not have to pay. For example, newspaper journalists can actually have a class, teaching children how to write articles. Or somebody from the gaming company can teach functions and that leads to programming of games. Together with IBM, Big Data, statistics class can be delivered, and that is actually used by data scientists, we tell the children. The purpose is to tell children that what you learned today is connected to what is happening in society right now. We actually do coordination or production of such classes. That is my first job.

I live in Chiba prefecture, and in the surrounding areas of schools, there are various stakeholders like the adults such as parents as well as community members and the private sector companies and so forth. How can they get involved to make things better? We think about the education of Chiba prefecture together with the board of education. I also teach at a vocational college, design college, and I teach more than 100 students in my class. Well, active learning in a large class with 100 students – active learning actually gets high ratings from the students. I am not boasting, but just like Professor Abe, it works with a large class as well.

I have two things that I would like to mention. Professor Abe or Prof. Inprasitha mentioned, meta-recognition I think is important. Another important aspect is to let the students know that there is a connection between what they learn in class with the things that are happening in society out there. So, what sort of messages should we disseminate is the question. Metacognition being emphasized and also having this link with the real life experience. So, sending out this message that this is something that is very much related to SDGs, but should we do that? How best to do that is my question. Then, the second question is how to get parents involved? Children come home and over dinner they discuss what they learned, and then the children can say something, and then the parents can say, okay that can be linked to this. I think this is metacognition or recognition that is done in Akita prefecture as well.

SDGs try to enhance education level for all, and everybody is contributing to that end. That is the kind of thing that we want to see happen. So, how should we best do that is my question? The private sector involvement as well as the involvement of the parents? What do you think about this idea of sending out such a message to disseminate this notion of how things are related to SDGs?

Prof. Akyeampong

Thank you very much. It is a very good question. I wonder if any of the panelists would want to respond to – I think he was asking about metacognition, real life experience and the role that parents can play and how we can actually achieve that.

Prof. Inprasitha

Regarding to the metacognition, in fact I did my thesis related to metacognition when I studied at the University of Tsukuba. But when we try to engage the students to become aware of – I just mentioned the cognitive tools that they can

use later is very important. We usually focus on calculation. Nine platforms equal 13, and repeated again, but we can use this. But how to make sense nine platforms is called for some tools before that. The metacognitions play important role in this part. How the student can become aware of decomposing, composing and making 10 instead of counting by hand, by finger. That is the role of metacognition, for next problem solving.

So, if we start with the real world situation, that would be helpful and support the students because they start from some meaningful. So, creating a problem situation which is related to the real world is very important, because later then they call for the tools. That is the role of metacognition. How the private and parents can involve when we start lesson study at the beginning, because in Thailand very short history, in Japan, the lesson study is more than 140 years. At the beginning I used lesson study as the way to improve the teaching method, not to focus on the quality of lessons itself. It is kind of the lesson study – the cycle is the metacognitive levels of the way they improve the teaching. Usually, in developing countries like Thailand, teachers always teach, but they do not have this level. Just teach. But they do not know how to reflect and to improve this. So, we need lesson study. They plan together, teach the class, and observe and then reflect on how to improve the teaching. As long as they can improve the way they teach, then they can involve the parent when they do the open class at the end of the semester, at the end of the year. Then, the parents observe the class – “Oh, the way the student learned has been changed.” They can actively participate. I am trying to involve that in our project.

Prof. Akyeampong

I would add one or two comments to that. In the work that we are doing in Ethiopia, we are working with rural communities, poor families, the poorest of the poor. We work with children who the education system failed them, they dropped out of school. The parents have to make a choice to rather send them back to school or to keep them at home to help them make a living. School, it has to be convincing that when they go to school, they will learn something and improve their lives.

I did not have enough time to describe the pedagogy in Ethiopia, but it is basically the principles that we have been talking about. The parents, once they started seeing that the children can now read, they can think, they can help solving problems. They get really excited. If you want the community, if you want parents to be involved, it has to reflect in the learning outcomes of children. If it does not reflect it, then they get dissolution. I think we need to raise that issue to see how does this really transform learning to the point where the community, the parents can see the transformation in the learning of the children. I think it works even for very rural people if there is a demonstration that their learning experiences have changed. Then, they can also be committed to that.

I think we need to not simply do it, we need to have the evidence that the students can actually take home, and the parents can see that there is a difference in their learning experience, for very poor children. I think that is one way in which you can get the parents to kind of support to be committed to it.

One other thing I would also like to add is that it is one thing talking about it. Some of these things are better caught than taught. If teachers can actually experience it in the way Professor Abe has been explaining, and can actually

experience it themselves, this is actually a very effective way of learning. They themselves can use that in their own teaching. I am sure we can see how Professor Abe in his own teaching, but the way he talks about, it demonstrates that he practices this very effectively. That can catch on, that students can actually see that this can make a difference. And I think the task for us is to get teachers themselves to become many Professor Abes who are doing the same thing that he is doing in his class, to have this experience, so that they can transmit this in their practice, and the children can learn. I think if we do not do that but rather tell them this is how you do it and then they do it without any commitment, without any evidence of its impact, then, with time, only a few of the teachers would carry it forward.

I think the parents can make a contribution if the learners can see a difference. They have tried other things. Activity learning, it is transformative. Then, they can also embrace it. This is what I have to add.

Any further questions or comments? We still have some time, so if you have any question or contribution. It does not have to be a question, it could be your own experience or something that you want to throw in as part of the discussion. Yes?

Prof. Kazuhiro Shibuya (Hiroshima University)

I am Shibuya from Hiroshima University. Thank you very much. Professor Abe talked about literacy and enrollment issues, and active learning can take place in parallel with those efforts regarding enrollment and literacy. This is a question to Mr. Kunieda. Niger, Madagascar under such circumstances - the knowledge, the beauty of that, and also there are various aspects of knowledge, how can we actually cope with those different aspects of knowledge? Active learning, it is not handling just high level of knowledge but rather like a mezzanine in between what is happening in the school and what is happening in society at large, a link between the two, could be maybe the address. What I am trying to say is there are different levels of knowledge that you can handle, so how do you address those different spectrums of knowledge?

Mr. Kunieda

Thank you, Professor Shibuya. Thank you for the tough and challenging question. What I believe is that, let us say, in Africa, particularly poverty-stricken Francophone Africa including Niger actually were on the ground. If someone like Professor Abe were to visit to do a class with an interpreter, for that class, I think it will be a great learning opportunity, and it would give positive impact definitely to the teachers and other observers.

Another thing is how to disseminate that, how to spread that. When we engage in a project, we do not want it to be limited to a particular school or community but to go nationwide in the end, at least that is what I believe. One issue is timeline. For example, if active learning is used as a tool to change the practices in the classroom, and once we do incorporate active learning, how long would it take for the learning of the pupils to change? If it is in a country like Niger, intuitively, I guess it will take 20 years, although I am no expert, because there will be children who like it, and then there is a pilot project in a given community, and then eventually that will be incorporated into a national education reform plan. Teaching and learning materials will be developed, teachers will be trained to enable active learning, and then spread to other schools. It will take a lot of time.

Perhaps in Japan, change can be incorporated systematically through the revision of the curriculum guidelines every 10 years or so. On the contrary, in my experience, in parts of Africa it takes much time for an idea to be reflected in a government reform plan. It will actually take time to put into action. It will take time to develop the capacity of local resources.

So, we have to think under different timelines, under different timeframe. Having said that, doing it is important. If taking action is important, then I think it is important to do it first and then see what the reactions are. My point is, it does take 20, 30 years to completely reform the education system to consolidate that new idea, could we engage ourselves to do that? What can be done now should be considered at the same time as what should be achieved in the long run, and active learning maybe just one tool. Either way, there is a time factor that has to be considered. Again, a long-term perspective in conjunction with immediate actions at the same time.

Obviously, this does not answer your question, but I want to emphasize how much time it takes. Because it takes time, it should not be a two-phased approach but rather simultaneously. If you do not take any action now, there will be no results in the end. If you believe that something is effective, you should do it right away. In other words, it is important to develop an effective and scalable model through technical cooperation so that it will be reflected in the policy accordingly..

Prof.Abe

Thank you very much for the question. I have two points. One is that it should not be a two-phased approach. Let us say, if literacy rate is inadequate and then therefore active learning will not be effective – well, how about lower grades in Japanese primary schools? Children at that age do not know grammar, they are still learning to read, and it will be a different kind of active learning from middle school and high school, but still enquiry-based learning can be implemented. We should not wait until enrollment rate is 100%, for example, to incorporate active learning. Active learning will never be widely available if we wait for that.

I also agree with the premise what Mr. Kunieda said. It cannot be a multipronged approach. It can be a non-governmental organization taking the initiative, it could be some kind of movement that is kicked off, and also someone has to lobby the government. Someone has to work on the government. We should not just talk about how good active learning is but to demonstrate what active learning is about, not just talk about a teacher coming to visit with simultaneous interpreters but also to make sure there are other pilot programs.

So, I think it is a multipronged approached, many strategies. Some countries may be able to revamp their curriculum in 5 to 10 years, but others may take more, but it is better to change than not to change at all. We talk about active learning a lot in Japan these days. Even before 2017, the Central Education Council already talked about active learning. But actually in the 50s and 60s already there was a similar initiative under a different name. That is why, because of this, we were able to introduce the active learning, self-motivation, interactive, and deep learning. But it did take a few decades actually. At one point, it was quite popular, other times it lost traction, but still did not stop, and I think strategically multipronged approach would be important.

Prof. Akyeampong

I think the point that you made about it probability taking 20 to 30 years would have gone past 2030, so we do need to have, as Professor Abe said, to begin to ensure that we start now, to make sure that this is much more widely available to every child.

Professor Abe also has raised a point about how we lobby our governments, how we lobby our leaders, and how we convince them to invest in the resources that will make this much more accessible to every teacher, because I think that is where we would have much more impact. But also the perseverance that we need, the commitment what we need to ensure that this is not something that it may have a challenge - I was encouraged to hear that this is something that also started way back in the 50s in Japan. So, sometimes we do have dips, but if we are committed to this approach, then we can see it having effect on a wider scale.

But I think it is important that we send this message through policy and think about how we actually can train teachers to be able to adopt these approaches and how we can sustain it in a way which has impact. If it has impact, that is the thing that would – if we introduce active learning on skill and countries and systems can see that it is changing the lives of children in terms of their learning, in terms of their capacities, I think that would be enough evidence to convince others to get on board.

Like I said earlier, we do need to really put in a lot more effort into this to make sure that this is much more widely available. In some systems, there will be resistance, there will be difficulties, but I think that if we are committed to the approach, we would see result. But children cannot wait. By 2030, how many years? We have about 12 years or so. Sometimes I wonder where we would be in 12 years, whether we would be actually going to make this. We do need to take this very, very seriously. Unless somebody has any burning question or comment, we would like to be wrapping up the session. Professor?

Prof.Kuroda

Just a clarification. I did not really mention a two-phased approach. I am fully aware of an organization which has employed an active learning type of method for the promotion of literacy education. What I meant was in a difficult situation, what would be the first trigger? What would be the breakthrough to introduce active learning? I would simply like to know any ideas on this. That is all I asked. I am not saying that active learning is not possible when education environment is poorly developed.