



e-Learning with Ninjas

The Surala Ninja! cloud e-learning system is helping children in developing countries improve their basic academic skills.

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SCHOOLS overseas are introducing a cloud e-learning system for elementary school arithmetic in a bid to break the negative cycle of educational gaps due to income disparities.

There are numerous businesses undertaken by Japanese companies that are contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The Surala Ninja! cloud e-learning system for arithmetic designed for elementary school pupils

overseas is one of the outstanding models of such businesses. This e-learning system uses Japanese ninja characters that are very popular among children all



SuRaLa Net Co. Chief Executive Officer Takahiko Yunokawa
Photo: Mao Fujita

1, 3, 4 Pupils enjoy e-learning with ninjas at a SuRaLa Net facility in Sri Lanka.

2 A training session for facilitators (instructors) of SuRaLa Net facilities

Photos: Courtesy of SuRaLa Net Co.,Ltd

over the world. The system was born as a version of the original Surala e-learning program that was released in Japan in 2008 with modifications made for overseas use. This e-learning system is characterized by high-quality education for a low price. Takahiko Yunokawa, president and CEO of SuRaLa Net Co., the developer and marketer of the system, provides the following explanation.

“A major concept for both SuRaLa Net and Surala Ninja! is that children who are not attending school for a variety of reasons can understand arithmetic with no intervention by teachers. Almost all preceding e-learning systems were developed for economically privileged children whose academic abilities fall in the middle or higher levels. There was no

e-learning system developed with the consistent concept of enabling children with low academic ability who are not attending school to study arithmetic systematically in small steps.”

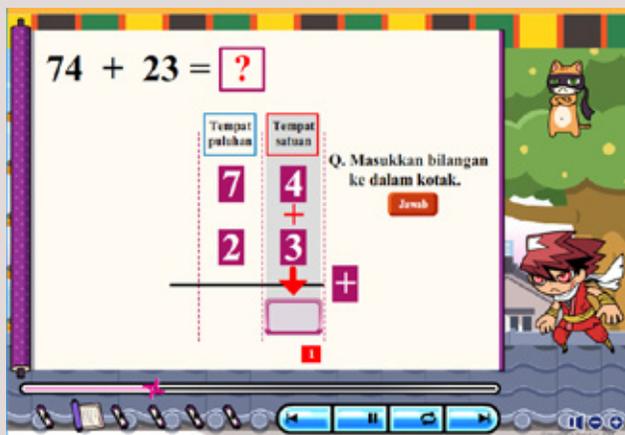
SuRaLa Net opened Surala JUKU, the first after-school study facility of its kind where Surala Ninja! is used for teaching arithmetic to children, in 2015 in a slum area of Sri Lanka with the adoption by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) of the Preparatory Survey for base of the pyramid (BoP) Business Promotion project for businesses that contribute to the solution of problems faced by the impoverished class in 2014. The company now operates seventeen Surala JUKU facilities in Sri Lanka. Fifty to 100 children, mainly in the low-income class, attend each facility. In addition, the e-learning software program is used for classwork in certain parts of Indonesia and India.

An animation starts when the children log in to the Surala Ninja! system. The characters begin their actions with the ninja protagonist named Hayate in the center. Voice actors and actresses ask the children questions and praise their achievements in clear voices depending on the scene.

The interactive style of instruction enables children to enjoy and learn at the same time while maintaining a suitable feeling of tension. The incorporation of game factors that excite children is another major characteristic of this system. It displays ranks as studies advance, enabling the children to compete with other pupils and win medals on the screen.

Furthermore, the classwork progresses in ultra-small steps that are elaborately designed to ensure an understanding of the matters taught, giving the children a sense of achievement and a feeling of definite understanding.

Instructors are essential for the operation of these after-school study facilities. SuRaLa Net hires two facilitators (instructors) per facility from the impoverished class in local communities in partnership with Women’s Bank, a local nonprofit organization undertaking deposit, financing and insurance operations for women who belong to the BoP class.



Screenshot of the Surala Ninja! interface, overseas version
Photo: Courtesy of SuRaLa Net Co.,Ltd

At the start, SuRaLa Net staff members dispatched from Japan educated and trained these facilitators. Recently, local staff members have begun to provide them with training.

The friendly, enthusiastic approach of the facilitators has won favorable comments. In a questionnaire survey, 96% of parents rated the facilitators as “very good.” On the other hand, 92% of surveyed facilitators replied that their income grew and all of them said that they were satisfied with the job.

Says Yunokawa, “We must eliminate the vicious circle of income disparities leading directly to educational gaps. We are advancing our business targeting the BoP class based on this concept. Children who belong to this class comprise a significant majority in developing countries. They have potential for high performance. I believe that the improvement of their basic academic levels leads directly to the development and growth of their respective countries.”

In May 2017, this business won the Scale-out Award in the SDGs Business Award 2017, a commendation for Japanese companies’ superior SDG businesses co-sponsored by the BoP Global Network Japan and the Tokutaro Hiramoto Laboratory at the Kanazawa Institute of Technology.

Surala Ninja! is attracting attention in Japan and abroad as an advanced example of contributions to the solution of problems in the three areas of poverty, education and gender equality. 