

Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication

《Provisional translation》

30 June, 2011

Commission on the Development of Foreign Language Proficiency

Table on Contents

1. Introduction – Society-wide Efforts toward Developing Japanese Proficiency in English for international communication
2. What Levels of the Foreign Language Proficiency Would Be Required?
3. Foreign Language Education in New Courses of Study
4. Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing English Proficiency
 - Proposal 1
 - English ability required of students
 - assessment and verification of attainment level
 - Proposal 2
 - Promoting students' awareness of necessity of English in the global society, and stimulating motivation for English learning
 - Proposal 3
 - Providing students with more opportunities to use English through effective utilization of ALTs, ICT and other means
 - Proposal 4
 - Reinforcement of English skills and instruction abilities of English teachers /Strategic improvement of English education at the level of schools and communities
 - Proposal 5
 - Modification of university entrance exams toward global society

1. Introduction – Society-wide Efforts toward Developing Japanese Proficiency in English as Lingua Franca

Globalization advances at a rapid pace in politics, economics, and other fields, and we live in the age of increasing borderless flow of things, people and money. Nowadays, command of English is required in many fields, in contrast to the past when it was only needed in large companies and some industries; it is also pointed out that the level of English-language skills has a great impact on one's future including employment and career advancement.

In addition, globalization intensifies the need for coexistence with different cultures and civilizations as well as international cooperation. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan received much support from abroad, and every Japanese felt connected with the world as a member of the global community; at the same time, we rediscovered the need for dissemination of information overseas and the importance of the English language as a tool to achieve this goal.

On the other hand, Japanese young people are recently said to be 'inward-oriented', which can be seen from the decreasing number of high school and university students studying abroad. This inward-mindedness is caused not only by young people's mind but also by various other factors; however, in the modern society with deepening international competition and coexistence, it is extremely important to develop human resources for activities on a global scale through acquiring language skills and accumulating cross-cultural experience.

English and other foreign languages are an important means to greatly expand opportunities for our children who will live in the global society, and an important element of improving Japan's international competitiveness.

In 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology adopted An Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities" (below referred to as Action Plan). This document set targets and directions for improvement of English education toward the year of 2008, and summed up particular measures to be taken by the Government to achieve the targets. Verification of the implementation of the Action Plan showed that certain results were achieved but the requirements for students and English teachers in terms of English proficiency and other skills were not met in full, and that tasks and policies for English education in this country have to be revised in order to truly cultivate Japanese with English abilities.

There are many foreign languages other than English, and they are all important in terms of communication means. However, considering that English is presently one of

the major languages of international communication, this proposal is drawn up with the emphasis on strategies toward improvement of English-language skills. Improvement of English ability is an important task not only in the field of education but also in industry and other fields. Therefore, based on the interim report by the governmental Global Human Resource Development Promotion Council dated June 22 this year, the society-wide efforts must be continued under wide-range cooperation and support.

2. What Levels of the Foreign Language Proficiency Would Be Required?

Foreign language proficiency required in global society can be defined as capability of smooth communication with people of different countries and cultures using foreign languages as a tool. The capability of smooth communication implies, for example, confident and active attitude toward communication with people of different countries and cultures as well as accurate understanding of partner's thoughts and intentions based on his/her cultural and social background, logical and reasoned explanation of one's own views, and convincing partners in course of debates.

In order to cultivate such communication skills, classes must be shifted from lecture style toward student-centered language activities by employing such educational forms as speeches, presentations, debates and discussions. In addition, it is important to provide comprehensive education covering not only foreign languages but also the national language as well as all other subjects.

New Courses of Study aim at cultivation of cogitation, judgment, expressiveness and other abilities in whole school education via enhancement of language activities; thus one can expect that the changes in foreign language classes will contribute to improvement of school education as a whole.

3. Foreign Language Education in New Courses of Study

Foreign language education from elementary school based on the new Courses of Study has started from April of this year. Foreign languages activities were newly introduced in elementary schools, while the number of English classes in junior high schools was increased by about 30 percent; as for senior high schools, classes conducted in English and other innovations were introduced.

In addition, positive attitude to communication is cultivated from elementary school through senior high school; junior and senior high schools aim at balanced learning of

four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing; subject structure and contents were modified in senior high schools.

The foreign language proficiency targeted by the new Courses of Study unifies approach toward foreign language skills required in the global society, and steady implementation of the new Courses of Study forms the basis for improvement of foreign language skills of the Japanese people.

Thus, based on the new Courses of Study, below we set forward five proposals and specific measures for their implementation toward the year of 2016 aiming at the achievement of actual results in improvement of students' foreign language skills, particularly, command of English. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology shall verify implementation of these specific measures and results achieved.

4. Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing English Proficiency

Proposal 1. English ability required of students – assessment and verification of attainment level

According to the Action Plan, benchmarks for English abilities of students were set about the 3rd grade of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) at the point of graduation from junior high school, and about second grade or pre-second grade of STEP at the point of graduation from senior high school. According to a survey conducted in 2007, about 32% of third-year junior high school students of public schools had English abilities of STEP Grade 3 or higher, and about 30% of third-year senior high school students of public schools had English abilities of STEP Grade Pre-2 or higher; that is, still few students possessed English skills stipulated in the Action Plan. Hence, steady implementation of the established requirements for students' English skills must be continued, while STEP, GTEC for STUDENTS and other external certification tests must be utilized actively to verify achievement levels and actual English proficiency of students.

While many schools conduct classes in compliance with the Courses of Study, some schools are reported to focus on grammar-translation learning, or on preparation for entrance exams to senior high schools or universities. In case of junior and senior high schools, each school sets up specific learning attainment targets in the form of 'Can-Do lists' to attain English proficiency required of the students, which makes easier refinement and improvement of teaching techniques and assessment methods based on

the contents of the Courses of Study. In addition, if every school adjusts targets stipulated in the Courses of Study to actual conditions in the region and students' capabilities, it not only contributes to improvement of English proficiency level of all the children, but also makes possible the acquisition of more advanced English skills acceptable in the global community. Furthermore, establishment of consistent learning attainment targets from elementary school through senior high school enables continuity in English education over school years.

Specific measures

- The Government as well as education boards and schools shall actively use STEP, GTEC for STUDENTS and other external certification tests to assess and verify attainment of English proficiency required of students.
- The Government shall consider establishment of national learning attainment targets in the form of 'Can-Do lists', while taking into account approaches adopted in foreign countries.
- Junior and senior high schools shall establish and publicize learning attainment targets in the form of 'Can-Do lists', and monitor attainment. The Government and education boards shall provide schools with reference information and other support as necessary for establishment and utilization of learning attainment targets.

English proficiency to be attained based on the Courses of Study at every educational stage is described below.

(Graduation from junior high school)

Listening and reading of basic English, understanding of speaker's and writer's intentions, speaking and writing about one's own views using basic English (corresponds to STEP Grade 3 or higher).

(Graduation from senior high school)

Accurate understanding and conveying of information and intentions in English (corresponds to STEP Grade Pre-2 to Grade 2 or higher)

Proposal 2. Promoting students' awareness of necessity of English in the global society, and stimulating motivation for English learning

Globalization brings about unprecedented necessity of English in universities and enterprises; on the other hand, it is pointed out that students have few opportunities to

feel the necessity of English.

According to a survey on curriculum implementation held in 2003, third-year junior high school students who believed that they could not follow English classes amounted to about 30 percent, the proportion being high as compared to other subjects. In addition, more than 60 percent of students liked English learning in the first year of junior high school but this proportion decreased over time dropping below 50% in the third year; again, this decrease was high as compared to other subjects. Therefore, it is important to reduce the number of students who believe that they do not understand English, or who do not like English, while enhancing the skill of those who possess advanced English skills.

In order to stimulate students' motivation for English learning, it is most important to use educational materials based on actual English usage, to actively introduce debates and discussions, and to resort to other means for improvement of lesson quality.

Besides, students should be shown concretely how mastering English would expand their opportunities in future, and how English can be used in any profession and position. This is required to provide the children with a 'global perspective', and to enhance their motivation for English learning. In the past, there were attempts to engage corporate employees experienced in overseas operations and other people from the private sector in terms of international education; however, motivation for English learning is promoted by providing opportunities to see how people actually use English in their work, and to imagine how the students will use English in their future activities.

In addition, friendly competition with foreign peers via international exchange with foreign schools or participation in international debate matches and other events also contributes a great deal to students' motivation for English learning.

Gaining overseas experience at an impressionable age allows one to interact with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, to expand one's view and to deepen one's insight, which is important for cultivation of human resources able to play an active role in the global community. 3,190 senior-high students studied abroad for 3 months or more in 2008 but then the number has decreased. Besides, 12,118 children returned to Japan in 2009 after long-term living abroad.

Several education boards have already promoted international exchange of senior-high students by providing grants to students who enrolled at foreign schools; in future, the Government, education boards and other institutions should make more effort to increase the number of senior-high students studying abroad.

Specific measures

- The Government shall present messages from people using English in their activities and other information to stimulate students' motivation for English learning.
- Education boards and schools shall make efforts, with cooperation of enterprises and universities, to allow students to imagine clearly how they use English in their futures activities, for example:
 - To provide opportunities to hear from people who use English in their work
 - To provide opportunities to participate in internships
 - To visit local branches of Japanese companies during school trips abroad, and to use videos of such local branches as training materials
 - To provide opportunities to attend university lectures conducted in English.
- The Government as well as education boards and schools shall promote international exchange in English with foreign schools via education for international understanding and sustainable development, and other forms of education.
- Education boards and schools, with wide support from the Government, municipalities, enterprises and other institutions, shall promote participation of students in speech contests, debate matches and other English-related competitions.
- The Government and education boards shall support students who enroll in foreign senior high schools, and promote study abroad in other ways. (The target is to increase the number of people with medium-to-long term experience of studying or living abroad by the age of 18 up to 30,000).

Proposal 3. Providing students with more opportunities to use English through effective utilization of ALTs, ICT and other means

Like sports and other skills, the English language is acquired through practical use. Besides, an experience of using English as a means of communication brings about pleasure and self-confidence, thus enhancing motivation for English learning. ALTs are a valuable asset increasing opportunities for students to come across practical English, and to actually use English by themselves, in the course of team teaching and other activities. In this country, there are few opportunities, other than classes, for students to communicate in English; hence it is important to efficiently utilize ALTs in out-of-school activities, such as clubs and circles, thus aiming at

reinforcement of English skills. In doing so, ALTs participating in the JET program and those directly employed full time can be used flexibly and play a large role.

On the other hand, regarding employment of native speakers under service contracts and other initiatives by many municipalities, it is pointed out that teachers cannot give instructions to such native speakers. Thus the Government should take appropriate steps, while education boards should address this problem by, for example, revising employment contract terms, so as to make possible efficient use of ALTs.

In addition, talented foreigners and Japanese possessing high-level English skills (for example, those with experience of working abroad, or those graduated from foreign universities), constitute another resource to be used as the core of English education at schools, and a means to improve English teachers' and students' concepts of globalization. In this context, one should consider employing talented foreigners as teachers rather than just 'assistants' like ALT. Similarly, efforts should be made for wider employment of Japanese with rich overseas experience and excellent English proficiency.

Besides, effective use of ICT is also important to expand opportunities to use English, and to improve students' English skills. Particularly, international exchange with foreign schools and cooperative learning using ICT can provide opportunities to come across practical English that is difficult to acquire in regular classes, thus contributing to deeper understanding of both foreign cultures and own culture, and to stronger motivation for English learning. Moreover, by using audiovisual materials, drill materials and other ICT materials, students can be provided with iterative learning, personal training and other important means to acquire English. This can provide learning opportunities according to student's interest and level of proficiency. Besides, lessons can be made more comprehensible and effective if English teachers utilize digital textbooks and teaching aids during class, presenting to students videos and images of native speakers speaking as well as facial expressions and gestures that accompany speaking.

In terms of implementation of English classes centered on students' language activities, textbooks and teaching aids play a big role. Thus, textbooks and teaching aids have to be compiled in compliance with goals and contents of the Courses of Study, and used efficiently to expand opportunities to use English during classes.

Specific measures

- The Government shall assess the current situation with ALTs, and provide schools and education boards with information regarding efficient methods of team

teaching and use of ALTs for out-of-school activities. Education boards shall take appropriate measures such as revision of employment contracts with ALTs.

- Education boards and schools shall provide students with opportunities for intensive contact with practical English, such as English camps with ALTs and people from the private sector.
- Education boards shall proceed with recruitment of English teachers among foreigners and Japanese with rich overseas experience and excellent English proficiency. (The target is employment of 600 teachers).
- The Government shall provide education boards and schools with information regarding effective use of ICT, such as ICT-based international exchange and cooperative learning, use of ICT materials for personal learning and extra-curricular study, employment of digital textbooks and teaching aids in classes, etc.
- The Government shall make efforts for effective use of human resources and information in English education, for example, creation of portal sites offering information about corporate employees and other local people with good English skills, teaching materials, exemplary English lessons, etc.

Proposal 4. Reinforcement of English skills and instruction abilities of English teachers/Strategic improvement of English education at the level of schools and communities

(Reinforcement of English skills and instruction abilities of English teachers)

Reinforcement of English skills and instruction abilities of English teachers is extremely important for the improvement of students' proficiency in English. Besides, English teachers themselves must realize the importance of English communication abilities in the global society. As regards instruction abilities, English teachers must be able to guide students according to the new Courses of Study. For example, in case of junior high school, the current Courses of Study define goals focused on listening and speaking, while the new Courses of Study insist on a well-balanced development of the four skills, and cultivation of reading and writing abilities must be guided according to the concept of the new Courses of Study. In case of senior high school, 'conducting classes in English' is required to expand students' contact with English, and to make classes a place for real communication. For this purpose, everyday efforts of each English teacher are of greatest importance; moreover, intensive training of English teachers is needed to improve their qualifications and performance. In this context, it is

helpful to cultivate teachers who would become the leaders of English education in every prefecture and major city through the continuation of such training endeavors as the ‘Japan-US Training and Exchange Program for English Language Teachers’ program, as well as analysis of English education and teacher exchange involving Asian and other non-English speaking countries.

In the previous Action Plan, the targets for English proficiency of English teachers were set to above STEP Grade Pre-1, TOEFL (PBT) score of 550, TOEIC score of 730; however, only about 24% of English teachers in public junior high schools, and about 49% in public senior high schools, have attained this level of proficiency, which means that teachers’ English skills are not always sufficient. Besides, about 40% English teachers in junior high schools, and about 30% in senior high schools, have never taken external certification tests, though taking an external certification test and realizing one’s own proficiency stimulates teacher’s self-improvement.

In addition, teacher training programs should aim at improvement and enhancement of not only English proficiency of English teachers but also instruction abilities for lesson design. As regards training programs for elementary school teachers, foreign language-related courses should be further promoted.

Specific measures

The Government shall continue the ‘Japan-US Training and Exchange Program for English Language Teachers’ program and other existing training programs, and consider trainee and teacher exchange involving Asian and other non-English speaking countries, as well as implementation of intensive training of English teachers to lead English education in every prefecture and major city. Education boards, too, shall implement intensive training of teachers.

- The Government shall provide education boards and schools with useful information for implementation of training, such as exemplary training programs and teaching materials related to presentations, debate, discussions and other educational methods.
- The Government shall provide education boards and schools with specific lesson models and language activity concepts based on the Courses of Study, including creation and distribution of DVD recordings of actual classes.
- Priority shall be given to development of universities as the core centers for English teacher training.
- The Government and education boards shall encourage English teachers to take STEP, TOEFL, TOEIC and other external certification tests, and shall analyze and

publicize the current attainment level of minimum requirements of English proficiency for English teachers.

- Education boards shall demand certain level of English skills when recruiting English teachers, for example, by setting a minimum score of external certification test as a prerequisite. The Government shall monitor and publicize situation of every education board.

Minimum requirements of English proficiency for English teachers are described below.

Abilities to expand students' opportunities to come across English, while making classes a place for real communication, in order to cultivate students' English communication skills (STEP Grade Pre-1, TOEFL (iBT) score of 80, TOEIC score of 730 or higher).

* There are several types of TOEFL tests such as PBT and iBT; however, iBT is only implemented presently in Japan; thus, minimum requirements of English proficiency for English teachers are set as the TOEFL iBT score corresponding to the TOEFL PBT score indicated in the Action Plan.

(Strategic improvement of English education at the level of schools and communities)

Individual achievements must be spread and fostered so that efforts made by every single teacher produce bigger results. According to a survey, senior high schools engaged in lesson improvement on a school-wide scale, such as discussions among English teachers and incorporation of language activities in school programs, or compilation of worksheets for shared use, show better performance than other schools (e.g., wider use of English in classes). It is important that English teachers set common goals on a school-wide scale, and work as a team to improve lessons; in doing so, initiative of the principal and other school administration is essential.

The 'Super English Language High School' project was implemented from 2002 through 2009; while acknowledging the project as an outstanding endeavor, it is pointed out that it was not necessarily centered on participating education boards, and positive results were not sufficiently propagated to other schools. Aiming at steady implementation of the new Courses of Study, it is important that schools that produced such positive results become 'hubs' to spread their achievements among other schools in the region, and that education boards seek to improve English education in the whole region. Some municipalities make advanced efforts toward improvement of regional English education, and such efforts are expected to be expanded.

In addition, promotion of advanced efforts, such as Super Science High Schools engaged in nurturing English communication skills and international minds required to cultivate internationalism, or schools introduced International Baccalaureate programs, is important to train top-level human resources acceptable for the standards of the global society.

Specific measures

- Education boards shall promote strategic improvement of English education in every region, including establishment of core school for English education in the region, dissemination of achievements of the core schools among other schools, strategic personnel placement, implementation of teacher training, etc. The Government shall provide necessary support for this purpose. (The target is to establish about 250 core schools nationwide).
- The Government shall promote Super Science High Schools engaged in nurturing English communication skills and international minds required to cultivate internationalism.
- The Government shall promote schools offering International Baccalaureate programs. (The target is to involve about 200 schools in International Baccalaureate programs during 5 years).

Proposal 5. Modification of university entrance exams toward global society

Admission policy of universities should be more transparent, thus making possible consistent English education from elementary school to high school to university. It is pointed out that English entrance exams in universities do not always aim at English skills required by the global community including speaking ability. The entrance exams must be modified so as to involve not only listening and reading skills stipulated by the Courses of Study but also speaking and writing, with all the four skills tested at proper balance.

In addition, prospective students who earned certain scores of TOEFL, TOEIC and other external certification tests are exempt from foreign language exams in case of so called Admission Office exams held by some universities. These efforts are need to be further promoted.

Specific measures

- The Government shall encourage development and introduction of exam equations

for comprehensive evaluation of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in compliance with the Courses of Study.

- The Government shall encourage the use of TOEFL, TOEIC and other external certification tests for Admission Office exams, general entrance exams and other types of entrance exams, from the standpoint of proper evaluation of foreign language communication skills of prospective students.