Japan's ODA for the University of the South Pacific

Fukumi Higashihira

Lecturer, Department of Civil Engineering, The University of Tokyo

Address: 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033 Japan

higashihira@civil.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract

This research analyzes the impact of Japan's ODA on distance higher education to date. In particular, it focuses on the University of the South Pacific, cooperating with the governments of 12 countries in this region (Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa and Marshall Islands). USP has been modified starting with distance education via post mail to internet based online learning, thereby the system and contents of education have changed since its inception in 1968. Japan's ODA has shown that various type of projects of USP have been conducted from 1998. It is evident that creation of ties between Japanese educational intellectuals and target countries is a key factor of developing sustainable system. Obviously, the USP, as a tertiary educational institution, should build communication bridges and intensify relationships between teachers, researchers and students by means of cross-functional cooperation.

Keywords

ODA, Distance Learning, Pacific Islands, The University of the South Pacific, Educational Development

1. Introduction

This research examines the history of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to higher education in the South Pacific region, and studies what kind of educational development has been done. Japan's ODA has been established as an international cooperation center with the main purpose to support developing countries. It has been involved and has cooperated in the development of education systems in the South Pacific region since 1998. Therefore, this paper analyzes the impact of Japan's ODA on distance higher education to date, on the University of the South Pacific (USP) according to the history of Japan's ODA. In particular, it focuses on the University of the South Pacific, cooperating with the governments of 12 countries in this region (Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa and Marshall Islands). Guy R., et. al (2000) mentioned regional obstacles such as distances

spanning for 6500 kilometers, four standard time zones and population 1.4 million is dispersed throughout an ocean vastness and on land masses[1].

USP is a unique university where the main campus in Suva, the capital of Fiji, which has adopted distance education since its inception in 1968. The development of information and communication technology has been modified starting with distance education via post mail to internet based online learning, thereby the system and contents of education have changed. One of the most striking features is the fact that Japanese ODA is limited to support for one country hence in case of USP, Japan's ODA has to cooperate with 12 countries at once. Japan's ODA provides more grants to Fiji, therefore, the study corelates the development process of distance higher education in USP and cooperation chronology of Japan's ODA and Fiji.

2. Background

Japan's ODA support for the USP began in 1998. Tanaka (2013) says that there are three reasons for the international cooperation from Japan to USP: (1) The Sasakawa Peace Foundation conducted local needs surveys at USP since the late 1980s, (2) research institutes and universities in Japan and the United States made various proposals for improving the satellite communication environment in the South Pacific area and additionally (3) Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (formerly Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications) and National Space Development Agency of Japan conducted the international experiment of distance education called PARTNERS project.

The USP distance education initially commenced with postal mail, shortwave radio, etc., since then it has become more widespread through the use of satellite communications.

Distance learning by means of satellite in the Pacific island area was initially conducted by the U.S., using Yagi antenna for communication with the Applications of Technology Satellite 1 (ATS-1 launched by NASA in 1966), in 1969 as Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Satellite Experiments.

In 1971, ATS-1 was granted to the Pacific Education and Communications Experiments via PEACESAT network, which originated at the University of Hawaii. According to the research report of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (1994), the site was at three locations in Hawaii islands: Manoa campus in Oahu islands, Hilo campus in Big islands and Community College in Maui. In April 1971, an experiment was conducted to access the computer of the Manoa school building via the VHF satellite line.

Furthermore, from 1972, with the permission of the University of Hawaii, the USP set up a site at the main campus in Suva, Fiji, and the Extension Service Center in Tonga, and used it for instructing students in distance learning, using aids of the Carnegie Foundation and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Afterwards, Extension Service Centers were set up at nine locations (at that time) including Samoa and Cook Islands, including Tonga. As it became difficult to operate within the time allotted to PEACESAT, in 1974, The University of the South Pacific Network (USPNet) was configured under the allocation of satellite use time

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[1] Guy R., et. al (2000:48)

exclusively for USP of ATS-1. Until ATS-1 became unusable in 1985, USP used PEACESAT as USPNet. USP Distance Learning done through workbooks and other printed media shipped to USP site. After ATS-1 failed in 1985, USP's distance learning network has been maintained by combining satellite and shortwave links by expensive commercial satellite Intelsat.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation held the Pacific Islands Conference in 1988, and established the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF) in 1989. They have built good relationships with the Pacific Islands.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation conducted local needs surveys at USP since the late 1980s. At the same time, in 1988, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was organized by the 50 bodies as an international organization to promote research on education improvement in the Commonwealth countries. The COL announced the concept of establishing COLNet as an educational information network linking educational institutions in the Commonwealth countries. USPNet is also positioned as part of it. Japan's PARTNERS Project was approved as one of the SAFISY projects at the International Space Year (ISY), 1992, at the International Conference to promote the activities of ISY. Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (formerly Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications) as well as National Space Development Agency of Japan conducted the international experiment of distance education called PARTNERS project. Japan invites PEACESAT members to participate in this project. Kondo (1994) said, from 1992 to 1996, they used the technology test satellite ETS-V to simultaneously connect the education and research institutes of Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Hawaii and Fiji including USP for international experiments of distance education.

Meanwhile, the PEACESAT Policy Conference was held at Tohoku University in Japan, 1992[2]. The conference was attended by representatives from about 100 Pacific islands. At the time, PEACESAT had lost its communication satellites, and its practical activity had stopped. Therefore, the Sendai Conference at the Tohoku University was held, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, to discuss what security policies should be taken to exploit refurbished satellites. The Sasakawa Pacific Island National Fund invested about 25,048,817 yen[3] for the meeting. The Pacific Island National Distance Education Development Committee of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, mostly comprised of professors and associate professors of the University of Electro-Communications, Kobe University, Keio University is participating in research of future distance education guidelines. However, this research has not been continued, and after that, JICA's ODA has been launched.

3. Japan's ODA for USP

3.1 Japan's ODA

Kayashima (2019) says Japan's ODA started in 1954 after World War II, and then, with Japan's economic growth, ODA business expanded and Japan became the top donor all over the world in 1989. The contents of Japan's ODA include the development of infrastructure facilities, the spread

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[2] Eiseituushin to Watashi URL: http://satcom.jp/16/SatAndI.pdf
[3] SPF URL: https://www.spf.org/spinf/projects/project_16921.html

of education, insurance improvement and environmental protection etc. Moreover, Kayashima (2019) says that the implementers of ODA are the Japan government, engineers and administrators of local public organizations, engineers and experts of private enterprises (development consultants, trading companies, construction companies etc.), and Japan University teachers and researchers.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is responsible for implementing bilateral Japan's ODA projects. Japan's ODA is broadly divided into bilateral aid, in which assistance is given directly to developing countries, and multilateral aid, which is provided through international organizations, so JICA provides bilateral aid in the form of Technical Cooperation, Japan's ODA Loans and Grant Aid.[4]

3.2 The Project for Upgrade of USPNet Communications System (1998)

This project is a grant aid. According to JICA, this project's basin design survey initiated on September 8th, 1997 and completed on March 30th, 1998. The execution date of Exchange of Note was implemented on June 22nd, 1998 by Fiji Ministry of Infrastructure, with facilities, construction and equipment provided, and had a limit of 365 million yen. The project was sited at Suva, Fiji with KDDI Engineering & Consulting as the contract consultant and Mitsubishi Corporation as both the contract construction and procurement company.[4]

This project developed for South Pacific University Fiji Headquarters and Lautoka Campus, which will conduct distance education, like satellite connection, wireless and line management equipment, Antenna equipment.

After this project, From the teaching method with the audio short wave by radio shortwave, 12 countries were connected by the distance education net by VSAT (very small earth station) satellite communication.

3.3 Project on strengthening the programs and networks

This project is a grant aid, called a technical cooperation for the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). According to JICA, after the first project, USP requested Japan to cooperate with USPNet expansion and human resource development in the field of computer science. Cooperation was implemented in three components: Component, Distance Education (DFL) component, and Information Technology Research and Training (IT R & T) component.[5] This project had a cooperation period between July 1st, 2002 and June 30th, 2005 with a monetary limit of 320 million yen. The institutions involved in this cooperation were: University of Electro-Communications, Media Education Development Center (NIME), Ryukyu University, National

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[4] JICA URL: https://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/oda/index.html
[5] JICA URL: https://www2.jica.go.jp/ja/evaluation/pdf/2008_0602719_4_f.pdf

Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT), Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.[6]

This project supported the development of instructors in the region, the improvement of remote teaching materials development ability, and the development of human resources and systems for information (IT) research. Through the dispatch of long-term experts in computer science, distance education, ICT research and training technology transfer, the USP aimed to improve the level of education by using ICT.

3.4 Project for Construction of Information and Communication Technology Center at USP (Phase I)

This project is a grant aid for education and ICT. According to JICA, the project's basin design survey was initiated in November, 2009 and completed in September, 2011 with an Exchange of Note executed in May, 2008 having a limit of 2.2 billion yen.[7]

As the number of USP applicants increased, the facilities and equipment could not cover the number of students. This cooperation project supported the construction of ICT center and the development of information and communication technology related equipment.

3.5 Project for Construction of Information and Communication Technology Center

at USP (Phase II)

This project is a grant aid for ICT. It's basic design survey was conducted in the same period as Phase I but the Grant was agreed upon in November, 2009 with a limit of 8.57 million yen.[8]

This cooperation project followed same project (Phrase I). As the number of USP applicants increased, the facilities and equipment could not cover the number of students.

3.6 USP-JICA ICT for Human Development and Human Security Project

This project is a grant aid, called a technical cooperation for education and ICT. According to JICA, this provided a new international level Net Centric Computer Bachelor's Degree (BNC) and Software Engineering Bachelor's Degree (BSE) program. In addition, we improved service provision through more efficient use of USPNet, provided distance education with new ICT, and established the operation center of the ICT center. As a result, it contributed to the development of ICT human resources in the region by providing an attractive computer science / information system (CS / IS) education program in Oceania and strengthening the ICT service provision ability

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[6] JICA URL: https://www2.jica.go.jp/ja/evaluation/pdf/2016_0800434_4_f.pdf
[7] JICA URL: https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/0802200/index.html
[8] JICA URL: https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/0961040/index.html

of South Pacific University. This project had a cooperation period between February, 2010 and January, 2013 with the Exchange of Note executed on October 30th, 2009 and a limit of 382 million yen. The Japanese institutions that cooperated in this project included: JPCERT Coordination Center, Kumamoto University and Padeco.[9]

3.7 Pacific-LEADS: Pacific Leaders' Educational Assistance for Development of State

In order to respond to disaster prevention, climate change, energy, etc., it is urgently necessary to foster core human resources who will be responsible for providing finance, administration, industrial promotion and social services.

In May 2015, Japan government held the 7th Pacific-Island Summit (PALM 7). Regarding "sustainable development" which is one of the topics, the Japanese government is important to foster young generation who plays an important role for the future of the country from the viewpoint of alleviating and overcoming the vulnerability of Pacific countries. Based on the recognition, a new training program "Pacific Islands Country Leaders Education Support Program" has been launched. This cooperation is planned to last from September, 2015 – March, 2021, however, this program is not limit to USP.

3.8 Expert on Coastal and Marine Resources Management (Regional)

This project aimed at strengthening human resource development and research of USP Department of Oceanography for sustainable marine resource conservation in Oceania.

JICA supports the development of coastal resource management methods by utilizing expert dispatch, volunteer dispatch and trainee acceptance for the purpose of sustainable utilization of fishery resources.

JICA constructed the USF Marine Department Building and facilities in 1998 and has continued to support them by dispatching experts and volunteers. The projects Exchange of Note was executed on October 30th, 2009 with the cooperation lasting from March, 2015 – February, 2018.[10]

USP has promoted collaborations with Kagoshima University, Ryukyu University, Kyoto University, and Mie University, but it is useful only for researchers in these universities to support Fiji's research, and that the USP Faculty of Oceanography lecturers give lectures in Japan. JICA pointed out that it was not effective.[11]

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[9] JICA URL: https://www.jica.go.jp/project/fiji/002/outline/
[10] JICA URL: Expert on Coastal and Marine Resources Management
[11] JICA URL: https://www.jica.go.jp/activities/project_list/knowledge/ku57pq00002jriei-att/2017_106_fij.pdf

4. Findings

Japan's ODA has shown that various projects of USP have been conducted. What is the role of JICA in establishment of international cooperation in the South Pacific?

It is well known that human resource, especially in developing countries, is an essential factor, thus the role of higher education to study expertise is very critical. It can be said that Japan contributes to the sustainable development of USP, however, it generally focuses on the infrastructure development of USP's ICT rather than contents of education. Obviously, USP's ICT and its infrastructure are very important in terms of management but with the development of ICT, the infrastructure has to be maintained and the maintenance cost is very high. In addition, Japan's ODA consists of projects which are conducted separately, hence, when the project is over, the its benefit is limited by undeveloped sustainable interaction.

5. Conclusion

Initially, professors and researchers from Tohoku University and the University of Electro-Communications were sent to Fiji, but recently the number of university staff has been decreasing. JICA staff and consultants from not universities have tended to be dispatched increasingly. On one hand, it seems to be positive trend that experts of distance education system infrastructure have been engaged in USP, however, infrastructure will completely be developed one day. Thinking of cornerstone, infrastructure can be considered as a tool for the important internal content, represented in human resources.

One of the most important questions, rising today, is what will happen to the relationships between Japan and the target countries of ODA after commissioning of infrastructural facilities? It is evident that creation of ties between Japanese educational intellectuals and target countries is a key factor of developing sustainable system. Obviously, the USP, as a tertiary educational institution, should build communication bridges and intensify relationships between teachers, researchers and students by means of cross-functional cooperation. Regrettably, reduction of Japanese teachers in ODA target countries has resulted in the loss of Japanese language classes. it seems to be reasonable to emphasize the promotion importance of connections between people through educational programs (intercultural exchange, exchange students, etc.).

Looking forward, it is important to outline an overriding priority of professors and researchers from Japanese universities to be involved in ODA projects in developing countries. This collaboration will contribute to the ability to advance efficiency of ODA projects as well as extract new findings from target countries. Additionally, cooperation through academic community will establish a strong relationship with the target countries and provide more profit for developing countries as well as Japan.

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