

The Implementation of Tokkatsu as a New Co-inquiry Approach in Egypt-Japan Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Agency
Collaboration
Early Childhood Education
Co-inquiry
Lesson Study

ABSTRACT

Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) is a partnership for a professional development training program that was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016 towards actualizing the new education system "Education 2.0". This program is based on Japan's holistic educational curriculum model, known as "Tokkatsu" or special activities. The purpose of this research is to investigate how the program is contributing to developing new teaching methodologies and strategies through tokkatsu, and to examine the outcomes in teachers' practices following the program as well as identifying the challenges they face. In this qualitative approach, a convenience sampling was used consisting of two trainees of batches one and two from different schools and different specialization. An inductive analysis of the reports submitted by the trainees prior to, during, and following the program; and an exchange of emails were conducted. This method was utilized as an alternative to the follow-up visit that follows the program; given the current circumstances. The results show positive outcomes and 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, and this was reflected in their academic behavior as well.

1. 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). 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, EJEP was established between Egypt and Japan in 2016. In 2018, Egypt established new 35 Egypt-Japan Schools (EJS) as an offshoot of the project and distributed them among all the prefectures. Up to this point, 48 schools have been established (Egypt's Ministry of Education). These new schools adhere to the new national curriculum "Education

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Cite this article as:

Mostafa, Y. S. G. (2021). The Implementation of Tokkatsu as a New Coinquiry Approach in Egypt-Japan Schools. *European Journal of Teaching and Education*, 3(3), 15-24. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ejte.v3i3.702>



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. The 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. 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. In addition, they 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 investigate how the program is contributing to developing new teaching methodologies and strategies through tokkatsu, and to examine the outcomes in teachers’ practices following the program as well as identifying the challenges they face. 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.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative inductive content analysis approach as well as an exchange of emails between the author and the trainees. 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.

In this research, the author chose four EJS teachers with whom the author had direct contact, after the EJEP program in Fukui through emails. Moreover, they are actively implementing projects related to EJEP. The final target two teachers were chosen based on recommendations from the Project Management Unit (PMU) of EJS within the Ministry of Education, Egypt. The target teachers are N, a kindergarten teacher and a former trainee of batch one (1) that took place from January to February 2019; and S, a primary ‘Discover’ teacher and a former trainee of batch two (2) that took place from June to July 2019. ‘Discover’ is a new branch that has been developed by the Center for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development (CCIMD) 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. Both teachers started working in EJS since it was launched in 2018. The study involves three stages. The first stage was looking into the teachers’ reports prior to the training to identify the challenges they faced while implementing tokkatsu in the new system of education “Education 2.0” for the first time. The second stage was following the weekly reports that were submitted by the teachers during the training to observe their comments and reflections on their practices

and their future prospects as early childhood education teachers in their respective schools. The third stage was analyzing the reports that were sent after the training by the teachers to look into the new teaching methodologies and techniques that were developed to promote the implementation of tokkatsu, and to define how the EJEP program is contributing to the development of EJS.

3. 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 TIMSS & PIRLS 2014- 2015 (Mostafa and Hambara, 2018; Mostafa, 2021; Misr Alarabia, 2019; Alyoum Alsabe', 2017). 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 (Egypt Vision 2030). 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.

Table 1.

Curriculum Reform in Education 2.0

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

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.

Table 2.

Targeted Skills in Education 2.0

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	

Source: *Special Activities [tokkatsu] Guidebook 2018*

3.1. 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, selfcontrol, 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.

Tokkatsu was introduced in Indonesia in 2018 as a holistic Japanese approach to educating children. Research by Kusanagi (2019) presented tokkatsu as a promising approach to addressing some serious issues in the Indonesian educational system, while developing the collaborative and interactive skills of children in the classroom. On the other hand, tokkatsu in Indonesia is implemented by initiatives and skills of individual teachers and not by a systematic approach. Therefore, it is still limited to acquiring values and social skills, and has not been integrated into academic learning.

4. Analysis of the Teachers' Reports

4.1. Tokkatsu as a New Learning Approach in EJS and the Rising Challenges (Learning from EJS Teachers' Reports before EJEP)

Tokkatsu was activated for the first time in Egypt with the launch of EJS in 2018. However, due to the lack of knowledge and experience in the implementation of the new concept, schools faced many challenges. The first stage analysis revealed similar challenges for both teachers. The first challenge was an academic related issue. The teachers did not receive the proper training on tokkatsu before the school started, and did not acquire the basic knowledge necessary to proceed with this new curriculum. The tokkatsu guidebook issued by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was the sole reference. However, theoretical instructions should be accompanied by application and methodology. In EJS, there was a common misinterpretation of the concept of tokkatsu. Tokkatsu was understood as an independent subject like other subjects and not as a whole child learning approach that promotes student's interactive and independent learning in all subjects. Therefore, interactive learning approach and collaboration between students were only conducted in the tokkatsu subject, while in the other subjects, the traditional teaching way was still predominant. This is due to the lack of knowledge and professional training on tokkatsu and the insufficient awareness from the teacher of the new teaching strategies that are designed to promote student's agency and co-inquiry learning with their peers in the classroom through implementing tokkatsu within all subjects.

The second challenge was the parent-school cooperation and connection and the lack of support from the local community. The parents showed uncooperative attitude towards schools and refused 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. However, it is a common understanding in Egypt that education and anything related to it is the school's sole responsibility. Tokkatsu as a holistic model of education promotes students' interaction and contribution to the local community. Without enough support from the local community, it will be difficult to expand the students' activities outside the school and deepen their conscious of belonging to their community. Furthermore, students in Japan clean their own schools and serve themselves food as a part of their daily life education in school among tokkatsu activities. This act was faced by rejection and disapproval from most of the Egyptian parents as a result of the lack of knowledge and unawareness on the new concept, and the improper introduction from the school. Tokkatsu is a way of life, and a whole-child education approach that is utilized to cultivate morals and ethics and educate children on both the academic level and the social level to create productive members to their society.

4.2. Teachers' Learning During EJEP

The second stage of the study was to follow the weekly reports that were submitted by the two teachers during the training to observe their comments and reflections on their practices and their future prospects as early childhood education teachers in their respective schools.

4.2.1. Teacher S's Learning Trajectory

In her report, teacher S says, "...I see it is important for elementary students to learn through inquiry, trial and error, and discovery and a specific time for this approach should be assigned in the time table of the school. This is similar to learning by playing in the kindergarten stage. This approach will enable students to differentiate, create, discover, and invent...". Teacher S suggests that learning by playing has a significant influence on the physical and mental development of children in the kindergarten stage. Therefore, elementary students should also be provided with the tools and method that enables them to develop their academic and social skills.

During EJEP training, teacher S observed many classes for the primary stage, and observed children's learning by playing in kindergarten. The reports revealed teacher S's interest and admiration of the children's learning attitude and their freedom to engage in the activities and develop them. During the kindergarten visit, she observed the children's active engagement in the activities, and their initiative to organize themselves in groups without the teacher's help. She mentioned that children were very creative and interactive with each other. Each group had a goal and the group members collaborated towards achieving this goal. 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. The activity involved elder children and younger children to deepen the connection between them, and nurture the sense of responsibility in the elders and respect in the younger. She added that the teacher did not interfere in the children's activity, but was always prepared to provide the support whenever needed. She also stated, "...Also, the role of the teacher during the reflection time drew my attention. The teacher thanked all the children for their participation in the activity...". She insists here on the crucial role of the teacher as a model for children. By thanking the children, the teacher gives a practical model for children to respect each other and appreciate each other's efforts. She also noticed the parents' participation in the kindergarten life by donating some of the books to the kindergarten to widen the children's knowledge.

During the primary school visits, she noticed that the students were organized and collaboratively engaged in many aspects of their activities. She focused on the mutual trust between the teacher and the students as a major factor for creating a safe learning environment for the students. She stated that students utilize the reflection sessions to deepen their understanding, suggest new ideas, and develop their practice. Resilience and mutual respect were key factors in all the learning. Moreover, she said, "...The teacher only puts the framework of the class and allows the children to proceed with the activity freely. The teacher acts as a facilitator only...". She insisted that 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. She also noticed that the school administration is closely involved in creating a sustainable and motivating learning environment for students. This was obvious in the attitude of the principals when they waited for the students at the school gate to welcome them in the morning, and when they participated with the students in many activities, such as singing.

4.2.1.1. Future Prospect within an Action Plan

As a teacher who aims at creating a motivating and engaging learning atmosphere where students can learn by co-inquiry and discovery, teacher S determined the goal of her action plan which is "sharing the others' feelings and accepting the other". Her aim is to cultivate the following competencies: "Resilience", "Decision Making", "Responsibility", "Problem Solving", "Self-control" in students by implementing many tokkatsu activities in her classroom inspired by what she learned in the EJEP training. For example, in preparing for Thanksgiving Day, students will engage in many activities such as theatre, songs, arranging flowers among others. All these activities will promote student's collaboration, communication and creation skills through learning by doing which will consequently develop student's agency.

4.2.2. Teacher N's Learning Trajectory

Teacher N focused on two major points, the first point is tokkatsu and its implementation in all the subjects and its effect on the learning outcomes of the students. The second point is lesson study and the collaboration between the teachers. In her career as a kindergarten teacher, teacher N paid great attention to the differences between individuals and worked on conducting many activities to develop children's skills. However, as a first batch trainee who had been working in EJS for only few months at the time, the implementation of tokkatsu was unfamiliar and unidentified for her. In her report, teacher N said, "I benefited a lot from this training and learned many things about tokkatsu. I knew that tokkatsu was only one class weekly, but my idea has changed. Now I know that tokkatsu is implemented in all subjects and not limited to one independent activity." During the school visits, she noticed that students of different grades engage in some activities together, and this has its positive outcomes on the social behavior of the students. Students learn how to respect each other and be responsible for their acts. Students were organized and managed their time efficiently. She observed the warm, safe and engaging atmosphere that the teacher created in the classroom, which in turn was reflected in the students' attitude who showed great interaction in singing with the teacher.

One of the activities she observed was about 'we want to take care of a small duck'. In one of her comments she said, "I asked myself, what is the goal of this activity? But the answer was obvious when I saw the children actively engaged and interested in what they were doing. The trial and error generated deep thinking." Teacher N realized for certain that the students learn by inquiry and through discovery. When students show interest in something, it is the teacher's job to create the opportunity and the environment for students to coinquire, discover and develop that thing. Co-inquiry leads to discovery, and discovery leads to trial and error, which in turn promotes deep learning, further thinking and redoing. This is an endless co-inquiry cycle

for students that develops both social and academic skills in children. The teacher should be resourceful in activities that enable students to elaborate on their discoveries and inquiries. At the same time, the teachers' role should not exceed being a facilitator and a supporter for the students, in order to enhance their learning skills and their independent learning.

On the other hand, in one of her comments she stated, "The school has become an institution for the professional learning of teachers and for sharing their experience." She noticed that the school has become a place for professional learning communities and communities of practice for the teachers. She observed the teachers' collaboration in subjects and research and saw the teachers share their practice in the lesson study and the reflection session that follows the lesson study. After observing some classes and teachers' discussions at the University of Fukui attached primary school which lies under the supervision of the university of Fukui, she said, "Every teacher shared some of their practices...The discussion was quiet, organized, though everyone listened to the other and took some notes...The participation from the university side was to support and not to observe and watch..." She focused on the collaboration, sharing, trust and mutual respect as the core of professional development of teachers. All the teachers, regardless of their age and experience sit together, discuss their practices, share their concerns and learn from each other.

4.2.2.1. Future Prospect within an Action Plan

From all her observations, teacher N learned many new aspects and acquired new knowledge from the training. She realized the importance of implementing tokkatsu in all subjects and not limiting it to one subject. She learned that tokkatsu focuses on developing students' skills and not delivering the content. The teacher is a facilitator who helps and supports the students when they need and who do not interfere in the students' learning. She also gained new aspect of the lesson study and learned that the aim of the lesson study is to observe the learning trajectory of children and not to watch the teacher's performance. Lesson study and reflection sessions help find new approaches to develop the learning skills of the students and to deepen their learning. From these new learning and discoveries, she said, "My plan should aim to build a proper personality with clear identity...Also tokkatsu should be linked to the subjects..." She mentioned that she aims at promoting the sense of creativity and discovery in the students. For example, in preparation for Thanksgiving Day, which was the coming major event after she had returned back to Egypt according to the schedule of the tokkatsu guidebook that was issued by JICA for EJS, she will apply the activities that will enable students to co-inquire, create and discover. She will conduct the activities that will establish the roots of the meaning of gratitude among the students. She aims at nurturing the academic and the social skills of children by creating a suitable learning environment for children.

4.3. *Initiatives After EJEP Towards Implementing New Approaches of Tokkatsu*

The third stage in this study was to analyze the report that was sent by the teachers after the EJEP training to look into their new initiatives and new methodologies designed to prompt student's agency in the classroom through tokkatsu, and to create a learning environment for students that develops co-inquiry, discovery and creation skills in children.

4.3.1. Creating School-based Teacher's Co-inquiry and Co-learning Community

After looking into the two teachers' reports, it was interesting to find similar initiatives and approaches in both schools that aligned with the new strategy of the new system of education 'Education 2.0'. One of the initiatives is the lesson study. Teacher S says, "There was a confusion in our perception of a lesson study and a follow-up lesson and the aim of the lesson was not clear. However, after we observed many lesson studies in Japan, especially the open lesson study in Kyoto city, the model of lesson study became clearer...After I came back from

the training, I trained my colleagues on the concept of lesson study...” This new initiative created a collaborative professional learning environment between the teachers in teacher S’s school. She mentioned that the teachers became more comfortable in sharing their opinions and giving advices. In addition, teacher S mentioned that the lesson study in her EJS school is conducted in four stages. The first stage is ‘preparation for the lesson’, the teachers sit together to discuss the academic parts of the lesson and the activities that aim at delivering the lesson to the students in an interactive way. The teachers share their opinions in a relaxed professional environment. The second stage is ‘performing the lesson’, the teacher performs the lesson as designed and prepared in advance. She says, “The observers take notes of what the teacher and the students say... They focus on how students react to what the teacher says and the interaction between the students and the teacher.” The third stage is ‘follow-up and analysis of the lesson’, the observers and the teacher sit together with the principal and the vice principal to discuss students’ interaction with the activities and what they acquired from the class. The fourth stage is ‘development of the lesson’, the teacher work on developing the lesson and designing new methodologies to promote students’ learning skills.

On the other hand, teacher N says, “Teachers conduct lesson studies in all subjects, such as Arabic language, physical education, tokkatsu... and all the teachers participate. Then, teachers do reflection sessions...” She mentioned that the lesson study is now conducted in all subjects and not only in tokkatsu as it used to be. She also stated that after the lesson study teachers sit together in a reflection session to reflect on the practice and share their comments and opinions on the lesson. The teachers utilize all the notes they acquire from their peers to further develop their lessons and design new approaches.

4.3.2. Teacher S: The Start of Reflection Sessions and Writing Practice Records

Teacher S states, “We did not have any idea about the concept of reflection session before, we used to call it feedback. However, during the EJEP training, we were trained to do reflection sessions and now it has become a habit for us in school...” One of the main practices in the EJEP training was to train teachers to participate in reflection sessions and to write practice records. After every school visit and every lecture, the teacher trainees would sit together in groups, discuss on what they had observed or learned, share their comments and concerns and open new prospects for possible methods and approaches in their schools. Teacher S recognized the value of the reflection sessions and practice records in sharing the learning for future development. She started implementing this practice at the end of every class with her students to develop their thinking skills and deepen their understanding by reflecting on their learning. She uses these data from her students to monitor their understanding in order to further develop the lesson and design new activities.

4.3.3. Teacher N: Building Bridges with the Parents and the Social Community

Teacher N put remarkable efforts in building a parent-school connection to eliminate all the doubts from the parents towards the tokkatsu approach, and to gain the parents’ cooperation in school life and activities. She says, “We hold a general assembly for the parents twice a year. In the first assembly, parents get to know each other. In the second one, parents are assigned into groups for school development. For example, cooperation team, school committees, etc. After that teams and committees assemble once a month to discuss school issues... We do this to spread the culture of EJS, for example, tokkatsu and what it includes, parents’ voluntary participation in school activities...” During the EJEP training, Teacher N observed parents’ involvement in school life and activities and insisted that the parents’ cooperation is crucial in the learning process of their children. Since the parents disapproved many aspects of tokkatsu activities, it was crucial to explain to them the culture of EJS to earn their support, and insist on the value and ethics the children will

gain from deepening the link between the school and the social community. Tokkatsu promotes children's participation in the society to nurture their social and communicational skills. Without the support from the local community, the children will not have a chance to extend their activities outside the school borders. Teacher N's initiative is a step towards cultivating the culture of EJS and planting its root to enable the children to develop in a collaborative community.

5. Conclusion

The EJEP training created opportunities for the teacher trainees to observe closely and inquire into students' learning and teachers' teaching approaches in Japan's schools. From the analysis of the three reports of the two teachers, it was obvious that the EJEP training supported the teachers in many aspects that were unclear before the training, and opened new possibilities for new strategies and practices for the teachers that create a motivating learning environment for students. Teachers became more familiar with tokkatsu activities and extended the activities to the academic subjects as well. Furthermore, they realized that the teacher facilitates the learning for the students and does not dominate the classroom. Therefore, they endeavored to design new interactive methods and approaches inspired by what they learned during the training. Moreover, they opened windows with the parents to create a school culture based on mutual understanding with the parents in order to deepen the students' link with the local community.

From the above, the author concludes that the EJEP training is contributing to opening new possibilities for the trainees to explore new methodologies and strategies that is applicable in their context. These new approaches enhance the implementation of tokkatsu in EJS which, in turn, promote student's agency and develop their learning skills.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by Research Grants from the University of Fukui (FY 2021).

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