

Collaborating with Japanese University Students on a Computer Laboratory Project in a Nairobi Slum School

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要 旨

著者は2019年の夏に城西大学現代政策学部生の9名と共にケニア共和国のナイロビ市を訪れた。学生たちと2016年に創設したスラム学校でのパソコン・ラボを訪ねパソコンの台数を増幅し、ラボの改善、パソコン点検など彼らにも協力してもらった。さらに、スラム学校で開催されたシンポジウムにも参加し、豊田通商トヨタケニアアカデミーにも訪問した。また、The Management University of Africa [アフリカ経営大学]の学生たちとの文化交流会に参加し、その他様々な活動を行った。今回この執筆では、研修を開催する理由、背景などを理論的に提示し、現地で学生たちの活躍、活動を詳しく述べ、帰国後学生たちの声も紹介する。今回のケニア研修の経験を通じ、苦悩している現地のスラム学校の子供たちや地域コミュニティに対して少しでも貢献出来たかもしれない学生たちの一人一人には貴重な体験であり、一生記憶に残る体験であったと思われる。

キーワード: ケニア共和国、パソコン・ラボ、スラム街の学校、学生の声

1. Introduction and Background

Located in East Africa facing the Indian Ocean to the Southeast, the Republic of Kenya borders five other African countries: Uganda, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia. The total area of the country is about 58,000km² (around twice the size of Japan), and it has a population of around fifty million¹. The climate ranges from tropical on the coast to arid in the interior, with the capital Nairobi enjoying a mild climate since it is elevated at around 1,800 metres above sea level. Kenya became a British colony in 1920 and gained independence in 1963 and as with other ex-British colonies, English is widely spoken and is used in both the government and private business sectors. The school curriculum is also conducted in English, closely following the UK GCSE model. There are forty four tribes in Kenya, each with their own distinct customs and languages, making for a very diverse country. This diversity created a divisive rift that historically divided the country which still prevails today. There are a myriad of social issues such as a high rate of crime, substandard housing, issues of

health, food security and the environment that the government has been working to deal with.² Despite these challenges, today Kenya continues to have a high rate of economic growth³ and is also an important player in the East African Union.

Ritchie had always been fascinated with Kenya, so in 2015 he was delighted to be invited to visit the country to undertake research on education by a colleague Richard Miller, who was working with the Management University of Africa (MUA) in Nairobi. With the help of Dr. Peter Kithae, a MUA professor, Ritchie and Miller were introduced to Mr. Edmond Opondo, director of Grapesyard School, Korogocho⁴, a slum located in the north eastern suburbs of Nairobi. The School offers primary education to local children between the ages of six and thirteen was initiated by Mr. Opondo who is himself an MUA graduate. Mr. Opondo, who grew up in Korogocho, was initially a businessman, but he later decided that he wanted to contribute to his local community and do what he could to lift children in the area out of poverty. Realizing that education was a key to success, he established the school in 1999.⁵ Today, Grapesyard Organisation runs an orphanage (Alice for Schools) and Grapesyard School, which from a very humble beginning twenty years ago, now has an enrolment of around 1,200 students. The school provides more than just an education, though. It also uniforms the pupils, feeds them and organises sponsorship programmes.⁶ In numerous talks with Ritchie, Opondo emphasized that the food that the school provides to the children may be the only meal they get, since they come from homes of abject poverty where most families live on the equivalent of less than \$2 a day.⁷

It was during the initial tour of Grapesyard school and the immediate area in 2015 that Ritchie noticed that there were a few unused, battered, old donated computers lying in a heap in a corner. He then thought of bringing used computers from Japan to donate to the school with a vision to set up a computer laboratory to improve the children's education through access to technology. And, in March 2016, the beginnings of this dream were realised when Ritchie organized a delegation of foreign teachers from Japan to accompany him to the annual Peace as a Global Language conference MUA.⁸ As part of the trip, each member of the delegation was asked to bring a computer to donate and a small laboratory of eight computers was established in a new purpose-built computer room fitted with power outlets and chairs and tables. This intake of computers were then each connected to a server that provided digitised books.⁹ A year later, in March 2017, Ritchie returned to the school with a second delegation of teachers who helped expand the number of computers to sixteen.¹⁰ And in 2019, with help from a group of nine students from Josai University, the laboratory was expanded to thirty six computers. The school now has a fully functional laboratory which is able to serve the needs of the pupils by providing them with the tools they need to succeed in the digital age.¹¹ Section Two will introduce the 2019 trip and the activities that the students undertook during their stay, and Section Three will examine and discuss their feedback.

2. The Trip to Nairobi with Japanese Students

During the summer of 2019, Ritchie was planning a trip to Nairobi to undertake a study on university harassment and to take part in a symposium on Human Capital at Grapesyard School as part of its 20th anniversary celebrations.¹² In May, Ritchie mentioned this to his students, and asked if any of them would be interested in going. In the end, a group of nine students¹³ expressed a desire to go. And, when they heard about the computer laboratory project, they also expressed interest in making an effort to procure computers in Japan to take with them in order to increase the number of computers.

The trip took place in September of 2019 during the summer holiday period. Students had worked independently for several months beforehand to raise money through crowdfunding initiatives and by asking their parents and friends for donations. In the end, although the crowd funding initiative itself failed, the students were able to raise a total of 110,000 yen (around 1,000 US dollars). With funding secured, Ritchie accompanied them to Akihabara (the electronics district of Tokyo), where they bought a total of seven used computers. These were added to another nine that had been kindly donated by friends, family, staff and professors. Finally, after much hard work preparing for the trip, on September 1, the delegation of ten (including Ritchie) made their way to Nairobi with the sixteen computers packed into their luggage (refer to Table 1 for the trip itinerary).

Table 1: Kenya Trip Itinerary (August 31-September 7, 2019)

Day	Event
Day 1	Depart Japan
Day 2	Arrive Nairobi. Initial visit to Grapesyard School
Day 3	Visit to Grapesyard School and Symposium on Human Capital
Day 4	Visit to the Management University of Africa
Day 5	Visit to Tokyo Toyosu Kenya: Grapesyard
Day 6	Day off
Day 7	Depart Kenya
Day 8	Arrive Japan

September 1. Day 2.

The delegation arrived in Nairobi in the morning, local time. After exiting the airport, the students purchased local sim cards (so as to be able to stay in contact at all times). A hotel van then picked the group up and took them to the Sentrim Boulevard Hotel, located just a short walk from downtown Nairobi and close to the University of Nairobi and the Nairobi National Museum. Following check-in and lunch, it was decided to make an initial visit to

Grapesyard School and after confirming with Mr. Opondo, the group made their way to Korogocho. Mr. Opondo and several teachers and pupils came and met the delegation just outside the southern part of the slum, and escorted them to the school. There, the delegation dropped off the computers and introduced themselves to Mr. Opondo and his staff. This was followed by a quick tour of the school, and a brief introduction to some of the 1,200 pupils. In the early evening, the delegation made its way back to the hotel, and after a short break, took a walk to downtown Nairobi where they bought some supplies and did a little shopping before retiring to the hotel for the evening.

September 2. Day 3.

On the morning of Day 3, the delegation members made their way back to Grapesyard School with the task of setting the computers up. Under supervision from Ritchie and the head teacher, Mr. Charles Guda, some focused on installing the OS, several took an inventory and a few repaired and updated computers that required it. In the afternoon, the delegation took part in a symposium on social capital.¹⁴ The students, dressed in newly acquired Grapesyard t-shirts, introduced themselves to the audience, before taking part in the activities. The event also coincided with the 20th anniversary of the founding of Grapesyard Organisation and afterwards the students were invited to take part in a traditional concert put on by Kikuyu dancers, as well as a feast.

September 3. Day 4.

On day 4, the delegation took part in student exchange and cultural activities at MUA's new campus located on the outskirts of Nairobi, organised by Dr. Kithae. Following introductions to the staff and photo opportunities at the main Nairobi Campus, the delegation made its way to the new campus, about an hour away from central Nairobi. There, they were given a tour and met some of the first cohort of first-year students who live on campus, in student accommodation. Following lunch, the students took part in a class, where they interacted with their Kenyan peers, teaching them about Japan and Japanese culture. Afterwards, the group were invited to play a mixed team soccer match to encourage further interaction and friendship. Then, they were invited to plant saplings along with their African peers in a show of solidarity and camaraderie.

September 4. Day 5.

On the morning of Day 5, the delegation made its way to Toyota Kenya Academy, located close to MUA. Following a tour of the facilities, they were given a presentation on the activities of Toyota in East Africa and Kenya. It was explained to them how Toyota contributes to the local community by providing employment opportunities to lift communities out of poverty and to encourage better nutrition and sustainability. Toyota also provides training to the locals so they can independently solve some of the issues facing their

communities at the grassroots level. Following lunch, the delegation made their way back to Grapesyard School where students were invited to teach classes on Japanese culture. First-year students worked in pairs, while the older students took their own classes.

September 5. day 6.

The student delegation took a well deserved day off and went on an early morning Safari to Nairobi National park, which is just a short drive from central Nairobi. There they were fortunate to see four of the “big five” animals that frequent the park (lions, leopards, rhinoceroses and buffalo). They also visited an area of the park which hosts an enormous pile of ivory ash. The Kenyan government has been burning confiscated ivory and rhino horns in the park since 1989 to show the world that they are serious about animal conservation and stamping out the ivory trade, which has drastically reduced numbers of elephants.

3. Student Feedback and Discussion

Following their return to Japan, Ritchie invited each of the participants to submit feedback regarding the trip to gauge how they, as young Japanese, had been influenced by their activities and what they had learned. This section introduces that feedback, with each accompanied by an brief comment. Note that the names have been removed and the order randomized.¹⁵

Student A: When I was asked by Professor Ritchie if I was interested in going to Kenya, I had images of what Kenya was like. However, when I went there, it was a world removed from what I had imagined. It was different to Japan, and I could learn so many things from the trip that I didn't know before. There were many things I found hard to get used to such as the atmosphere of the city, the food, and the life-style. By interacting with the children at Grapesyard school, I realised that one can relate to the smiles and joys of others and I deeply felt that we all have things in common beyond culture and language.

Ritchie has lived in Japan for many years and notes that it is quite common for young Japanese to have misconceptions about other countries, especially Africa, and the above comment from Student A encapsulates some of these sentiments. While the student stated that things were quite different to Japan, the time spent in Kenya also made them realise that people everywhere share many commonalities that transcend language or culture.

Student B: In Nairobi, where the economy is booming, I reaffirmed the importance of education. At the symposium held at Grapesyard School, we were able to hear the opinions of graduates. One of them said, “For me, school was not just a place to study, but to fulfil my dream. It is a shield that protected us from the dangers of the slum” I learned that

education is the first step to escape poverty and began to think about my own identity through different cultures. I know Kenya has experienced high economic growth and in the midst of that, I could see the value of education. I realized I am spoiled.

This student felt deeply moved by some of the remarks made by a Grapesyard graduate at the symposium. The student has eloquently quoted how the presenter did not feel sorry for themselves; instead they used the opportunity to get out of the slum to build a successful life, realizing that education is the key to success. The student also considers that many people in wealthy countries, such as Japan, are spoiled and should be thankful for the opportunities presented to them.

Student C: I went to Africa, a place where I have always wanted to go and I had many valuable experiences there. The slums you see on television are so widespread I was lost for words the first time I saw one. At the same time, I realized what is usual in Japan for us is not usual in Kenya, leaving me helpless feeling. There was much we did in Kenya over the week, and I want to make sure that I never forget the people I met there and live a life devoid of shame.

Student C noted how they had always been interested in going to Africa, and what they saw in reality was so different to what is presented on television. And, as others have also mentioned, it was natural for them to compare life in Kenya to Japan, which are worlds apart. They also felt that the people they met in Kenya made them think of the direction of their own life, and they came to realise how they should work to live a fulfilling life in Japan, and take full advantage of things.

Student D: In an era where we can get any information through the media and other various tools, I learned the importance of actually seeing and feeling first hand. It made me think that people in rich countries with poor hearts are actually less prosperous than children in poor countries who have rich hearts. However, I also felt that human beings were the same in any environment. Looking at the children of Kenya who laughed happily, I wondered, will I be able manage to live a good life? Unfortunately, I couldn't feel what they felt. This program was a good experience for me, I realised the world was so big, but I am so small.

This student was also moved by their experiences in Nairobi and noted how insignificant they felt in a vast world outside of Japan. The student also made a thought provoking statement that alludes to how the poor may be richer in other ways. They have seen first-hand the challenging situation that many Kenyans find themselves in, and consider themselves to be lucky living in Japan.

Student E: My first visit to Kenya was one surprise after another. I visited Nairobi, the capital, but there are slums there, and there many people with missing arms and legs, and we were often mistaken for Chinese, but it was an excellent week. In Kenya, the gap between rich and poor is still large and I went to a slum and talked with the children at the school and could feel their poverty, but on the other hand they gave me so much energy. I want to make use of this experience and the things I felt while there in my future life.

This student wrote how the pupils of the school were so full of energy, even though they have very little, and how they felt invigorated through interacting with them. They also made numerous observations regarding the conditions around them, including a rather amusing one: that of being mistaken for a Chinese.¹⁶

Student F: For the first time, Josai University students took a big step by going on a trip to Africa. They undertook a major project to deliver a computer Lab to an elementary school in Kenya. From conversion the installation of the OS, and the wiring, everything was undertaken through the cooperation of the professor and the students. I took a class and taught the pupils traditional Japanese culture and music, etc. But their lives are full of danger, and they go through things that would be unimaginable in Japan. They live desperately, facing crimes, drugs and accidents every day. I would like the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies at Josai University to continue such projects every year.

Student F was proud to have been part of a first cohort of students to Africa from Josai University. They also outlined some of the work they did in developing the computer laboratory and how delighted they were to have been involved in setting up the computers, and teaching classes about Japan. However, they were also concerned about the conditions of the area around the school which are less than ideal, and how every day is a struggle.

Student G: I had an image of poor security in Kenya, but when I went there, the people were warm and gentle. Through the Safari I felt that it was a very good place where animals and people lived at ease. However, there are many cases where poverty is an issue; where people wear tattered clothes in several areas or children's' classrooms are in darkness without electricity. I strongly felt that I would like to not forget the importance of contribution and to help and save people who suffer from poverty in places such as Kenya.

Student G noted (and other students mentioned) that the people were warm and gentle in Kenya, which alludes to how things were not as dangerous or scary as they had imagined. The Safari left quite an impression on them, and they described how Kenyans are much more in harmony with nature than most Japanese people. However, they were worried about the living conditions of many Kenyans and hoped to somehow contribute to helping those who

suffer from similar circumstances.

Student H: My experience in Kenya has changed my general knowledge. Born in Japan, studying and living without inconvenience are the norm. But in Kenya that is not the norm. Clean water, food, and the housing are things we take for granted in Japan. I will never forget what I learned as a volunteer in Kenya, and seeing people trying to break out of the slum and trying to make their own way, made me want to do my best in my life.

Student H also mentioned how they were grateful that they lived in an advanced country such as Japan, where people take simple things such as clean water, food and decent housing for granted. They were also impressed with those in the slum trying to get ahead and improve their lives and were motivated by their experiences to improve their own lives and do the best they can upon returning to Japan.

I went to foreign countries and Kenya for the first time. I was very scared before going and things there were very different from how I had imagined them to be. The people were gentle, but after all, the culture is too different from Japan. I felt the poverty level to be great, too. On the ground, in Africa, there was not much I felt I could do, but I wanted to contribute as much as I could. In the future, I also want to help where I can.

It was the first time for Student H to travel outside of Japan and it was natural that they felt trepidation; yet things were not as scary as they had expected. Kenyans were very hospitable and welcoming, but the culture was so different to Japan and the level of poverty was a challenge. As several others mentioned, they felt a sense of helplessness that the challenges were immense. Yet, they wished they could have contributed more during their stay.

4. Concluding Remarks

The nine students from the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Science of Josai University who visited Kenya in September 2019 were pioneering, and just deciding to go must have taken an enormous amount of courage, especially since the trip was not part of an official program. Also impressive was the fact they paid their own way, and carried out much of the planning, including arranging their own air tickets and choosing the hotel. Several also took the initiative to procure used computers that they then hand delivered to the school and helped set up. In Nairobi, the students learned much about the myriad of issues that disadvantaged communities in developing countries face hands-on, something that is just not possible within the classroom. They were outside of their comfort zones and were exposed to some extreme poverty and trying conditions that were very different from which they are used to. The

people they met and the things they experienced re-shaped their views of the world and influenced how they perceived their lives in Japan, making them realise just how privileged they are. They were also deeply impressed with the hospitality and warmth of the Kenyans they met, and how people who live in extreme circumstances are positive and upbeat, despite the hardships they face in their daily lives. It is clear that they thought the trip to Kenya was valuable and worthwhile and found it to be a very precious experience.

Finally, the students returned to Japan invigorated. They seem to have more confidence in themselves and have incorporated many of their experiences from the trip into their own learning within the classroom. Many of them have also expressed a desire to return to Kenya to re-connect with those they met. It was certainly a life-changing experience.

Notes

- 1 This figure is the official population according to the latest national census that was conducted in 2019. Refer to: <https://kenyayote.com/census-results-2019-in-kenya-population-per-county-report-pdf/>
- 2 Kalih, P. (2019). *Kenya's Outstanding Leadership in Spearheading National, Regional and Global Peace*. Presented at the Peace as a Global Conference, held at Josai University on November 9, 2019. In this presentation, Mr. Kalih also outlined the Kenya Vision Strategy of the Kenya government that aims to transform Kenya into industrialized, middle-income country that provides a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030. Also refer to: <https://vision2030.go.ke/>
- 3 The World Bank forecasts economic growth in Kenya to be 5.9% in 2020. Refer to: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview/>
- 4 One of the largest slums in Nairobi. It hard to know exactly how many people live in the 1.5km² area. It is common to hear a figure of between 150,000-200,000.
- 5 Opondo, E. (2019). The Evolution of Grapesyard School. Presented via Skype from Nairobi at the Peace as a Global Language conference held at Josai University. November 9. Also refer to: <http://www.grapesyardkenya.org/> for further information.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Richard Miller and Zane Ritchie worked with MUA to bring the annual Peace as a Global Language conference to Nairobi in 2016. The conference itself was held over two days on March 3-4, with the theme: Peace building with an African Focus.
- 9 Ritchie, Z. (2016). *Setting Up A Computer Lab In A Nairobi Slum School: improving educational opportunities through digital textbooks* (Poster). First presented at PanSig 2016. Nago, Okinawa, May. 22. "The computer lab was formally established on March 5, 2016, in a purpose built room within the main school campus. Over two days, Ritchie and Bethell worked on setting up the lab which uses a Linux based Raspberry Pi, a thirty five dollar mini-computer server to provide a series of digital textbooks to the computers" Also refer to: Gondress, G., Ritchie Z., Edwards P., et al (2018). *Narratives from an*

- Excursion to Grapesyard School in Korogocho Slum, Nairobi: Reflections and Perspectives on Education, Community Spirit and Resilience*. In the Bulletin of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2:2018, for an account from the delegation of teachers who visited Grapesyard in 2016.
- 10 Referred to in Ritchie, Z, Kitamura, Y. (2018). *Establishing a Computer Laboratory in a Slum School in Nairobi: An interview with Administration and Teaching Staff a Year On* (Poster). Presented at Engaged Pedagogy Association (EPA) conference, Daito Bunka Kaikan Hall, June 3. This presentation outlined research on the state of the computer lab a year on through interviews with the head teacher, Mr. Charles Guda and several teachers. It concluded that the laboratory was a generally a success, although there were issues regarding the small number of computers, which limited the contact time per student, maintenance of the computers, teacher training, and relevancy of the digital textbooks to the curriculum.
 - 11 Ibid. In the interviews with the teachers, one of the unexpected remarks was that on computer day the number absentees decreased markedly. Having the computer lab available motivated the pupils to come to school and they got more engaged in the learning process.
 - 12 The Grapesyard Symposium on social capital was held on September 3, 2019 at the newly established Soma Library on the school grounds that was built with a substantial donation from Mr. Kobe Soma, chairman of the Kobe Peace Institute (<http://kobepeace.org/>), and support from Academics Supporting Korogocho (ASK), among others.
 - 13 The nine students comprised of 4 first-year students (2 males and 2 females); 3 third-year students (all male); and 2 fourth-year students (1 male and 1 female). Remarkably, the students paid for the entire trip out of their own pockets. This was not an official programme, although the University endorsed the trip.
 - 14 The symposium on *Social Capital as a Way to Progress* was organised by Academics Supporting Korogocho (ASK). There were around fifty attendees, attendee, including academics from MUA and other local agencies. Ritchie presented on issues of harassment in Japan, and lessons for Kenya.
 - 15 Feedback regarding the trip were solicited via a group chat in the social media chat app, LINE. Students were requested to freely write their thoughts on the trip between one hundred and two hundred Japanese characters. In that respect, the results are rather raw; however they are a good indication of the students' thoughts regarding their experiences. Although two of the nine students chose to write their feedback in English, the rest wrote in Japanese which the author has translated.
 - 16 Many of the students made similar sentiments during the trip about being mistaken for Chinese. In recent years the number of Chinese have exploded in Kenya in accordance with increased investment into the country. The author also recalls a much larger number of Chinese tourists during the fourth trip in 2019, compared to that of the initial trip in 2015.

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Abstract

In the summer of 2019, the author accompanied a group of nine students from the Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies, Josai University to Nairobi to partake in a project to develop and expand a computer laboratory that he had established there in 2016. During the trip, the group also took part in a number of other activities, including a symposium, a visit to Toyota Kenya, and cultural exchange activities with African students at the Management University of Africa. This paper will outline the background and rationale for the trip, and the activities that the students took part in, before briefly discussing their feedback.

Keywords: Kenya, slum school, computer laboratory, Japanese university students