

June 5, 2015

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Plans on the Promotion of Improvement of Students' English Abilities

1. Background

- The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) supports leading efforts and teacher training which aim to improve Japanese students' English abilities in elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools based on the English Education Reform Plan in Response to Globalization (announced in December 2013) (Reference 1).
- However,
 - 1) FY2014 Survey on English abilities for improving English education for third-year upper secondary school students shows that students **have problems in all four skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, writing)**(Reference 2).
 - 2) **Sufficient improvement was not seen in the English abilities of students in lower and upper secondary schools** obtained through the Survey on the Implementation Status of English Education annually implemented by MEXT since FY 2011 (Reference 3).
- In light of such situations, MEXT **will formulate Plans on Promoting Improvement of Students' English Abilities** as described in the abovementioned plan.

2. Basic concepts of reform

- ◆ The national and prefectural governments will set clear goals (GOAL 2020) towards steadily improving students' English abilities
- ◆ Annually publicize progress made in these goals to promote improvements according to the plan.

Goals of Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (from FY 2013 - 2017)

(*) Aim for 50% of the students at the end of the lower secondary school to pass a minimum of Grade 3 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency. (*) Aim for 50% of the students at the end of the upper secondary school to pass a minimum of Grade Pre-2 or Grade 2 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency.

- Specify following items:
 - 1) **Request prefectures to set and publicize goals** based on the national government's goals on students' English abilities.

(*) Goals set during the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (until FY 2017) **shall be implemented by the end of FY 2015.**

2) **Publicize survey results on students' English abilities per prefecture based on the Survey on the Implementation Status of English Education**
(*) To be implemented from FY 2016

FY 2014: Around 35% of the students at the end of the lower secondary school had a minimum English proficiency of Grade 3 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency (includes students who passed Grade 3 or higher: 18.4%, and students who had nearly the same English proficiency: 16.3%).

Around 32% of the students at the end of the upper secondary school had a minimum English proficiency of Grade Pre-2 or Grade 2 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency (includes students who passed Grade Pre-2, Grade 2, or higher: 11.1%, and students who had nearly the same English proficiency: 20.8%).

3) **Implement a nationwide survey to measure students' academic levels in the four skills in English to ascertain students' English abilities in the lower secondary school compulsory education phase**

- Improve school guidance to achieve steady improvement in students' English abilities, establish a PDCA Cycle to improve English education by the national and prefectural governments.
- Implement surveys at certain intervals once every few years for students in third-year lower secondary school.

4) Continue ascertaining and analyzing students' English abilities in lower and upper secondary schools, utilize private qualification and language exams which measure all four skills in English for university admissions.

3. Future schedule of assessing students' English abilities in lower secondary school

- Goal-setting and review on related measures will be implemented at the end of the term for the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education. In addition, nationwide surveys on students' English abilities in all four skills for lower secondary school will be introduced as a measure to support further improvement of students' English abilities during the Third Basic Plan term.

[Lower secondary school] Nationwide survey measuring students' English abilities in all four skills:

FY 2015: Survey on students' English abilities in third-year lower secondary school (feasibility study of 60,000 students)

FY 2017 and 2018: Survey design and preliminary survey

FY 2019: Implementation of nationwide survey on academic ability

Based on the Plan on the Execution of Reform for Linking and Coordination between Upper Secondary Schools and Universities (formulated in January 2015), new tests to measure students' abilities in all four skills in English are being reviewed by the Council on System Reform for Linking and Coordination between Upper Secondary Schools and Universities.

- FY 2015: Survey on the students' English abilities in third-year upper secondary school (feasibility study of 70,000 students)
- FY 2016: Survey design
- FY 2017 and FY 2018: Preparing and implementing preliminary tests
- FY 2019: Introduction of Fundamental Academic Ability Test for Upper Secondary School Students (tentative name)
- FY 2020: Introduction of the Tests for the Assessment of Academic Abilities of University Applicants (tentative name)

4. Reform Efforts in elementary and lower and upper secondary schools

- Efforts are advancing with an eye on the next National Curriculum Standards currently being reviewed by the Central Council for Education

⇒ Class and entrance examination reforms emphasizing the four skills in English

- Ensure development of communication in all four skills in English through disseminating information on improvements in the National Curriculum Standard and revisions in the next National Curriculum Standard, ascertain status of students' learning through nationwide surveys to assess academic abilities of lower secondary school students (feasibility study on students' English abilities in third-year lower secondary school and third-year upper secondary school currently implemented)
- Promote integrated reform of education in upper secondary school and entrance examinations focusing on the four skills in English based on the Plan on the Execution of Reform for Linking and Coordination between Upper Secondary Schools and Universities

⇒ Improving students' English abilities and teachers' teaching skills

- Provide training for all teachers in elementary, lower and upper secondary school (cultivate English Education Promotion Leaders)
- Prepare teaching materials for early implementation
- Develop and prepare model teaching materials for Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Improve teacher employment which emphasizes applicants' abilities in the four skills in English
- Proactively utilize external human resources including Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), etc.

English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization

In order to promote the establishment of an educational environment corresponding to globalization throughout elementary, lower and upper secondary school, MEXT is working to **enhance English education substantially** by strengthening English education in elementary school in addition to further upgrading English education in lower and upper secondary school. **Timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics**, towards the full-scale development of new English education in Japan, **MEXT will incrementally promote educational reform from FY2014** including **constructing the necessary frameworks** based on this plan.

1. New English Education corresponding to globalization

- Elementary school (Third and Fourth grade): **English Language Activities classes 1-2 times a week**
 - Nurture foundations for communication skills.
 - Supervision by **class teacher**.
- Elementary school (Fifth and Sixth grade): **English Language (Subject) classes 3 times as week** (also utilize module classes)
 - Nurture **basic English language skills**.
 - In addition to class teachers with good English teaching skills, actively utilize specialized course teachers.**
 - ※To ensure nurturing English communication skills by **establishing coherent learning achievement targets throughout elementary and lower and upper secondary school**.
 - ※Enrich educational content in relation to nurturing individual's sense of Japanese identity (focus on traditional culture and history **among other things**).
- Lower Secondary School
 - Nurture the ability to understand familiar topics, **carry out simple information exchanges and describe familiar matters** in English.
 - Classes will be conducted in English in principle.**
- Upper Secondary School
 - Nurture the ability to understand abstract contents for a wide range of topics and the ability to fluently communicate with English speaking persons.
 - Classes will be conducted in English, **with high-level linguistic activities** (presentations, debates, negotiations).

2. Constructing Necessary Frameworks for New English Education (vigorous promotion from FY2014)

- Empower teachers in elementary school**
 - Create measures for the additional posting and training of English education promotion leaders in elementary school.
 - Improve **teaching** skills of specialized **English** course teachers.
 - Improve English **teaching** skills of elementary school class teachers.
 - Develop and provide audio teaching materials for training.
 - Improve teacher training program and teacher employment.
- Empower teachers in lower and upper secondary school**
 - Nurture English education promotion leaders in lower and upper secondary school.
 - Improve **teaching** skills of lower and upper secondary school English subject teachers.
 - Utilize external **language** exams to periodically inspect English levels of achievement for teachers posted within each prefecture.
 - ※ All English subject teachers must prove English capabilities by passing **Grade pre-1** in the **Test in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN)**, scoring over 80 in TOEFL iBT test **or achieving equivalent scores.**
- Promoting utilization of external staff**
 - Expand placement of Assistant Language Teachers (ALT), promote utilization of community members (formulate guidelines **for such external staff** use, etc.).
 - Strengthen and enrich ALT training programs.
- Developing Guidance Teaching Materials**
 - Prepare teaching materials for early implementation.
 - Develop and prepare Information and Communication Technology (ICT) teaching materials for module classes.

Enrich English education throughout each stage in elementary, lower and upper secondary schools and improve students' English abilities (aim to pass **Grade 2 or above in the **Test in Practical English Proficiency**, score over 57 in the TOEFL iBT test, etc.)**

→Examine students' English abilities by utilizing external **language exams and expand the utilization of **such** exams, **which measures all four skills in English**, for university entrance including the **Test in Practical English Proficiency** and TOEFL.**

3. Schedule (provisionary)

- Around** January 2014 Establish expert council
- 2014-2018 Establish **teacher empowerment frameworks**, expand advance implementation **through support by the Regional Core** Project aimed to Enhance English Education and **Schools with Special Substitute Curriculum**
- Revise the Course of Study upon examination by Central Education Council, advance incremental implementation from FY2018.
- Full scale implementation from FY2020 timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Outline of Results of FY 2014 Survey on English Abilities (in Third-Year Upper Secondary School)

1. Objective of Survey

- To measure students' abilities (in third-year upper secondary school) in the four skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, writing) to ascertain how well-balanced these skills are being cultivated, and to utilize survey results to improve English education at schools and students' English abilities

<Reference>

Promote strategic efforts to improve English education and nurture global citizens through ascertaining and verifying students' English abilities by utilizing external language exams is recommended in the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education. English abilities of third-year upper secondary school students' will be tested:

* Guidelines defined in Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (from FY 2013 through 2017)

① Improving English abilities

- Enable 50% of lower and upper secondary school students to achieve the goals set forth for English abilities based on the National Curriculum Standards (by the end of the lower secondary phase: English abilities to pass minimum Grade 3 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency, and by the end of the upper secondary stage: English abilities to pass minimum Grade Pre-2 or Grade 2 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency).

2. Details and objects of survey

- Implement surveys on students' English abilities at around 70,000 upper secondary school students nationwide (approximately 480 national and public upper secondary schools)
 - Assess students' three skills (listening, reading, and writing) in English based on the National Curriculum Standards.
 - Assessment of listening skills in English was conducted to about 17,000 students(one class per school).
- Ascertain and analyze students' English learning status and teachers' English teaching skills(level, quality, activities) through questionnaires
 - Students who were tested: motivation for English learning and learning status in and out the classroom
 - English subject teachers subject to survey: teaching level, quality and activities in the classroom
- Efforts by schools
 - Implement surveys on efforts by schools showing certain tendencies in survey results.
- Implementation period for tests: July - September 2014

3. Feature of survey

- The first nationwide government feasibility survey assessing the four skills in English using random sampling
- Survey for third-year upper secondary school students who studied English under the previous National Curriculum Standards (before the revision in 2008) implemented in FY2014
(Survey for students who studied English under the current National Curriculum Standards and a year-by-year comparisons will be implemented in FY2015)
- Survey will be designed to measure students' English abilities under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels A1 through B2 (See Appendix) in order to broadly measure upper secondary school students' English abilities.

There are critical issues especially in English speaking and writing skills

[Overview]

Students' have issues in all four skills in English.

There are critical issues especially in English speaking and writing skills

Issues in students' motivation

1. Students' motivation for learning English

<Analysis of test results and questionnaires>

○ Students' motivation for learning English ①

- More than 50% of students do not enjoy learning English

A considerably high percentage of students at level A1 gave this answer.

- **The higher the test score, the higher the percentage of students** that answered they enjoyed learning English.

○ Current English skills and expectations for future use of English ②

- The students' expectations of future use of English varies depending on their current level of English. **The higher the test score, the higher the percentage of students that answered they had clear expectations of using English in the future.** "To what extent do you want to learn English?" was the answer: "I want to play an active role in international society by making use of English in the future", "I want to study my current academic disciplines in English".

<Direction of improvement for item 1 description>

⇒ Goals must be defined including specific indices such as nurturing motivation and an attitude for proactive learning to allow students a sense of achievement **by making use of English.**

Advance discussions and improve methods for learning and teaching English which lead to proactive learning (Active Learning) and assessment.

2. Students' attitude toward activities which utilize the four skills in English

There are critical issues especially in speaking and writing skills.

<Analysis of test results and questionnaires>

○ Students' attitude towards linguistic activities using skills in reading and listening ①

- **More than 50% of the students performed activities related to understanding summaries and main points** while reading and listening to English.

(total: 67.2% for reading, 58.2% for listening)

- **The higher the test scores** in reading and speaking, **the higher the percentage of students** that answered, "I tried to understand summaries and key points" in class.

○ Students' attitude toward linguistic activities using skills in speaking ②

- Students **lack experience** discussing and exchanging opinions in English on what they heard or read (total: 35.2%).
- **The higher the test scores** in speaking, **the higher the percentage of students** who answered, "I discussed and exchanged opinions with other students in English" in class.

○ Students' attitude towards linguistic activities using skills in speaking ③

- Students **lack experience** giving speeches and presentations in English (total: 22.9%).

- **The higher the test scores** in speaking, **the higher the percentage of students** who answered, "I gave speeches and presentations in English" in class.

○ Students' attitude towards linguistic activities in writing what they heard or read
(integration of two or more skills)

- Students lack experience in writing and summarizing what they heard and read in English and writing their thoughts on what they heard or read in English (total: 38.7%).
- **The higher the test scores** in writing, **the higher the percentage of students** who had experience writing and summarizing what they heard and read in English, and had experience writing their thoughts on what they heard or read in English.

<Direction of improvements in item 2.>

- ⇒ Opportunities must be created for students' to experience a variety of linguistic activities including presentations, discussions and negotiations on a wide range of issues including topics of high interest, current issues and social topics by utilizing fundamental knowledge and techniques to enhance students' comprehensive communication skills to accurately understand and appropriately convey information and opinions.
- ⇒ Implement evaluations and develop methods for learning and teaching which aim for students to identify issues by themselves, understand issues in a proactive and cooperative manner, and tell their thoughts and feelings to each other in actual society and in their real lives through linguistic activities utilizing integrated skills such as writing what is heard (active learning).



Linguistic activities utilizing integrated skills
Teaching skills for such activities is insufficient

3. Teachers' attitude towards linguistic activities utilizing the four skills in English

<Analysis of questionnaire>

○ Teaching linguistic activities in class ①

<Integration of skills: discussions, exchanging opinions and writing activities based on what students heard and read>

- Low percentage of teachers who instruct students to have discussions, exchange opinions (33.0%), or implement writing activities (39.7%) based on what they heard or read.

○ Teaching linguistic activities in classes ②

<Integration of skills: speeches, presentations, debates, and discussions>

- Low percentage of teachers who instruct students to give speeches or presentations (28.0%).
- Extremely low percentage of teachers who instruct students to hold debates and discussions (6.9%).

<Direction of improvement for item 3.>

- ⇒ Improve practical details of cultivating and training teachers in line with the directions for improvement described in items 1. and 2.
 - Improve methods for learning and teaching including pair work and group activities, simulated classes for making presentations, discussions, and negotiations on current issues and social topics, and performance tests measuring speaking and writing abilities.

(Appendix)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for learning, teaching, and assessment

- The CEFR was designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabi and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency, which was announced by the Council of Europe in 2001. It is used in Europe and also on other continents.
- Within the E.U., the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR are applied as goals from elementary education to lower secondary education and employed when conducting surveys on language proficiency within the E.U.

PROFICIENT USER	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently, and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed texts on complex subjects.
INDEPENDENT USER	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear and detailed texts on a wide range of subjects.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.
BASIC USER	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows, and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: the British Council and the Cambridge English Language Assessment

Table for comparisons with CEFR based on data from each language tester

CEFR	Cambridge English	Test in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN)	GTEC CBT	IELTS	TEAP	TOEFL iBT	TOEFL Junior Comprehensive	TOEIC / TOEIC S&W
C2	CPE (200+)			8.5-9.0				
C1	CAE (180-199)	Grade 1 (2810-3400)	1400	7.0-8.0	400	95-120		1305-1390 L&R 945~ S&W 360~
B2	FCE (160-179)	Grade Pre-1 (2596-3200)	1250-1399	5.5-6.5	334-399	72-94	341-352	1095-1300 L&R 785~ S&W 310~
B1	PET (140-159)	Grade 2 (1780-2250)	1000-1249	4.0-5.0	226-333	42-71	322-340	790-1090 L&R 550~ S&W 240~
A2	KET (120-139)	Grade Pre-2 (1635-2100)	700-999	3.0	186-225		300-321	385-785 L&R 225~ S&W 160~
A1		From Grade 3 through Grade 5 (790-1875)	-699	2.0				200-380 L&R 120~ S&W 80~

EIKEN: Society for Testing English Proficiency <http://www.eiken.or.jp/forteachers/data/cefr/>

http://www.eiken.or.jp/association/info/2014/pdf/0901/20140901_pressrelease_01.pdf

TOEFL: scheduled to be announced on the website of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the U.S. in the near future

IELTS: sourced from references from the British Council (and Society for Testing English Proficiency)

TEAP: sourced from references prepared by Professor Kensaku Yoshida at the first meeting of the Study Group for the Assessment of English Ability and Utilization of External Examinations

Cambridge English: Cambridge English Language Assessment. <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/cefr/cefr-exams/>

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cambridge-english-scale/>

GTEC: sourced from references prepared by the Benesse Corporation

TOEIC : IIBC <http://www.toeic.or.jp/toeic/about/result.html>

Among the scores described above, those without "L&R" or "S&W" are the total of those for the four skills.

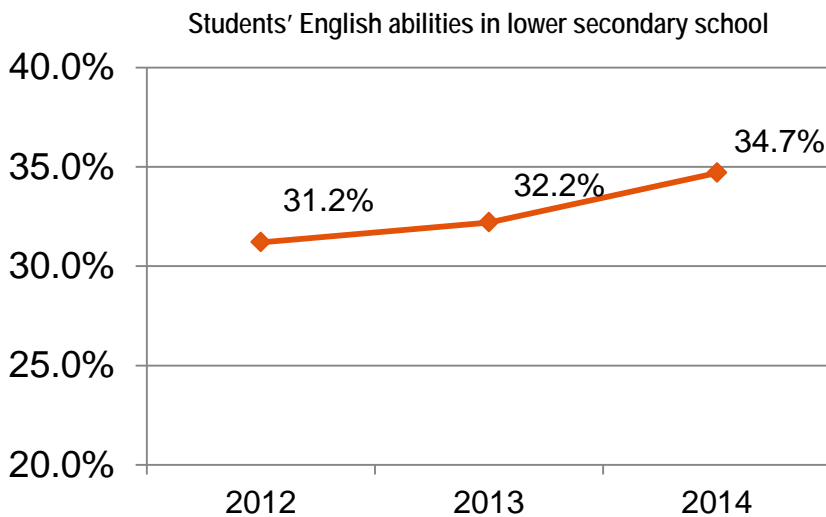
(*) Prepared by MEXT from references published by each language tester.

Survey on Implementation Status of English Education in FY2014 -Status of Students' English Abilities

<Lower Secondary School>

Situation of Students' English Abilities in Lower Secondary School

- Percentage of students in third-year lower secondary school who passed a minimum Grade 3 on the Test in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN) account for 18.4%, up 1.9 percentage points from 16.5% in FY2013.
- Students who didn't pass Grade 3 on EIKEN but have equivalent English abilities account for 16.3%, up 0.6 percentage points from 15.7% in FY2013.
- The sum of the above is 34.7%, up 2.5 percentage points from 32.2% in FY2013.



◆ Ratio of students who passed Grade 3 on EIKEN or have equivalent English abilities

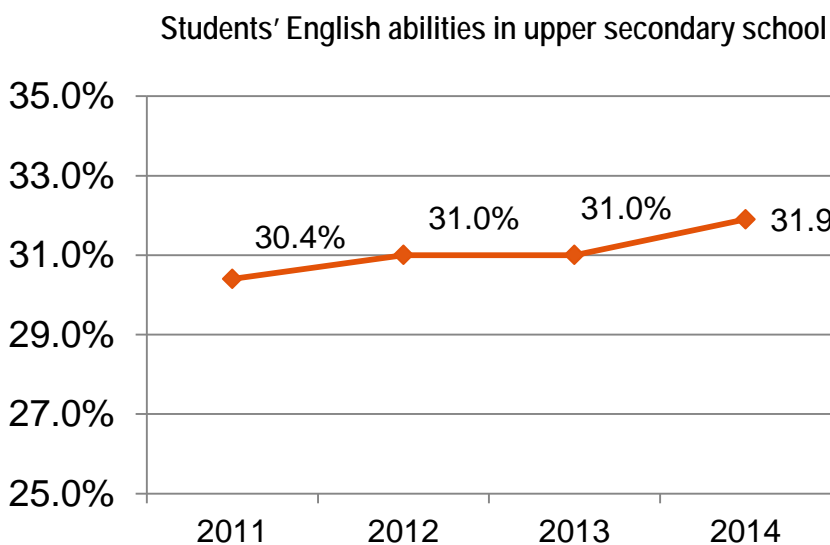
* 2012 figures are based on results of the Survey on the Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication.

* The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education aims for 50% of lower secondary school students pass minimum Grade 3 on EIKEN when graduating from school.

<Upper Secondary School>

Situation of Students' English Abilities in Upper Secondary School

- Percentage of students in third-year upper secondary school who passed a minimum Grade pre-2 on EIKEN account for 11.1%, up 0.1 percentage points from 11.0% in FY2013.
- Students who didn't pass Grade pre-2 on EIKEN but have equivalent English abilities account for 20.8%, up 0.8 percentage points from 20.0% in FY2013.
- The sum of the above is 31.9%, up 0.9 percentage points from 31.0% in FY2013.



◆ Rate of students who passed a minimum Grade pre-2 on EIKEN or expected to acquire equivalent English abilities

* The 2011 and 2012 figures are based on the results of the Survey on the Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication.

* The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education aims for 50% of upper secondary school students to pass a minimum Grade pre-2 on EIKEN when graduating from school.