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Transcript of Lecture [ISF Forum 7]: Winning the Japanese Government Scholarship (aka MEXT) Scheme

Saturday 20th June, 2020; 0200pm WAT

Lecturer I: Emmanuel Dansu Jesuyon.

B.Sc: Industrial Mathematics (First Class), Federal University of Technology, Akure (2010);

M.Sc: M. Tech Mathematical Optimization (Distinction), Federal University of Technology, Akure (2014);

Ph.D scholarship: Mathematical Biology/Sociology, Tohoku University, Japan (in view)

Lecturer II: Chisom Joshua Onu.

B.Sc: Microbiology (First Class), University of Nigeria (2013);

M.Sc: Biotechnology (Distinction), Osaka University, Japan (2019);

Ph.D scholarship: Biological Sciences, Wayne State University, USA (in view)

Moderator: Scholar Justin

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Lecture Phase

1. Contribution from Lecturer 1
2. Concluding part by Lecturer 2

Now the Lecturer I

I have been asked to talk about the Embassy Recommendation Track of the Japanese MEXT Scholarship. The MEXT Scholarship is a fully funded scholarship for different categories of students including research students (MSc/PhD), undergraduates, college of technology students and specialized training college students.

It is funded by the Japanese Government Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, Culture and Technology.

The scholarship takes care of visa, return flight, tuition and monthly stipends for scholars' upkeep. If you have a family, you can conveniently take care of them based on your stipends. If you are married, your spouse may also be able to work or even study with tuition fee waiver.

Japan is one of the most developed countries in the world and currently the third largest world economy. This would mean that there is a lot a student can learn by just living in Japan not to talk of studying there.

The educational system is highly developed as it has been in existence for centuries. However, language can be an issue. Undergraduate scholars usually have to study the language for at least one year before starting their studies. For other scholars, it is very important to choose a programme that is taught in English or to master the Japanese language. For MSc and PhD students, choosing a Professor is the most important decision you will make. Be sure to choose a Prof that is exposed and has been publishing in English so that your research interactions can be conveniently done in English. For instance, I am very blessed to have a Professor with whom I basically communicate in English. We only exchange pleasantries in Japanese.

Once you can get an exposed Prof, any course of study in Japan would be great. However, Japan is known for some technological advancement that even the West can only dream of. As such, Japan is particularly an excellent place for technologically inclined courses like Physics, Robotics, Engineering, Chemistry, Architecture, Agriculture and all that.

Age is very crucial here, for you to be qualified to apply for the MSc/PhD programme for the 2021 set, you should be born on or after April 1, 1986 so that you are at most 35 years old when you resume in April 2021. This was a near miss for me as I was only two months away from disqualification. Please find the age requirements for the other programmes.

Being a highly competitive scholarship, a very strong academic background is very crucial. For undergraduate studies, an excellent O Level result, probably with all As, would be very cool. For others, I think CGPAs of 4.30/5.00 upwards can place one in good stead, the higher the better though. In my set (2017), I learnt about 400 of us applied; 70 were shortlisted for the written test in Abuja; 18 made it to the interview stage and 8 of us were finally selected. The final number selected varies from year to year but I think it ranges from 4 to 8 for Nigerians.

The requirements include Excellent Academic Background, Filling the Forms as Nicely as Possible (there are even grades for this), Doing Well on the Test Organized by the Embassy or the Test Organized by a Willing Professor in a Japanese University in the case of those nominated by such Professors, Braving the Interview Thereby Passing the First Selection (it is as good as done at this stage) and Getting a Willing Professor in a Japanese University.

Once the forms are downloaded, they can be filled electronically before printing. The Health Form should be printed and taken to a recognized health facility for the necessary tests. There is a form for choosing prospective professors and course of study, so candidates should do their own research to identify at least three professors that they would like to work with. I usually suggest Tohoku (my University), Nagoya, Kyushu, Hokkaido since they have records of thriving international students. The embassy usually advises against choosing Universities in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka because of the cut throat competitiveness for admission and the high cost of living in those cities. However, in my set, one of us went to Tokyo and another one went to Kyoto.

In addition to the forms, you are required to attach every certificate you might have starting from Birth Certificate to Primary School Certificate and Testimonial, Junior and Secondary School Results, Certificates and Testimonials, BSc and MSc Certificates and Transcripts, NYSC Discharge Certificate, Award Certificates, Wedding Certificate (if you are married), Children's Birthday Certificate (if you have kids) as well as Reference Letters. You should understand that the Japanese are so crazy about documentation that it sometimes get annoying for even Japanese people.

Please don't forget that the documents whose originals you cannot submit would have to be notarized in a competent court. All you do is make like three or four copies of each document and take them to court for signing after showing the originals. For those interested in MSc and PhD, you will need to present a research proposal and attach your publications (if you have any). After filling the forms and notarizing your documents, you can courier your application package to the embassy in Abuja. If you are in Abuja, you can also submit in person.

Going through the embassy means you will write a test that is basically about the English Language (Comprehension, Lexis and Structure). There is a Japanese part of the test too but it doesn't really matter, just do it anyhow you can. When I did my test, I could not read any Japanese character. However, I copied the questions back for them. If you can study the basic Japanese scripts (Hiragana and Katakana), you might be able to really answer the questions. Don't forget, the Japanese part doesn't really count.

Popular English Proficiency Tests are not necessary but if you have written them in the past, you could just indicate your score on the form and attach your certificate. It may be the little edge you will have over another candidate. In my case, I had written IELTS and GRE so I just attached my scores. Don't forget they are not necessary.

Based on how you fill the forms, your academic history and your performance on the test, you might be selected for an interview where you face a panel in the embassy. The questions are usually about your background, why you want to study in Japan, why you are interested in your line of research and what you want to do after your studies. As a Mathematician, I remember emphasizing that I was interested in Japan because they had produced about 24 Nobel Prize Winners as well as 3 Field Medal Prize Winners (more like the Nobel Prize in Mathematics). I guess I also had the advantage of already being an Assistant Lecturer in a University (only 3 out of the 8 of us selected had such status though). Having a letter of acceptance from a Japanese professor at the interview stage might also boost your chances though most professors only respond when you have scaled through the interview. In my case, my supervisor accepted me before I went for the interview. He was the only one who ever responded to my email, of all the professors I wrote.

Research Statement and Purpose

An award winning statement of purpose would contain your academic background in brief, highlighting some of the key courses you took that are relevant to the programme you are applying for. It might also be helpful to point out awards you got that are relevant. Leadership experience is also becoming important these days. So, you stand a better chance if you excel academically and still held extracurricular leadership positions. You can now go ahead to establish why you are interested in the programme, the University and even the country. If you have potential supervisor, by all means mention that you are interested in their work.

Research plan is more like a time line of the things you intend to do on your programme but I think research proposal is more important. For a research proposal, all you need is state your proposed research title, your objectives, literature review with references, methodology and probably the timeline for your proposed area of research.

If you meet the requirements I have stated above, feel free to get to work. It seems July 31 is the deadline for submission this year! Thanks for attending my TEDTalk.

Lecturer II

Thank you ISF for having me. And thank you Mr Emmanuel, you made my work easy. Emmanuel gave an explicit explanation on all about MEXT but I will highlight a few things peculiar to University recommended type. In University recommendation, you MUST have a professor in Japan that has accepted to supervise you before you can apply.

Secondly, the required documents have to be mailed to Japan. I will advise you use FedEx or DHL. They are quite expensive (24K) to send documents but it is worth every effort. So how do you get a supervisor and when should I start? The best short is to widen your search. Write out all federal schools or schools of interest in Japan, Go their department pages to see the professors doing what you plan doing (this should be in line with your BSc). Narrow it down and start writing the professors. I advise you start this process at least 8-12 months before the time you wish to start the application. This will give you enough time for the search and for professors to reply you. Note, not all professors will reply you so don't be discouraged. So now I have a professor, what next? The professor or secretary of the lab will email you the required documents and inform you when to apply (pls check your mail daily). Fill in the form and scan all required documents. Send to your professor for vetting before mailing the hard copies to Japan (This is very important so you won't have to mail twice. Any mistake will mean you will send it again, no please in Japan). Once you get shortlisted, you will be expected to write an exam. This could be by Skype or mail (with given time). Please, avoid copying answers from the internet. If is mail questions, provide practical answers relating to your country. The Japanese love authenticity and culture.

Please note that one of the documents you have to submit is TOEFL for Osaka University or a proof from your university that your program was conducted in English. Once you have passed the exam. You will be selected, no politics. Other required documents will be sent to you by your supervisor. Air ticket to Japan and all other. The document you will attach when looking for supervisor includes, transcript, CV, why you want to join his lab. Reading his papers will boost your chances.. In summary, start early,, get a supervisor, apply, write the exams, get selected, go to Japan, study and excel.

In conclusion, getting a scholarship is an active process and involves a lot of effort. No effort is too much for a fully funded and prestigious scholarship like MEXT. Free air ticket, 450,000K/month and an education that is prestigious. Thanks for attending my TEDTALK. Hope to hear your success stories soon. We rise by lifting others.

Questions & Answers

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| Q: Please was any health course selected for the scholarship | A: A lot, yes I had friends from Medicine. All courses are eligible but the science courses stand a higher chance of getting supervisors. |
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| Q: Thank you sir, please can a final year student try the Scholarship for MSc? | A: Your NYSC certificate will be required at the Embassy. I am not sure of the University Recommendation Track though. |
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| Q: Please can mr Emmanuel buttress more on the research plan, a template or skeletal framework will do | A: At this point, all you need is a general idea of what you would like to do. More like a research idea with possible methodologies. It is not as serious as research plan required for most scholarships. In fact, the space for it on the form is small. |
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| Q: How can the forms be filled electronically? | A: Filling electronically is better. You have to be a bit skillful with your computer to do this though since the form will be a like a normal MS Word or MS Excel template.
I filled mine by hand back then though. |
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| Q: Can the English proficiency certificate gotten from my university be used instead of TOEFL or IELTS? | A: The English Proficiency thing is just by the way. It is not so important. In fact, the embassy test is basically an English exam. If you have written any of those tests, just put it. If not, no worries. For university recommendation yes. Japan is not an English speaking country.
Exactly. I must add that you may still need to write TOEFL, IELTS or TOEIC before getting into your MSc or PhD programme even after arriving in Japan. I had to write TOEIC since my IELTS result had expired by the time I was getting into my PhD programme. |
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| Q: I appreciate the Scholars for this captivating lecture. Is the programme also meant for those who studied education | A: There is a special teacher training scholarship every year too. It last for one and half years. |
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Q: How many times will I be asked to send documents to the university (through university recommendation)?	A: 2-3 times provided you do everything well. Always scan and email your professor for vetting before mailing them
Q: Must I get a professor from my university of choice before completing the application?	A: For embassy recommendation, not necessarily. For university recommendation, yes!
Q: Is there a separate application for both Scholarship and School admission?	A: For university recommendation, the same. Just one application. Same for embassy recommendation. One application.
Q: Do someone need to apply for admission to schools and then apply for the MEXT scholarship differently?	A: You just apply for MEXT Scholarship through the embassy.
Q: With or without the acceptance letter from a potential supervisor, will it be okay to go ahead with the MEXT application.	A: You don't have to worry about a supervisor through embassy recommendation until after you pass the primary screening. If you have an acceptance before hand, it is not bad though.
Q: Is it all the Japanese universities that are involved in MEXT?	A: Most are involved for embassy but for university recommendation, all govt owned universities are involved
Q: A very big thank you to the scholars who have sacrificed their time for this awesome TEDTalk. My question goes thus: How long should the texts or mails to potential supervisors be? (in terms of characters or words) On the placement preference application form, there are two questions that are conflicting to me. First they asked: 1. Field of study in Japan 2. Detailed field of study in Japan. What's the difference pls	A: Sample email: Dear Professor xyz, I am ABC and I graduated from the Department of pqr of the Obafemi Awolowo University with a First Class Bachelor's Degree. I had a cumulative grade point average of 5.00/5.00 (100%). I have gone through your research profile and I am interested in undertaking my postgraduate studies under your tutelage. I am interested in bla bla research. I am in the process of applying for the MEXT Scholarship through Embassy recommendation. Please find attached my CV and research proposal. I am very grateful for your kind considerations. Best regards, ABC 1. Field of study in Japan may be something like Mathematical Optimization 2. Detailed field of Study may be Optimal Control of the Spread of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa
Q: If you are using embassy, will you be required to send 2-3 times to embassy too or how or the university will later contact to send 2-3 times as	A: After your first application, you may be required to bring some more documents by the embassy as you advance in the process. It all depends.

you have mentioned. Pls help clarify very well

Q: It was mentioned during the lecture that in addition to the form, you are to attach, birth certificate down to all personal documents. So my question is, is there any form we are downloading, filled and attached while submitting at the embassy or what we only need do is to go with our documents and the form of a thing will be sorted out at the embassy????

A: The Japanese embassy website has the instructions. You have to download the forms, fill them and go to submit to the embassy with the necessary certificates.



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