

A Study on Japan's Better English Education Policy to Raise a Global Leader — Propose to start English education from nursery schools and kindergartens, not from elementary schools —

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Summary

We examined Japan's government policy to raise a global leader and proposed our better policy in the last issue of this journal, which is to introduce English education at nursery schools and kindergartens, not from elementary schools. We focused a policy to improve English ability. In this issue we examine prospective problems when we introduce English education at nursery schools and kindergartens. We show more practical teaching plans, based on the above problems and our empirical teaching experiences. Thus we show smooth transition from nursery schools and kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools to colleges and universities for Japan's English education.

keywords : Global leader, English education, Brain study

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explain prospective problems when we introduce English education at nursery schools and kindergartens and show one of practical solutions.

In this paper (1) we explain background in the global economy, (2) show problems in the global economy which most Japanese people face, (3) introduce Japan's government policy to solve above problems, (4) introduce a better policy which is to propose English education from nursery schools and kindergartens, and the reason of this introduction, (5) explain prospective problems of this introduction, (6) show our practical teaching plans, based on above problems and our teaching experiences at nursery schools, and (7) explain conclusions and future research.

(1) Background in the recent global economy

Now we faced a global economy since Berlin's Wall breakdown in 1989. We have one economy rather than two economies (capitalist and communist) before. The main type of international economic dealings has shifted from trade to FDI (Foreign Direct Investment). The new phenomenon of this shift is people's movement. If people move, they need a common language. This is "English"! However, Japanese English ability is so "low"!

- Data: 1. TOEFL ranking in the world (135th/163 countries)
2. TOEFL ranking in Asia (27th /30 countries), Data of land 2 from (ETS, 2010)
3. Japan's weak point (English education), Data from Swiss IMD," 2012
International Competitiveness Ranking

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(IMD, 2012)

(2) Problems in the recent global economy

In global business field, companies from South Korea and China have become dominant in some industries such as electronics and shipbuilding. UNIQLO and Rakuten use English as a company's official language. Takeda Pharmaceutical asked applicants to get 770 at TOEIC as requirements for job application. Most Japanese cannot catch up with this trend.

(3) Japan's government policy to solve the problems

Japanese government made a policy to raise global leaders. In this policy, Japan's government introduced English education for 5th and 6th grade students at elementary schools in 2011. However, the project on "Learning Sciences and Brain Research" launched by OECD's CERi in 1999 proposed "The earlier foreign language instruction begins, the more efficient and effective it is likely to be (OECD 2007, p.86)". Thus we propose Japan's government should start English education from nursery schools and kindergartens, not from elementary schools.

(4) Why do we propose English education from nursery schools and kindergartens?

Answers are based on the following OECD studies;

A. There are developmental sensitivities to learn languages; in general, the younger the age of exposure, the more successful the language learning (OECD 2007, pp.85-86).

B. Children who master two languages

understand the structure of each language better and apply them in a more conscious way (OECD 2007, p.119).

C. Initiatives aimed at ensuring that all children have sufficient opportunities to develop pre-literacy skills in early childhood are essential (OECD 2007, p.87).

(5) Prospective problems of starting English education at nursery schools and kindergartens

We can learn them from discussion when we introduced English education at elementary schools in Japan.

A. Munoz (2008, p.591) suggested that an early start leads to success but only provided that it is associated with enough significant exposure. This points out importance of amount of inputs.

B. Some of people still believe that one has first to speak well one's native language before learning a second language (OECD 2007, p.119). This is counteracted by (4) B. above.

C. Most teachers have poor command of English because English is not required when they were hired as a teacher.

D. The smooth transition from nursery schools and kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools to colleges and universities should be considered. English education at each stage should do each role and have smooth relationship for next step.

(6) Empirical teaching plans at nursery schools and kindergartens

A. We propose to sing basic songs with action for 15 to 20 minutes everyday because students learn Japanese songs with hand action (Teasobiuta) . For example, a nursery school in Kakogawa do the above. They sing very well. A teacher used CD and sing everyday.

B. We propose to teach storytelling with CD for 15 to 20 minutes everyday. Stories which students learned already in Japanese versions should be picked up. They know the outline already; so, they can enjoy the difference between Japanese and English. For example, a nursery school in Kakogawa do the above. They have presentation at the end of the academic year.

The crucial role of experience in building neural circuitry capable of supporting literacy suggests that attention needs to be given to differences in the degree to which early home environments provide a foundation of pre-literacy skills (OECD 2008, pp.86-87). This phrase points out that it is important for early home environments to provide a foundation of pre-literacy skills. They can teach English almost every day; it is good for students at nursery schools and kindergartens to provide a foundation of pre-literacy skills.

(7) Conclusion and future research

We propose to start English education from nursery schools and kindergartens. This is based on brain research by OECD. This considers the smooth transition from nursery schools and kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools to colleges and universities. This is the base for literacy to

improve English.

For future research, we have to do more cooperative works with OECD and other countries. We have to do more empirical teachings and their researches at nursery schools and kindergartens.

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