

## Innovating Japan's English Education

### Abstract

Although Japan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world today, Japanese society is facing the serious problems of a decrease in global competitive power and introversion caused by poor English education. Nowadays, English is one of the most spoken languages in the world, making fluent English essential to global success. However, Japan's English education system is insufficient. The insufficient English education in Japan is producing "examination English" which is only useful when taking examinations. Therefore, Japanese people cannot speak English fluently when interacting with people overseas. The influent English is stressful and is making the Japanese lose their confidence. Loss in confidence makes Japanese companies unmotivated when advancing into overseas markets causing introversion. These negative factors are causing a decrease in global competitive power to Japanese companies. In order to save the Japanese economy from unstabability, the Japanese government must consider changing Japan's English education system. Production of practical English is essential for Japan's successful future.

### Innovating Japan's English Education

Japan's insufficient English education is leading to useless English, causing negative effects to Japanese society such as a decrease in global competitive power and introversion. English is an essential skill for success in the global world today. However, Japan's English education system is deteriorating, causing a decrease to the English level in Japan. The low level of English is inducing the Japanese to lose their confidence, making them introverted, ultimately causing Japanese companies to lose their global competitive powers. In order to solve these problems, Japan's English education system must put more stress on writing and reading, as well as making it easier to study abroad.

### **Background of Japan's English Education**

Although Japan is one of the most advanced countries in the world, the English level of Japan is declining. According to the ETS (2011), Japan marked 27<sup>th</sup> out of the 30 Asian countries in the TOEFL test scores. This is a low score considering that Japan has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest GDP in Asia. On the other hand, Japanese people spend more than 2000 hours in their life time studying English, meaning that the hard work of the Japanese people is not paying off. According to a survey done by Shunkan Research News (2013), 75% of 36,898 people said that they thought that the English education system in Japan needs to be changed. Efficient English education is the demand of today's Japanese people.

Practice doesn't always pay off. Japanese people spend much time studying English, but improvement cannot be seen in their English abilities. This is because Japan's English education system is based on how to succeed in Japan's fiercely competitive entrance examinations. In other words, English education in Japan is only made to succeed in examinations, rather than

aiming for efficiency. According to the survey done by Shunkan Research News (2013), people answered that Japan's English education system needs to aim more on nurturing the ability to "speak" and "write" English. This "examination English" is one of the largest burdens for Japan's improvement of English.

Japan's English education system is not practical. In Japan's English education, grammar and vocabulary is considered important. As a result, Japanese people are unable to use English efficiently in their future occupations. The Japanese can read and write English to a certain level, but they cannot listen and speak English without having difficulties. According to Sakai (n.d.), 59.6% of students who answered that they have difficulty studying English said that they especially have trouble speaking English. The ability of "speaking English" is much more practical than just learning grammar and vocabulary. In order to make negotiations smooth with people from foreign countries, and to succeed on a universal scale, Japan's English education must be changed into a practical one.

Changing Japan's English education system will solve the negative effects it has, leading to higher levels of English, revitalizing the Japanese economy.

### **Negative Effects to the Japanese Society**

Introversion and a decrease in global competitive power are the two main negative effects induced by the poor English education. These two factors are breaking down the Japanese society and economy.

#### ***Introversion***

The low level of English is causing a decrease in global confidence, making the Japanese nationality introverted. According to Koji Mikitani (2013), president and chairman of Rakuten Inc., "The poor English is causing Japanese companies to become introverted, and Japanese

companies are going against the trend of time.” The poor English education in Japan is making the Japanese lose their confidence as a globally advanced nation, causing them to become introverted.

### ***Decreasing Global Competitive Power***

Introversion is causing the Japanese economy and society to gradually break down, making Japanese companies lose their global competitive power. Without global competitive power, Japanese companies are going to lose their global reliance and Japan's economy will collapse.

The introverted attitude of the Japanese companies is causing the Japanese economy to shrink. The Department of Treasury of the Japanese Government (2013) announced that Japan's trade deficit was the worst since the department started recording, in the 2013 first report, marking 4.8438 trillion yen. Trade deficit is induced when the import value is superior to the export value. Introversion is causing Japanese companies to stay inside the Japanese economy, and Japanese companies are not capable of advancing into the overseas markets. This is causing the export value to decline, inflating Japan's trade deficit. Japanese companies must take back their confidence and act to advance into the overseas markets.

Without advancing into overseas markets, Japanese companies are starting to lose their global competitive power. Currently, customs duties are put on most overseas' products in Japanese markets because Japanese products cannot compete without adjusting their prices. According to the International Institute for Management Development (2013), Japan marked 24<sup>th</sup> out of 60 countries in the World Competitiveness Ranking. On the other hand, other Asian countries marked higher rates. Hong Kong marked 3<sup>rd</sup>, Singapore was 5<sup>th</sup>, Taiwan was 10<sup>th</sup>, Malaysia was 15<sup>th</sup>, Mainland China was 21<sup>st</sup>, and Korea was 22<sup>nd</sup>. Putting into mind that Japan is

a relatively advanced nation, this is considered a low position. Japan needs to recover its global competitive power in order to sustain its position as an advanced country in the world.

The introverted attitude of Japanese society led by the low level of English education is causing the Japanese economy to shrink, making Japanese companies lose their global competitive power.

### **Solutions**

Japan's insufficient English education may be solved by two ways. First, Japan should change its education of English from "examination English" into "practical English." The second solution is to make it easier to study abroad. These solutions are likely to solve the low level of English as well as solve the negative effects induced by it.

#### ***Practical English Education***

Japan must change the system of English education. The current English Education system in Japan puts stress on grammar and vocabulary because it is based on getting high scores in examinations. However, in order to make the English education practical, the system must put more stress on writing and speaking.

Learning how to write long forms of writing at a young age will not only improve Japan's English level, but will also enable people to acquire skills needed to succeed in future occupations such as research skills and reporting skills. A survey was done by Hideki Sakai (n.d.) asking when Japanese students find difficulties in their English. According to the survey, 72% of students answered that they found English difficult when writing English. However, learning how to write essays is inevitable for English education. First, research skills will be developed by writing long forms of writing. Through researching, the writer will have many opportunities to read English literature, giving the writer many chances of improving the writer's

English. Also, high levels of research skills will lead to the person having a wide range of knowledge, which will be essential to future occupations. In addition, reporting skills will be developed. Through reporting opinions, vocabulary and grammar will be naturally achieved, which will be a much more effective way of achieving vocabulary and grammar than the current English education system. When writing, the writer will have to research, build up the writer's opinion, and finally report the writer's opinion. The same procedures are taken in most occupations. Through "practical English education," people will not only be able to improve their English, but will also acquire important skills that will be useful in the future, benefiting the Japanese economy.

Japan's English education system is not sufficient in the means of speaking. According to Hideki Sakai, 65.8% of students answered that they found difficulties when listening to English and 59.6% answered that they found difficulties when speaking English. Opportunities to speaking English are too little in the current English education system. Without being able to speak English, the English which the Japanese citizens speak will end up as useless. In order to improve their English speaking skills, Japan's English education system must put more stress on speaking.

Putting stress on writing and speaking will be much more practical than the current English education system. It will lead to higher levels of English, giving more confidence the Japanese, solving the problem of introversion and lack of global competitive power.

### ***Studying Abroad***

Japanese people do not have enough opportunities of studying abroad. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Japan marks 2<sup>nd</sup> from last out of 33 countries concerning the number of students studying abroad. Japanese students have lost their

confidence of English, making them stay inside the country. In order to solve these problems, the Japanese government must make it easier for students to study abroad. For example, the government should give more scholarships to people who want to study abroad. People who want to study abroad will be funded, making it easier to go abroad. Studying English abroad will lead to recovering the level of English, ultimately solving the negative effects brought by the low level of English.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current English education system in Japan is creating low level of English, which is causing negative effects to the Japanese economy and society. The low of English is causing introversion and lack of global competitive power. English education needs innovation. In order to make the English education system superior, "Practical English education" must be adopted as a new method, and giving chances to study abroad will be essential. To make the Japanese economy and society reach global standards, innovating Japan's English education system is essential.



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