

Executive Summary

Japan Education Forum for Sustainable Development Goals Quality of Education for SDGs: Realities and Challenges of Education Policy

Outline of the Forum

Quality of education carried over to SDGs as one of the critical agendas from EFA, and education can be considered to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality and effective learning outcome” in SDGs. In other words, the goal is to broaden opportunities by linking learning outcomes -- obtaining knowledge and skills, including non-cognitive ones -- to employability.

Education in Japan has also changed with the trends of the times. For example, in 1983, an education guideline was changed to aim at “fostering student ability to learn by themselves,” and it was the beginning of the “Yutori Education” era in which the amount of content taught in schools was reduced. Because of the worsening results of the OECD student Programme for International Student Assessment (2003), the learning content was increased again in 2008.

Then, recently, the themes of valuing cultural diversity, inquiry-based/problem-solving “self-motivated, interactive, and deep learning” have garnered attention rather than simply acquiring “knowledge,” and the curriculum guideline was revised.

In developing countries, quality of education has been on the agenda for a long time, and education policy is often affected by the prevailing regime and donors of the time. For example, school enrollment in many developing countries has been improved thanks to previous initiatives; however, only 70 % of children in low income countries would have completed primary education by 2030. (In one country in Sub-Saharan Africa, gross enrollment rate for preschool reaches 100%, but the net enrollment rate for primary education is only 80 %.) Learning outcomes have more issues, including traditional curriculum and large class sizes, lack of national standard licensed teachers, and physical infrastructure such as unmaintained school buildings.

Therefore, this year’s JEF for SDGs highlighted the realities and challenges of education policies in Japan and developing countries by exploring quality of education for which SDGs are aiming. This year, the JEF for SDGs was held on March 8 at Assembly Halls at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) with the theme, “Quality of Education for SDGs: Realities and Challenges of Education Policy,” co-organized by the MEXT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Hiroshima University and the University of Tsukuba and supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). More than 200 people participated in the forum including diplomats from foreign embassies, ministry officials, development cooperation agency representatives, people from the private education sector, university faculty members and students, NGOs/NPOs, and the public.

Keynote speech by H.E. Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport (Cambodia)

H.E. Dr. Chuon Naron stressed that young people need quality education because education enable them to have decent jobs with future income earning opportunities in his keynote speech title “*the Quality of Education for SDGs: Realities and Challenges for Education Policy in Cambodia*”. Indeed, Cambodia has made considerable progress in achieving EFA, as primary enrollment rate reached 98% in 2017, compared to only 87% in 1998. Budget for education increased from 16% of current budget or 200 million USD in 2010 to 18% or 800 million USD in 2018, and will increase to more than 20% in 2020 in nominal terms. Moreover, H.E. Dr. Chuon Naron expressed, on behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and the Cambodian people, their deep gratitude to Japan for helping them to restore peace, invest in both hard infrastructure, such as roads, bridge, water and power supply, as well as in the development of human resources.

H.E. Dr. Chuon Naron noted that the biggest challenges their education system is facing are: skill mismatch, low quality, sub-standard curriculum, un-qualified teachers, poor school facilities, the lack of use of ICT and laboratories in teaching and learning, weak relationships between policies, teacher training and schools and classrooms. Furthermore, H.E. Dr. Chuon Naron stated that in response to Cambodia’s aspirations to achieve a higher-middle income status by 2030, to address skill mismatch and to diversify our industrial growth base, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) has embarked on education reforms focusing on four main components: (1) Human Resources Management Reform; (2) Academic management reform; (3) Education finance management reform; and (4) Administrative and general management reform. In addition, , MoEYS adopted a roadmap to integrate the SDGs into their Education Strategic Plan (ESP) and give attentions to early childhood education; teachers; School-Based Management; equity; STEM education; soft skills and entrepreneurship; quality national and quality global citizenship; the voice of students; life-long learning and youth; out-of-school children; school health; students with special needs; improving data collection for monitoring and evaluation; education quality and Schools of the Future.

Keynote speech by Noboru Abe, Professor, Graduate School of Education, Akita University

Second keynote speech titled “Challenges and Possibilities of Active Learning (Self-Motivated, Interactive, and Deep Learning),” Prof. Abe discussed the pedagogy of “active learning” which promotes children’s self-motivated, interactive, deep learning.

Professor Abe emphasized that among active learning’s three elements “self-motivated, interactive, deep learning, we must first pay attention to “interactive” because it is considered important in districts that have good results in the surveys of students’ academic achievement, and that interaction should

be incorporated into pedagogy as a core element for all subjects and areas. Furthermore, even though interaction is introduced in lessons, it sometimes turns into mere “activism,” in which children talk aimlessly and repeat empty discussions or exchanges of opinions; therefore, it is important to do collaborative research among teachers to bring about deep learning through interaction. Teachers need to form teams to carefully study the subject matter and learning/teaching materials, which requires a lot of time; however, Japanese teachers are busy and no time for it. Prof. Abe concluded by stating a need for education policies in which everyone can receive a high-quality active learning in any region of the world

During the question-and-answer session that followed, participants and keynote speakers discussed such topics as the introduction of active learning at schools and faculty development.

The discussion continued in the afternoon in two a panel session. The five panelists invited to the Session were Kwame Akyeampong, Professor, Center for International Education, University of Sussex, UK; Maitree Inprasitha, Dean of the Faculty of Education, the Khon Kaen University, Thailand, Shion Inoue, Teacher, NADA Junior and Senior High School, Rasheda K. Choudhury, Vice President, Global Campaign for Education (Bangladesh), Nobuhiro Kunieda, Senior Advisor (Basic Education), Human Development Department, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Prof. Akyeampong, served as the moderator for this session. Prof. Akyeampong began the session by revisiting the SDG 4 agenda and argued that to address this problem, education policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) needs to pay closer attention to cases of successful pedagogic practice that has emerged from the African context. Prof. Akyeampong presented evidence from research in Ethiopia that demonstrates how a revolution in classroom practice has the potential to ensure equal opportunity in access to effective and relevant learning as envisioned by SDG4.

Prof. Inprasitha was the second presenter and proposed an innovative development model of the mathematics curriculum in Thailand because the traditional model is a kind of top-down approach with little or no feedback from the classroom, thereby excluding any revision process for refinement and continued development and it is necessary to incorporate a bottom-up approach to this model.

In the third presentation titled “The Role of the International Baccalaureate’s “Theory of Knowledge” in SDGs: Developing Intellectuals Who Can Change the World” by Mr. Inoue. gave an overview of the inquiry-based learning at Nada High School based on the concept of the Theory of Knowledge (TOK) offered by the International Baccalaureate (IB) as well as the role of the TOK in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ms. Choudhury claimed that even though many countries have started to design road maps for achieving the SDGs, a number of developing countries are still struggling to contextualize the “concept of quality”, manage the challenges of quality assurance and deal with capacity gaps. She emphasized the need for “quality teachers for quality education” to fulfill the SDG targets and resource mobilization to ensure that no one is left behind.

Mr.Kunieda shared JICA's learning improvement projects as well as Japanese cases through his own PTA experience to overcome the "learning crisis." He concluded by pointing out there exists a "learning crisis" not only in developing countries but also in Japan. In order to overcome this crisis, it is necessary to critically review the notion that government and schools have all responsibility for ensuring quality education for all children. The whole society, including parents and the community, should share the responsibility.

In the question-and-answer session that followed, various topics were discussed. Finally, in the wrap-up session, the keynote speakers and panelists gave final remarks on what they had learned from the forum and what messages they had received.