



Tokkatsu Taking Root in Egypt

A classroom discussion at a public school in Giza that is implementing mini-tokkatsu

In recent years, an increasing number of schools in Egypt have introduced Japanese-style education, notably *tokubetsu katsudo*, “special activities” known for short as *tokkatsu*.

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JAPANESE elementary schools, junior high schools and high schools conduct educational activities called “special activities,” known in Japanese as *tokubetsu katsudo*, or *tokkatsu* for short. The Courses of Study, the public educational guidelines, stipulate that effective group activities aim at the well-balanced development of mind and body and the encouragement of individuality. More specifically, these special activities involve student activities such as classroom discussion (*gakkyu kai*), in which students discuss a range of topics including school events and class issues, one-day classroom coordinators (*nichoku*), who clean the blackboard and make announcements before and after classes, and cleaning classrooms, corridors, and school grounds. These are a characteristic part of Japanese education.

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of schools in Egypt that have introduced elements of Japanese-style education, including *tokkatsu*. An element behind this is the so-called cram school

All photos: Courtesy of JICA

education. Because Egyptian schools conduct strict examinations for promotion and graduation, classes emphasizing rote memorization and examinations are quite common. That is why there was growing concern that schools did not provide sufficient opportunity to foster social and emotional skills, such as cooperative mindsets, discipline, and morals.

Amid this situation, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi’s attention was drawn to Japanese education, which fosters cooperative mindsets and discipline. This triggered an Egyptian request to Japan for cooperation in introducing Japanese-style education. In 2016, the Japanese and Egyptian governments signed the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership for jointly promoting an introduction of experience and know-how from Japanese-style education into Egyptian schools. In 2017, based on this partnership, projects for introducing Japanese-style education were implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), starting with twelve public elementary and junior high schools in Cairo and its neighboring prefectures being designated as pilot schools, and experts in school management and *tokkatsu* being sent from Japan.

Taro Kakehashi of the Human Development Department of JICA says, “In addition to support for *tokkatsu*, such as classroom discussion and one-day



Students clean a classroom at EJS Hadayek October



Students brush their teeth after lunch at EJS Hadayek October



EJS Hadayek October is one of thirty-five EJS schools in Egypt and has about 400 students

classroom coordinators, in the pilot schools, we also provide support for meetings with principals and other teachers, which are rare in Egypt, and school management, including teachers' mutual observation of each other's classes. The word 'tokkatsu' has been generally adopted by Egyptian educators since the project began."

In 2018 the Egyptian government opened thirty-five Egypt-Japan Schools (EJS) by making use of the experiences obtained from the pilot schools and first and second-year kindergarten students and first-grade elementary school students were enrolled in the schools in the first year. EJS conduct tokkatsu, including classroom discussion, one-day classroom coordinators, cleaning, and ten minutes quiet study time before classes. In addition, classrooms are larger in area than conventional public schools and a desk and a chair is prepared for each student. Furthermore, facilities, such as practical training rooms for practical subjects and teacher rooms, which are not common in public schools, are also prepared for use. EJS have attracted parents' attention even before their opening, and, on average, received about three times as many applications as they had room for students.

To train and nurture the human resources who teach Japanese-style education, JICA has

implemented one-month training programs in Japan for a total of about eighty teachers including teachers of the pilot schools and EJS and trainers who instruct teachers to this day. The Egyptian government plans to open several new EJS this September and aims to found 200 model schools, including EJS, in the next few years to promote Japanese-style education across the country.

The pilot schools and EJS are evaluated very highly. Parents and principals note many changes in the attitude of students. The children learned to actively help parents clean their homes, for example, or began to act more calmly at school than before. They learned to respect and be considerate of other students. In addition, looking at students during classroom discussion, some teachers noticed their ability to think and act on their own and came to listen to their opinions even more.

Starting from 2018, activities such as classroom discussion and one-day classroom coordinators were included in a new curriculum for first-grade elementary school students implemented in about 18,000 schools nationwide, called *mini-tokkatsu*.

"Currently, Egypt is working on a range of reforms to improve the quality of education. We would like to contribute to boosting those reforms by introducing Japanese-style education," says Kakehashi. 