In Zambia, school teachers are recently trying to improve the quality of education by incorporating Japan’s “lesson study.” Lesson study is a mechanism in which teachers observe classes with related persons inside and outside of school and consider approaches to improve classes and their own teaching skills. In Japan, it has spread gradually since the Meiji Era, and is now commonly practiced at schools. Japan’s experience is being used in faraway countries in order to provide children with better education.

**Lesson Study**

In Japan, it is common to conduct lesson study, a mechanism through which teachers observe classes with related persons inside and outside of school and consider approaches to improve classes and their own teaching skills. This approach has spread gradually since the Meiji Era and is now commonly practiced at schools.

**Lesson Study by Teachers for Teachers**

“Zambia is one of the few countries in Africa where the lesson study is incorporated as a system,” says Expert Kazuyoshi Nakai, who has been supporting educational reform in the country for more than 10 years.

The experience in Japan has been shared with teachers in Zambia to improve their teaching methods and curricula.

**Zambia’s Experience**

Zambia is one of the few countries in Africa where the lesson study has been implemented as a system. Kazuyoshi Nakai, an expert in educational reform, has been working in Zambia for over 10 years, utilizing his experience from Japan to support educational reform in the country.

**Lesson Study at Bulungu Secondary School**

Bulungu Secondary School, located in the town of Mumbwa, a two-hour drive from Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, is an example of how lesson study is being implemented. The school has more than 40 students per class, and Njekwa Mumdia, who teaches science to third graders of junior high school, writes the theme “Density” on the blackboard.

The leader of each of six groups takes a graduated cylinder with water, a pebble, a string, and a scale. Mumdia instructs them: “Sink the pebble into the graduated cylinder, check the scale and record how much the water surface is raised.” The students start to discuss with each other in low voices.

It seems like an ordinary lesson, except for the presence of other teachers in the rear and sides of the classroom. One of the teachers explains, “This is a lesson study.” They are checking in Mumdia’s class if their ideas are effective.

When the lesson is over and the students have left for lunch, the teachers move their desks together and start reviewing the lesson. “Incorporating the experiment makes it easier to understand.” “But only a few students really understood the concept of density.” “We should have given them more time to think before showing the answer.” They exchange opinions referring to the evaluation chart. Head teacher Annie M. Njovu also joins the discussion, “It is meaningless unless the children can apply what they have learned to outside of the classroom.”

**Conclusion**

Zambia is one of the few countries in Africa where the lesson study is incorporated as a system, and Japan’s experience has been shared with teachers in Zambia to improve their teaching methods and curricula. Lesson study is an effective mechanism to enhance educational quality, and its implementation in Zambia has shown promising results.

**Challenges and Solutions**

Although the school enrollment rate has exceeded 90%, the issue in Zambia is that many students fail to keep up with lessons and drop out. One of the causes is the lack of teaching skills. There is no budget for assembling teachers from remote areas for training. If that is the case, why not establish opportunities for teachers to learn mutually at their schools? The lesson study for which Japanese teachers have worked hard was optimal for solving this issue.

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Elementary school classroom in Zambia. Whatever their surrounding is, children are always eager to learn.

Once the lesson is over, teachers gather to review their experimental session.

Bulungu Secondary School is huge; each class has more than 40 students.
However, Nakai says, “At first, it was difficult to change their way of thinking.” Because the teachers had been stuck with the environment where training was something that should be planned by the Minister of Education and daily allowance was supposed to be paid, Nakai has been prepared to confront the difficulties. In persuading teachers that it was possible to carry out training at school even without money if they actively exchange ideas.

**HANDMADE EXPERIMENT KIT**

However, as if to eliminate such worry, there were school teachers who found lesson study significant. One of them is Benson Banda who taught mathematics class, they were learning root calculation. It was not realistic to establish a science room when there were not even enough regular classrooms. Therefore, “mobile experiment kit” was developed with JICA Senior Volunteers. It is a movable shelf containing beakers, alcohol lamps, electrical wiring components, test tube stands, etc., virtually a “mobile science room”. The device is distributed to and used at schools throughout the nation, and highly appreciated by teachers.

Banda says, “I was impressed by the passion of Japanese teachers when working with Nakai and earning a master’s degree at Graduate School of Hiroshima University as a long-term trainee of JICA. I was totally determined to promote the same passion in Zambia through the lesson study.”

Here is an episode in which Nakai witnessed such determination. One day, they were about to leave for monitoring of a school which is practising the lesson study. When Nakai and his group offered to accompany them, Banda confidently declared, “We are going on our own today, because the other classes were observing in the rear of the classroom.”

Next day, at Linda West Elementary/Junior High School in the vicinity where children welcomed guests with cheerful greeting and dancing. In a mathematics class, they were learning root calculation. They copied the questions written on the blackboard in their notebooks and solved them, and Meikee P. Mutambo checked the answers. Teachers of other classes were observing in the rear of the classroom again.

“It was good to summon students to the blackboard and have them write answers.” “It seems like students didn’t have enough time to finish calculation. Maybe it’s better to give less number of questions.” After the lesson, the teachers had a boated discussion. They unanimously said, “There used to be no opportunity for sharing information, and we were often struggling alone. Sharing ideas can improve our lessons.”

Thus, the lesson study has spread throughout Zambia and will be incorporated among teacher training schools for further establishment. Nakai emphasizes, “The Zambian people have realized the necessity and incorporated the lesson study on their own instead of just being cooperated by Japan, which was the key to success. The motivated teachers are the assets of Zambia’s education.”

Children genuinely want to “learn”, and teachers make their utmost efforts to make it come true. Zambia’s field of education will achieve dramatic progress in the near future.

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**OPPORTUNITY TO THINK TOGETHER AND SHARE INFORMATION**

Victoria Falli, an hour flight from Lusaka, is one of Zambia’s famous tourist spots. In Livingstone where it is located, professionals engaged in education in each province of Zambia are having a meeting in the conference room of a public facility. They assemble four times each year in order to share approaches including the lesson study and find solutions for issues. Chief Education Officer Esvah Chizambe of the Teacher Education insists, “An opportunity to share opinions like this is valuable. Education should exist for the sake of children. In order for that, we must do our best to improve it.”

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