

Cooperation in the Field of the Japanese Language Education

in Sri Lanka: Supporting of Sri Lankan Teachers in Senior High Schools

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Sri Lanka and Japan have been enjoying friendly diplomatic relations in a sustainable manner for a long period of time. Diplomatic relations as seen are today between two nations commenced in February 1952, with the establishment of a Japanese Overseas Mission in Colombo. From 1950s to 1960s there was a rapid development of bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and Japan. To strengthen the trade and investment, a branch of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) was set up in Colombo in 1964.

In 1977 the economy was liberalized and restrictions on imports were removed to a great extent. Today the range of exports from Japan varies from small pins and clips to textiles, advanced information technology and communications systems, computers, and so on. Japan has been playing a vital role in Sri Lanka as the biggest single donor country. Sri Lanka office of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has also been playing a key role in implementing technical cooperation programs, while expediting execution of grant aid, dispatch of experts and Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV).

With the change of cultural relationship and widening of economic ties between two nations, a new order of relationship has attracted the interest of many people. Consequently, the number of learners of Japanese language in Sri Lanka is increasing every year. The Overseas Japanese-Language Education Organization Survey conducted in 1998 shows that the interest in Japanese language has not lost popularity, despite the economic recession in Japan. Sri Lanka's history of Japanese language education dates back to almost 35 years. Presently, Japanese is taught at various levels of education system such as in universities, senior high schools, adult education programs including language courses and apprenticeships. Around 4,340 individuals are, at present, learning the Japanese language in the island. With regard to senior high schools, in 1989s only two government schools in Colombo had commenced teaching the Japanese language as an elective subject for university entrance examination (General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination (G.C.E.(A/L))). In 1998 the number of schools increased to 24, not only in Colombo but also in suburbs of Colombo. These schools offered

Japanese language course in 1980s not under the national policy of language, but on the initiative of authorities of these schools due to their personal interest in Japan or Japanese language. The number of learners in senior high schools was 2,717 in 1998. The number of students who select Japanese as the elective subject for G.C.E.(A/L) has progressively increased.

Sri Lankan Japanese language teachers vary on their condition, qualifications and circumstances. In order to be a Japanese language teacher in Sri Lanka, there is no specific set of qualifications required. It is a crucial problem that there is no place to train teachers. Some of those who study Japanese as the elective subject for G.C.E.(A/L), have been, after sitting for the examination, hired to teach Japanese language.

As for the involvement of Japanese national teachers in Sri Lanka, some Japanese nationals have taken part regularly in teaching Japanese in Sri Lanka. The Japan Foundation has been dispatching Japanese language education specialist for the University of Kelaniya for the past 20 years. JICA is also sending Japanese language teachers as JOCV. Japan Silver Volunteers Incorporation and some private exchange program institutions are also sending Japanese language teachers. In 1999, 9 teachers who were sent by the government program were teaching in higher-educational institutions and non-school educational institutions, 2 teachers who were sent by private program were teaching in senior high schools. Since 1997 JOCV has not dispatched language teachers to senior high schools.

The purpose of this study is to investigate why Japanese national teachers are not dispatched to senior high schools and to show how the Japanese national teachers can cooperate in the field of Japanese language education in senior high schools. To know the real situation of senior high schools, we studied the motivation of learners for learning Japanese and observed the classroom activities in senior high schools in 3 districts.

The nature of G.C.E.(A/L) and classroom observation showed that teachers are requested to have ability of Sinhala language to teach students. If Japanese national teachers have no ability of Sinhala, then their activities are limited to introduction of Japanese culture. As for Sri Lankan teachers, simple mistakes of reading kanji and making example sentences were observed. We suggest that supporting Sri Lankan teachers in senior high schools is one realm of Japanese national teachers' activities in Sri Lanka. We focus on the reviewing the two main textbooks of G.C.E.(A/L). This way of supporting Sri Lankan teachers is a very simple and a realistic way, since the most important thing is to teach Japanese correctly to the learners in senior high schools who learn Japanese for the university entrance examination and their own personal purposes of learning Japanese.

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