



## Chapter 6

# A Glimpse into a Master's Degree and an Internship Programme of African Business Education Initiative for Youth: A Case Study of International Partnership between Japan and Africa

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### 6.1 Background

Following the first four chapters, in which the higher education and societal contextual configurations of Japan and South Africa were presented and the scope for partnerships between universities of the two countries portrayed, chapter 5 presented a case study of partnership programmes between Japan and Zambia, as an example and object lesson for South Africa. This chapter offers a second case study of Japanese universities' involvement in Africa, as an object lesson to learn from, in exploring possibilities for South African – Japanese universities' partnerships.

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The African Business Education (ABE) Initiative for Youth programme was the brainchild of the Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD) held in 2013 (Fujino 2016). TICAD V represents a series of conferences that provide a multilateral platform for the development of African countries, co-organised by the Government of Japan, African Union, United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank. During TICAD V, the Japanese government committed itself to officially raising support for Africa through the following three pillars:

1. A robust sustainable economy
2. An inclusive and resilient society
3. Peace and stability

A robust sustainable economy with human resource development for business and industry in Africa, such as the ABE Initiative and TICAD Human Resource Development Centers, were highlighted under Pillar 1. A year later, the first group of ABE Initiatives students was recruited to pursue a master's degree and internship programme in Japan.

### **6.2 Introduction of the ABE Initiative**

The objective of the master's degree and internship programme of the ABE Initiative is to support young personnel who have the potential to contribute to the development of industries in Africa. This programme offers opportunities for young African personnel to study master's courses in Japanese universities as international students and to experience internships at Japanese enterprises. This programme intends to foster excellent personnel who can recognise and understand the contexts of Japanese society and the systems of Japanese enterprises to contribute to Africa's development in collaboration with the Japanese private sector. The expected outcome of the programme is a network of potential contributors to the development of African industries, which will also lead the Japanese private sector to engage in further

economic activities in Africa (JICA 2016; Someya, Yoshimoto & Komoriya 2016).

The ABE Initiative programme targeted participants from 54 nations in Africa (all TICAD nations, including North Africa).

### **6.2.1 Persons from the Private Sector**

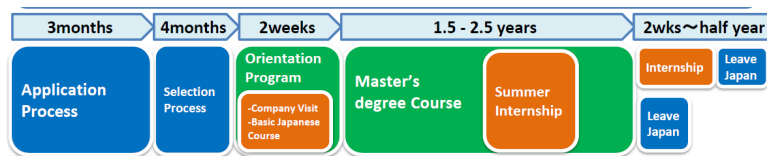
Young individuals who are or will be involved in economic activities in the local private sector and develop and maintain strong ties with Japanese companies were targeted so that they will be able to contribute positively to the business development between people from Japan and the private sector in their respective countries.

### **6.2.2 Government Officials**

Young government officials and civil servants participate in the formulation and/or implementation of industrial policies. These individuals were targeted because they were strategically positioned in government machinery. They could support policy formulation whenever they fostered mutually beneficial relationships between the Japanese business sector and any African country where Japanese investors may be interested in establishing their businesses.

### **6.2.3 Educators**

Young instructors or teachers in higher education, technical and vocational education and training institutions in Africa were included. This group was targeted to ensure smooth technology transfer whenever possible from Japan to any African country where educators could benefit from the programme. Areas in higher education were of particular interest.



**Figure 6.1:** Operational framework of the ABE programme (Fujino 2016)

### 6.3 Recruitment Process (Adapted from Fujino 2016)<sup>2</sup>

Generally, the ABE Initiative scholarship is advertised on the Japan International Cooperation Agency’s (JICA) website to all members of the public worldwide. The JICA office shares country-customised advertisements to specific African countries with timelines for the dates of particular activities in the application process.

The recruitment process (Fig. 6.1) for potential ABE scholarship beneficiaries was twofold: application documents for the scholarship and those directed to a prospective Japanese university. The Japan International Cooperation Centre (JICE), which is entrusted with managing all scholarship-related activities in Japan, contacts universities that successful scholarship candidates submitted as per their choices during their application. JICE only formalises the entry arrangements regarding scholarship guidelines for candidates who have already secured a place in the university.

The scholarship process is embodied by a rigorous activity that comprises the screening of application letters, interviews and language tests. When successful, the candidate also underwent online interviews with university personnel, arranged by the JICA office.

It is heartbreaking though, that at every point, candidature could drop, but there was no formal

<sup>2</sup> Fujino is a staff worker for JICA Headquarters in Tokyo. He made a presentation to ABE participants that highlighted all critical areas about the programme.

communication with unsuccessful candidates. Those who are successful learn about it once they are invited for another round of interviews. Finally, JICA contacts the handful of candidates that are picked to participate in the programme.

#### **6.4 Participants' Arrival in Japan**

The ABE Initiative is a scholarship programme offered by the Japanese government to the international community, specifically African youth, and its conceptualisation ensures that it serves the training objective. The first group of African students was invited to Japan in 2014, and for subsequent years, every year's intake was referred to as a 'batch', starting with 2014 as the first batch. Initially, 1,000 participants from the 54 African countries were supposed to be enrolled in three batches, but after the third batch and after three years, an extension of some kind was registered (Fujino 2016). This implies that the programme was implemented over three batches. The author joined the programme in the second batch and enrolled in a master's degree programme at Hiroshima University in the Graduate School of International Development and Cooperation (IDEC).

#### **6.5 Orientation for ABE Initiative Participants**

Upon arrival in Japan, all participants in a particular batch were hosted at the Tokyo International Centre (TIC) for two weeks. Participants were focused on various issues for their smooth survival in Japan for the next three years. Their stay was divided into three segments: during the first six months, participants joined the university as research students; during the second 24 months (two years), they joined as master's degree students in their respective universities; and finally, they join as internee students in any admitting institution for the last six months (this is optional, and duration could also vary).

Additionally, participants were oriented towards the business manners of Japan's cooperate world and what is expected of them. They could also interact with Japanese

companies prior to joining their respective universities within their first two weeks in Tokyo. By the time participants were dispatched to their respective universities, they had better knowledge of the programme from their first to last day in Japan. Coupled with the practical aspect of organising a company fare right away in Tokyo, this enabled participants to approach the programme's activities with courage and strength.

My experience during this time included both excitement and concern as I was in a foreign country and very far from home. Similar to the many young people who came to Japan under this programme, almost all of us were excited to live in Japan. Firstly, because Africa is very far from Japan, and to have an opportunity to travel to Japan, a country known to Africans as one of the first-world countries which export most of the motor vehicles trotting on our continent, was a great achievement. Secondly, everyone who was accepted into the programme had a reason to celebrate, considering how hectic the recruitment process was. Thirdly, the opportunity to study for a master's degree would be a turning point in changing an individual's status when we return to our respective countries. Fourthly, through the orientation programme, participants were able to meet and make friends from all corners of Africa, which also helped us to know each other prior to joining our study institutions, something that cannot just happen even back in Africa. Another pleasure stemmed from the opportunity to see things in person that one only used to hear or read about back home.

When undergoing orientation about Japanese business culture, the programme encouraged us to meet business personnel from different Japanese companies and to interact with them without any hiccups. I realised there was a difference in approaches when it came to business issues as compared to foreign students who joined universities through other programmes.

However, most of the participants were worried about the progress of orientation because of the real-

world interactions. Different sessions were arranged for participants, starting from general living conditions in Japan, thus integrating all African students into Japanese society. Most participants started complaining about whether they would manage to survive the next 36 months with no serious challenges. The concerns were coupled with students' lives yet to be lived in the universities as they studied for a master's degree. The actual study was not a challenge to many of us, but how to survive is what gave us food for thought, especially when we compared African ways with Japanese environments. Participants, however, encouraged each other, especially when we had a meeting with some of the previous ABE participants who came to share their experiences about living and studying in Japan.

## **6.6 Dispatching ABE Participants to Their Respective Universities**

After a two-week orientation period, ABE participants were dispatched as prospective students to join their respective universities. Participants going to universities in the same region were dispatched together to a regional JICA centre. For instance, in our case, those going to Hiroshima University, and universities in Yamaguchi, Tottori and Shimane, were dispatched to the Chugoku JICA Centre located in Higashihiroshima. For a week, we were oriented on how we would fare in the universities where we were to enrol. Thereafter, JICE officials introduced us to our respective academic supervisors in the graduate schools we joined. Depending on the university's admission policy, some participants were directly admitted to the master's degree course. A good example would be those enrolled at the University of Tottori, while those enrolled at Hiroshima University were enrolled as research students for the next six months before being admitted fully into a master's degree programme after passing an entrance examination.

Upon joining the university, another orientation was organised to enable new students to settle well as they pursued

their studies at the university. Some guidelines for conducting research were like those met previously, while some were specific to student researchers. After staying in Japan for a year, participants are allowed to join one- or two-week clinical internships in a company as organised by JICE and hosting companies depending on their (company's) interests in the African region. This activity also acts as an eye-opener for ABE participants to understand the depth of Japanese companies' business culture, their interest in human capital and future collaboration with Africa.

### **6.7 Programme for Monitoring ABE Activities**

From the time ABE participants enter the universities until they finish their master's course, scheduled face-to-face monitoring of the participants is done twice in the year, but informal sessions are done whenever necessary. For instance, JICE schedules formal face-to-face monitoring sessions with ABE participants to get an update on their living conditions and their welfare in terms of academic progress. These sessions are intensive because JICE personnel must ensure that all kinds of stakeholders in the university are approached, especially those that relate in one way or the other (such as academic supervisors, laboratory mates, neighbours at your apartment, etc.) towards the well-being of ABE participants. Personally, I liked these monitoring sessions, as JICE took the role of a guardian during our stay in Japan. Through this kind of interface, we were able to share with JICE the challenges that we were experiencing from general living conditions, such as where we were housed. However, in all these monitoring sessions, we were reprimanded not to submit written reports unless on appropriate occasions, such as when one had returned from a research activity overseas. JICE valued face-to-face meetings more because they were able to probe further if there were issues that required them to do so.

Sometimes, challenges could exist between a student and an academic supervisor, and JICE could help solve the issue. I remember there was a very challenging scenario

between one of us and the academic advisor to the extent that the ABE student could not make any research progress. It took the intervention of JICE to settle the whole pandemonium for our friend to make progress in their research.

In another case, a friend of mine decided to withdraw from the scholarship even after further counselling and support from JICE. This friend had some role conflicts between academic and family life, which contributed to some serious challenges in research progress. Even though JICE dedicated some staff to offering specialised support in several ways, it did not address the situation. Thereafter, JICE recommended that JICA temporarily withdraw this friend from this academic program to return to his home country, although it was a bitter pill to swallow.

Informal monitoring usually emanates from emergencies such as earthquakes, floods, heavy storms or typhoons that cause serious damage where some ABE participants reside. If this happens, emails or phone calls from JICE could be received asking participants in that region to report their condition. As Japan is an earthquake-prone area, JICE can send emails checking our well-being every time an earthquake is officially registered in our area, regardless of its magnitude. Sometimes, warnings of typhoons and floods in a specific region propelled JICE to communicate constantly with us to make us alert. I remember that three weeks towards my internship termination date, our city had heavy downpours, and JICE kept on reminding us of our well-being until the continuous rains subsided.

## **6.8 Further Engagements with Private Companies (ABE Participants and Japanese Company Networking Fair)**

As mentioned previously, during the first two weeks of orientation, JICA ensures that ABE participants have an opportunity to interact with Japanese company personnel so that they embark on a relationship that could be beneficial during the study period and way beyond. The engagement

between Japanese companies and ABE participants paves the way for initial internship activity, which falls one year after a participant is enrolled as a student in a Japanese university, as indicated in scholarship guidelines. With reference to our batch, for instance, we had the first Japanese company networking fair during the orientation and the second after six months in Tokyo. All ABE participants were called to participate in this fair from all regions of Japan. During the networking fair, a number of presentations were made by various organisation representatives such as JICA, JICE and JETRO, to promote the networking envisioned through TICAD towards investing in Africa. A year later, all ABE participants from the Kansai region also had another networking fair in Kobe organised by JICA. This one was patronised by ABE participants from all three batches. The purpose was to enhance networking between Japanese entrepreneurs and ABE participants in the region. However, at the Kobe Networking Fair, African countries' embassy representatives based in Japan were also invited to showcase their countries. This move strengthened the ABE participants' drive to elaborate more on opportunities for investments and collaboration with other business entities in their respective countries.

### **6.9 Initial (Pre-Graduation) Internship After Two or Three Semesters (A Must Attend)**

As per the operational framework, during a time period ranging between one and a half to two and a half, the ABE participants are supposed to join the initial internship as arranged by JICE in one of the hosting companies. The internship is generally arranged for a period of either one or two weeks. This exposes a participant to a real business environment in Japan, beyond the interface with companies during company networking fares. In my case, I spent two weeks on an initial internship at two locations. In the first week, I was hosted by a company in Ehime Prefecture, Matsuyama City. This company is involved in information and communication technology (ICT) and operates a school for the special needs community in the ICT area. During my stay, I noted the passion the people

in the company had for the skills development of children with special needs from their community. In the morning, these children go to their specific ordinary schools until they are picked up by the company's vehicles during the early afternoon and taken to the company's school. These children are loved and supported to the extent that their attendance is not by force. Because of what I observed in this company that I decided to study a course on inclusive education and special needs so that I could understand and support the special needs children accordingly. Through the course, I got very good exposure as the professor was able to take us to these specialised schools, like one in Kure Ward within Hiroshima Prefecture.

During the second week, I was hosted by a company in Tokyo that was in the business of teaching and learning materials, especially in science subjects. It is rare for one to join two companies, as was the case with me, but JICA and my academic advisor arranged for internships in different companies and to avoid inconveniences to the companies, an opportunity was granted to join both. In Tokyo, my interest was in the company's drive to provide services in Japan and beyond, and how the business cooperated with the government through the Ministry of Education. This was the case because, by then, the business plan I submitted to JICA was in line with what this company was doing. Besides selling science teaching and learning materials, the company also supported science teachers in Tokyo by providing continuing professional development (CPD) to science teachers.

Overall, I realised that the business system and environment in both Japanese companies were similar, although they differed in their business focus.

## **6.10 Graduating From the Master's Course**

After two or two and a half years (participants who join the master's course directly without undergoing research student experience), the master's course is completed, and ABE participants graduate with a master's degree. However, before

I share more about my internship experience after graduation, let me say something about the masters' course experience.

My experiences during this phase were both exciting and enriching. My studies at Hiroshima University taught me how to think through my interactions with academic advisors, weekly science education laboratory presentations and informal gatherings within the university, especially in my graduate school and university libraries, which I usually visited to strengthen my research arguments and wherever possible in general.

During the four-semester period, I studied different courses that enabled me to satisfy the university's acceptable accumulation of credit hours to qualify for a master's degree award. This course was conducted alongside the development of my research. Depending on the number of students in the research laboratory, a schedule for individual presentations for the progress of one's research was created, sometimes two or three times a semester. These were exciting moments as one was expected to present in the area of your expertise and the audience could ask all sorts of questions ranging from methodological, ethical and content, and then advise you accordingly for better progress. The audience in this case were research laboratory mates and academic supervisors. Most often, my academic supervisor could not just tell me what to do, but through the Socratic model as an individual, I could collect myself and move on, hence being a catalyst for my development of how to think.

The course also exposed me to take part in local and international conferences, where I presented my research progress. Through these appearances, I gained the courage to share my academic findings whenever there was a need. Academic integrity dictates the sharing of findings, as researchers learn from each other to determine a gap worthy of further research. Through my master's course, my academic supervisor recommended that I collect data twice: first, following the experimental research design I pursued, and second, longitudinal data collection was deployed to check

the level of participants' progress at different times along the way. My studies at Hiroshima University also provided opportunities to collaborate with people from different countries. This improved our networking base as I can enquire from colleagues from Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Japan, Rwanda, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Uzbekistan, and so forth whenever needed.

As per the ABE Initiative design, a participant was provided with two options: going back to Africa immediately after graduating or joining a long-term internship prior to returning to Africa. This post-graduation internship is optional in the sense that one can join, but it also depends on whether the participant has been invited by the hosting company. Unlike the initial internship, whoever participates in ABE is expected to join. JICE makes arrangements if a company has invited a participant as taking part in the internship is strictly based on companies' invitation and ABE participants' willingness to join.

In this phase, the same company in Ehime Prefecture, Matsuyama City, invited me to join them for another six months. However, because of my personal schedule, we negotiated and reduced the period to four months. I started my internship on 1 April 2018 and finished on 31 July 2018. During this time, I was first exposed to all the departments in the company in more detail compared to my initial encounter so that I would appreciate how the company conducts its business. Through our weekly meetings and other specially arranged meetings, I was tasked with studying how Japanese companies hire and develop their employees to meet the company's needs. I learnt that the Japanese company arranges various events, both formal and informal, to establish a working relationship and reduce tension in the workplace between different offices in the organisation. In contrast to the Japanese scenario, I was previously exposed to the Western way of hiring employees only. The company also asked me to come up with business ideas and plans for future investments and further collaboration with African countries. To this end, I

came up with over six plans for the company's consideration in the future.

After my first month at the company, I was given the opportunity to develop a project that could be beneficial to people of my home country when I returned. At this point, I decided to develop an online platform, Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), which can be used to further Malawian teachers' CPD, starting with science teachers in secondary schools. I branded my MOODLE CPD platform Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE), and the company supported me in hosting the website in their servers until we were ready to move it into our servers back in Malawi. The platform is still there, only that it has remained idle for the past three years owing to a lack of maintenance. When I returned to my home country, the platform continued to be used on a trial basis, but was not rolled out due to resource constraints. All in all, it was worth having these two experiences in the university and internship company. I am a proud product of Hiroshima University and the internship company as far as what I formally learnt in Japan is concerned.

### **6.11 End of Programme: Returning to My Home Country**

The programme has different ending points for different individuals, depending on what was shared after the master's course and the pursuance of an ABE participant in the internship programme. As highlighted earlier, for those who were not interested in joining postgraduate internship activities, their ABE scholarship programme ended immediately after attaining their master's degree. Those invited and willing to join internship activities ended immediately after the internship regardless of the internship duration, whether a few weeks to six months (maximum duration of the final internship programme) is over. It is worth mentioning that there is still collaboration years after the master's programme and business internship courses.

JICA and JICE continue to coordinate and usually participate in meetings that are conducted online together with Japanese companies collaborating with African companies and even those willing to invest. As for ex-ABE participants from all batches, participation in these online meetings is open, but most often, the number of those who respond positively to invitations does not exceed 200.

## **6.12 Conclusion**

According to the design of the ABE Initiative Master's and Internship Programme, the basic fulfilment of the programme is over upon completion of the master's programme in the Japanese university, and ABE participants are free to go back to their own countries as postgraduate internships are optional. This arrangement is also in agreement with the bilateral contracts made by the Japanese government and benefitting African countries. However, there are some ABE scholarship recipients accommodated into doctoral programmes in their universities, which is an arrangement beyond the ABE scholarship and internship programme. This was an added advantage provided to recipients of ABE Initiative scholarships to extend their stay to pursue further studies.

I also find the ABE Initiative to be a vibrant course as it provided an opportunity for many African youth to learn from Japanese successes and challenges to contribute positively towards their respective countries' development, while collaborating with Japanese industries.

Africa has gained a lot intellectually by having more than 1,000 youths trained in higher education, where everyone graduated with a master's degree and some privileged few with a doctoral degree. In the long run, this will impact Africa's development.

However, I would suggest that organisers provide a better path to hosting companies to engage in activities with ABE participants during their post-graduate internships. Most of the post-graduate interns experienced a small gap in aligning the hosting companies' desires with the development

of the African market, despite the support of interns. It appears that the hosting company's interests are not well defined, and even the support provided by the ABE participants after returning to their countries is unclear. My experience with the internship hosting company after my postgraduate internship has not been quite successful. I tried to engage the company personnel in Malawi for our support, but they were not interested. Efforts to engage headquarters in Japan did not bear any fruit. I think this happened because there were no straightforward plans on how we (former ABE participants) could render our support after returning to Africa.

I would also suggest that all Japanese companies hosting ABE participants for internships express a strong interest in investing in the African market. This will enable them to develop concrete plans with interns thereafter. Apart from the company that hosted me in Japan, no other company has come to Malawi yet or even registered an interest in collaborating with Malawian companies at a time of this publication.

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