

Education is Much Mightier than the Sword: An Education Improvement Project for Malala's Homeland

— Supporting hard and soft infrastructure for vocational training in Pakistan —



Mr. Ito, Mr. Kurokawa and Mr. Sawada (from the left) stand at the entrance of the Government College of Technology Railway Road Lahore (Photo: Yuji Kurokawa)

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Lahore is a city in the eastern Pakistan Province of Punjab along the border of India. It is Pakistan's second largest industrial city after Karachi, and has already seen the entry of many foreign companies into its market, including Japanese automakers. Lahore is a foundational part of the Pakistani economy, promoting the growth of industry and developing human resources. In charge of fostering the engineers crucial for Punjab's economy is the Government College of Technology Railway Road Lahore, a school that continues to place graduates to local corporations.

Through "the Project for Development of Center of Excellence (CoE) for Technical Education," JICA has been working since December 2008 to facilitate collaboration among the College's Mechanical and Architecture Departments, the federal government of Pakistan, and provincial government of Punjab. Central to this project has been its Chief Advisor Mr. Yuji Kurokawa. He is joined by Mr. Koji Sawada for work with the Mechanical Department and Mr. Minoru Ito for work with the Architecture Department. The three are collaborating on such efforts as those to improve the College's curriculum, develop educational materials, train teachers, and strengthen relationships with industry.

"The situation was such that the curriculum had not been updated since 2000, it was up to teachers to find educational materials, there weren't enough teachers in terms of absolute numbers, facilities and equipment were wearing out, and there was no support for graduating students to find jobs," explained Mr. Kurokawa. The project proceeded through stages, first hearing the opinions of graduates, then visiting local corporations and cooperating companies to research their needs towards education. This was followed by three years of work to revise the content of classes, and then efforts to revise the college's curriculum and develop educational materials. Furthermore, the Project invited corporation representatives to speak to the students at the College, held job fairs to bring students and business people together, established corporate internships, and organized technical competitions to enhance student skills. From March 2012, the new curriculum was picked up by the federal government and became the shared curriculum not just for Punjab, but for the entire country.

"There is an urgent desire in industry for the fostering of human resources with practical skills and knowledge," pointed out Mr. Sawada, who worked with the Mechanical Department. "The academic abilities of the students improved when we enhanced our collaboration with corporations. The pass rate for the graduation examination used to be around 60%, but it's 80% today. We've also achieved a job placement rate of over 50%. There are a lot of Japanese automakers active in



Students learn how to work with concrete (Photo: Minoru Ito)

Pakistan, but Japanese small and medium enterprises that make automotive parts are showing more caution about entering the market here because of concerns over issues like terrorism and a lack of security.

They currently have no choice but to ask local manufacturing corporations to make parts for them. By placing graduates with technical skills in local corporations, I believe that we can make a contribution to achievements such as an increase in the quality of Japanese automotive products, reduced costs, and shortened the time to delivery for local operations."

Mr. Ito, who worked with the Architecture Department, made a big contribution by facilitating the first ever acceptance of women at a technical college in Pakistan. Due to local customs, there are strong-rooted negative feelings in Pakistan towards moves by women to pursue education or employment. In the midst of a society where the literacy rate among adult women is only approximately 40%, Mr. Ito proposed and realized a coeducational program within the Architecture Department. Twenty-four female students entered the department in the new program's first academic year. Today, the College has 70 female students within its three grades.

"The acceptance of female students was approved in the process of revising the curriculum and developing educational materials. In Pakistan, only graduates of a university architectural program can become architects. Architects are skilled in the field of design, but are lacking structural field skills because it is outside of their specialty. Our thought was that we could open a new path for employment by fostering female college students who can support architects with those structural field skills. We first established practical learning courses on topics like concrete in an effort to strengthen our structural field program, and from there it was decided that we could start to accept female students."

In addition to the above activities, in March 2013, Japanese grant aid made it possible to build a dedicated classroom building and a practical learning room for structural classes for the Architecture Department as well as to purchase equipment for both the Mechanical and Architectural Departments. A separate prayer room, a health services room, and a washroom were also created for the female students, and women came to account for over half of the instructors.

Half a year before the attack on Malala Yousafzai, a girl who has repeatedly argued for the importance of education for women, a bombing occurred at a train station near the school. This led to a debate, with some calling for the removal of a recruitment billboard which featured a photograph of female students. But the female teachers declared that they would protect their female students. They blocked the removal of the billboard, and took a stance of not giving up when faced with terror. With strong resolves, the women of Pakistan are protecting their own right to education. There are many women throughout the country who have a strong will just like Malala.

"By creating an office for the teachers, which they didn't have before, we put the school on the path towards improved communication between faculty members, more efficient school management, improvements in student grades, gender equality, internships, and employment. We even built an elevator in the classroom building so that students living with disabilities can take classes, too."

Through its "visible" ODA and work to improve both soft and hard infrastructure, Japan is promoting reform in vocational education in Pakistan.