

Implementation of a Modern Japanese Program into Adventist Tertiary Education in the Philippines

: A Needs Assessment on Nurturing EPA Nurses and Caregivers

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Abstract—In 2014, the author conducted a needs assessment on nursing EPA nurses and caregivers in the Philippines and this article evaluates the results. It reveals that the rural colleges are less interested in the Japanese scheme despite the urban schools are more advantageous for dispatching their nurses to the US.

Keywords- EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), Japan, The Philippines, nurses, caregivers, Japanese education.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

It is widely known that the society in Japan has been rapidly ageing, and since 2008, the population keeps decreasing despite the government continuously attempts to stimulate the birth rate, which was only 1.43 in 2013. Consequently, this shift directly affects the public policy on elderly care. In order to solve the issue, in 2006, the government of Japan and the Philippines signed on Economic Partnership Agreement (hereafter refereed as EPA), which allows a maximum 400 nurses and 600 caregivers in the Philippines to come and work in Japan for the first two years. In the following year, Japan decided to expand this EPA to Indonesia (Kawaguchi et al, 2009), and also to Vietnam in 2008.

Japan has already accepted nurses (hereafter refereed as EPA Nurses) from the Philippines and Indonesia, and the first batch from Vietnam will arrive in the country in 2015. Strictly speaking, they are not qualified as EPA Nurses yet. When they land in the islands, they are called the nurse candidates, because they were required to pass the national exam (officially, the National Nursing Examination) in Japan within the first three years of their stay. Later, it was extended to four years due to very few successful candidates, which were around 10% of the applicants. Kawaguchi et al (2012) clearly illustrated the current condition for the EPA candidates to learn Japanese in Japan as below.

With the EPAs between Japan and Southeast Asian nations in effect, candidates for registered nurse and certified care-worker positions have arrived in Japan — from Indonesia beginning in fiscal year 2008 and from the Philippines from 2009. They have been assigned to the hospitals and care facilities throughout Japan for education and training, which has been left to the discretion of each host institution.

Preparation for the national examination was also assigned to the host institutions and the candidates themselves. (p. 643)

Basically, hospitals and nursing homes are not educational institutes, therefore it cannot be said that those are appropriate places for the EPA candidates to study Japanese in order to pass the exam.

However, some extremely bright candidates, around 10% of all pass the exam every year. Once they are qualified as EPA Nurses they are entitled to live in Japan for good and work as registered nurses. But if failed, they have to leave the country after a maximum of four years of their stay. Many surveys pointed out that most of the candidates start learning Japanese when they came to Japan, and it is too late to begin in order to pass the exam in Japanese within four years (Ikeda et al, 2010 & Nagae et al, 2013).

A Christian denomination in Japan, The Japan Union Conference (hereafter refereed as JUC) of Seventh-Day Adventist (hereafter refereed as SDA) Church has operated hospitals and nursing homes throughout the country, and due to the ageing society and declining population, like other hospitals and nursing homes, they are facing severe shortages of nurses and caregivers.

On the other hand, the SDA Church in the Philippines and Indonesia have many universities and colleges, which have courses for nurses and caregivers. Especially, the nurses in the Philippines have already successfully worked overseas like in the United States and the U.K. During the assessment in the Philippines in July of 2014, the country celebrated exceeding their population over a hundred million. In addition to that, the society still keeps a beautiful shape of the population pyramid, which means there are more young people than old people in comparison to Japan.

By Utilizing the EPA and the church network between Japan and the Philippines, the author believed that implementing a Japanese program into the nursing courses at the Adventist colleges and universities in the Philippines could hire many EPA candidates from the country, and they will learn Japanese before coming to Japan. Thus this will enable them to raise the examination pass rate of the applicants.

B. Purpose, Rationale and Importance of the Research

This article aims to evaluate the assessment, which sought a possibility of implementing a Japanese program into two Adventist colleges and a university in the Philippines. As described above, nurses in the Philippines are the subject of the EPA, and training and hiring potential human resources within the church network seemed an appropriate and more efficient way for recruiting nurses at the hospitals and nursing homes under JUC.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far, there have not been various types of researches done on the EPA due to its short history, which is less than a decade. Unfortunately, in addition to that, there has not been many inquiries conducted outside Japan and published in English. Consequently, the literature review for this article should refer mostly to the ones conducted within Japan and published in Japanese.

The limited articles are categorized in two different groups; the countries where the EPA nurses and candidates are from, and the issues they are facing to.

Despite the candidates from the Philippines came before the Indonesians, the objects of most researches are the Indonesians instead of the Filipinos, and mostly those papers only treat the issues on communication and languages (Kim, 2010, Ogawa et al, 2010 & Ishii, 2014).

However, there are few studies available, which investigate both Indonesians and Filipinos (Hirano et al, 2010 & Noborisato et al, 2014). Hirano et al (2010) explored the candidates' motives of working in Japan and compared the similarities and differences between the two countries.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Type of Design

This is a project development research. In order to implement a program into tertiary education in the Philippines, a series of assessments have to be required beforehand. This article is about the first field assessment in the Philippines.

B. Proposed Program

The author brought this idea to JUC and the nursing homes, and they settled a provisional proposed program to the Philippines for the initial assessment. The offer was very simple.

1) The nursing homes will provide a native Japanese teacher to the school for 5 years.

2) The school is required to provide the teacher with an office and lodging.

They supposed that the details would be negotiated in the following discussions.

C. Selection and Description of the Sites

There is a hypothesis that the local colleges and universities in the Philippines have less access to the United States, which seemed the biggest competitor of the hospitals and nursing homes in Japan. Consequently, the author decided to visit Mindanao Island first. There are three Adventist

colleges with nursing courses on the island, and the author visited the campuses and met the presidents, as well as the heads of nursing. In this article, the names of the colleges will be described anonymously, then they will be indicated College A, B and C.

In this study, College C was excluded because the college has its affiliated hospital, but it was far from the college campus; the hospital is located in the heart of a city, but the college is in the suburb of the city. The EPA candidates need to have at least three years of work experience at hospitals, thus in our plan, Japanese institutions would provide not only to the nursing students, but also to active registered nurses in the Philippines. In the other colleges, College A has its affiliated hospital, which is about a 20 minutes drive from the main campus and only 10 minutes from the annex for the nursing department. College B is in a more advantageous location. The college shares the campus with an Adventist hospital. The back gate of the hospital is the main entrance of the college.

Last but not least is University A and College D in Luzon Island. Our primary targets were the first two colleges in Mindanao, but the schools in Luzon were on the way back home from Mindanao. Honestly, the author did not have a great expectation on the institutes, but apparently, University A is the only university and the largest Adventist institute of education in the country. University A is just an hour drive from Manila. Like College B, College D is operated by another Adventist hospital and located in the heart of Manila, so that the author decided to visit the schools in the end of assessment.

D. Data Collection Strategy

The author travelled to the Philippines and visited the colleges and the university in July 2014. The author had meetings with the president, the head of nursing and other administrators at the institutes and explained the proposed program. The author also interviewed faculties of nursing at College A and College B, and the nursing students at College B. Only at College D was the president not available, and the author had a meeting with the vice-president and his administrative team.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Overall Remarks

The detailed findings for each school will be described later, and the common phenomena should be stated. Definitely, a demand on Japanese education existed in all schools, but it is widely spread. It means that there are few nursing students who aim to work abroad in Japan in the future, but none of the schools had not gathered enough numbers of the Japan bound students yet, thus it will not be economically efficient to send a native Japanese teacher to one of those places and let him/her teach. Especially, at the colleges in Mindanao Island, nobody, including faculties were aware of the EPA. In fact, before the assessment, the author interviewed an EPA nurse in Tokyo. She graduated from College A in 2010. As I showed her video clip to the faculties of College A, they were all surprised because they did not know one of their graduates had

worked in Japan as a nurse. Even if a school would be chosen for implementing Japanese program, we have to gather Japan bound nursing students into the place. Otherwise the program should be inefficient.

Another common phenomena to be pointed out is that all of them were very positive and happy to send out their nurses to Japan. In fact, the nurses in the Philippines were currently overflowing. They mentioned that it had been caused by the Obama administration in the United States, which stopped accepting nurses from outside due to reducing the unemployment rate. Generally speaking, most hospital administrators do not want their nurses to be taken away, because training nurses costs them a lot. However, the situation in the Philippines is very different. Nurses are constantly oversupplied since President Obama came into power and many registered nurses struggle to find a place to work domestically. This is a headache for college administrators too, because their nursing students could not be employed after graduation. In fact, the number of nursing students at the institutes were more than double before President Obama closed the door to the States. It heavily affected the student enrollment of the colleges. Therefore, they are trying to send nurses to the UK and New Zealand instead. Particularly at College B, their Muslim graduates work abroad in some Middle East countries like the UAE and Qatar. But the demand is not as big as the one in the United States, and it does not seem successful.

B. College A and its Affiliated Hospital

The first college to be visited in the assessment was College A and its affiliated hospital. They do not share the administrative board, and the author had two different meeting to explain the proposed program. Even though the president of the hospital was positive about it, the meeting at College A went a different direction. They were more interested in funding College A from JUC rather than implementing a program. Later, they revealed the fact that a Japanese native speaker was sent from an NGO in Japan, but the teacher could not work effectively at the college, because the teacher did not speak English well. In the meeting with the faculties of Nursing, they complained that the Japanese teacher learnt more English from the students than the students learnt Japanese from the teacher.

C. College B and its Affiliated Hospital

second college to be visited was College B and its affiliated hospital. They share the same administrative board, therefore the author had a meeting with the president and his staff only once. Despite they were not aware of the EPA, both college and hospital were extremely positive about introducing a Japanese program for their nurses and students. The head of Nursing brought some students to a dinner with the author, and they were also positive to work abroad in Japan if possible.

However, the biggest problem at College B is the ratio of Adventist students, which is only 20%. The rest of them are all Muslim students. Basically, this proposed program aims to bring Adventist nurses to the JUC operating hospitals and nursing homes in Japan. Unfortunately, it seems that the 20% is too small to deal with. In fact, when the meeting was held, it

was the day of ending Ramadan. The author also had an opportunity to talk to a MD of the hospital, and he suggested to me that tourists should not go out for dinner by themselves due to the Islamic festival. Thereupon, the Head of Nursing took the author for a dinner with her students then.

D. University A

As described above, the author was discouraged in Mindanao and went back to Luzon where a meeting at University A was scheduled. Betraying the author's primary expectation, the president of University A showed his interest in the proposed program. He certainly understood the current situation in the United States and mentioned that the program would be important even if only 5% of his nursing students would be taken to Japan. However, the Head of Nursing was against the program, because the curriculum for the nursing students was more rigorous than the other students. Thus, to begin with, the president suggested the author to introduce this program for the nursing graduates. Then gradually getting into the undergraduate students later.

The president said that University A could provide an office for the program, but not accommodation due to the shortage of residence on campus.

University A's affiliated hospital is in Manila and it owns College D. The president of University A was not sure if the hospital would like to accept this program.

E. College D

The final place to be visited was College D. The school is located next to the hospital in Manila, and share the same campus. The president was not there at the time so the author had a meeting with the vice-president and his administrative team. Unlike the first three schools, this institute has a lower status and strictly delimited by the Philippine government. For example, the other schools are able to develop their own curriculums but College D needs to get permission from the government as they change their curriculum. In the year 2015, the educational system of the Philippines will be upgraded from K-10 to K-12, which means that they will have 12 years of school education before tertiary education, and it has been for 10 years now. To meet the educational reform, College D had been required to have more subjects of foreign languages and employ foreign faculties, which seemed very timely for implementing the proposed program for JUC. All the heads of departments welcomed the new program to College D, because currently, they were all working on developing new curriculums, which would meet the requirements from the government.

However, the vice-president and his treasure claimed that they were financially struggling, and providing an office and lodging for the Japanese teacher was still a heavy burden for them. Then they suggested that if College D could share this program with University A like giving lessons for two days at University A and three days at College D a week. One of them would provide an office and the lodging would be on the other one. The distance between University A and College D is about an hour by bus, which seems not too far away for the teacher to commute twice a week.

The vice-president also revealed their plan to build its affiliated high school in 2016. If this program would be implemented in the high school, the Japan bound students could have a maximum 10 years of Japanese lessons (three years in high school, four years at college and another three years at hospital before applying the EPA). The author strongly believe that that is long enough to pass the nursing exam in Japanese when they get there.

There was no chance to talk to the president, consequently, the author did not collect any information about the hospital. The vice-president hinted that probably the president would not be against the program on the nurses, but he is always money-conscious.

V. CONCLUSION

First of all, the hypothesis, the urban colleges have more access to the United States has been completely rejected, and College D in Manila showed their interest in the program the most among the schools. University A was not as eager to introduce as College D, but they were also willing to accept it for 5% of their nursing students. When the author presented the fact at ISIS, some professors from Mindanao pointed out the uneven distribution of information. In fact, the author did not meet anybody who was aware of the EPA in Mindanao. Even in the Internet age, the information gap between cities and country sides seems still wide. Some participants of ISIS told about universities, which already introduced Japanese lessons for the nursing students, and surprisingly, all of them were in Manila.

In the first section of this article, the author pointed out that the spread demand on Japanese learning should be excavated and gathered in one institute. This assessment trip was arranged by the Southern Asia Pacific Division (hereafter referred to as SSD) of SDA church, and the SSD seems an appropriate organization for the program to be known to all the Adventist high schools throughout the Philippines, and appoints the implemented school to be the center of Japanese education in the country.

After assessing the three colleges and the university in the Philippines, the SSD informed the author that an Adventist university in Indonesia showed an interest in the program. The SSD covers Indonesia under their operation. It was already explained that the EPA has been concluded with Indonesia too, therefore this program could be implemented in the Indonesian university as well. In order to capture the demand on the program, the author have been planning a trial session at University A and college D in 2016. Thereupon, as its extended research, conducting a trial session at the schools in the Philippines, as well as at the university in Indonesia will be the next phase of developing this proposed program.

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