

Examining the Implementation and Extended Plan  
for English Education of Japanese Primary  
Schools for the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grades

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松 山 大 学  
言語文化研究 第41卷第1号 (抜刷)  
2021年9月

Matsuyama University  
Studies in Language and Literature  
Vol. 41 No. 1 September 2021

# Examining the Implementation and Extended Plan for English Education of Japanese Primary Schools for the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Grades

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## 1. Introduction

This research was conducted through funding by the 2019 Special Research Budget from Matsuyama University, Ehime, Japan. It allowed for travel, personal interviews, and analysis of the upcoming consequential changes to English language education at the Japanese primary school level. This author is extremely grateful for the opportunity and would like to express his utmost appreciation for the possibility to explore into this currently relative topic. These significant changes will take place at Japanese primary schools from April, 2020. Future years could show exceptional improvements in the English language abilities of Japanese.

Although this research has been completed it by no means brings the ever-expanding study of English language education in Japan to an end. Education has long been one of the most controversial issues in Japan (Sakurai, 2016). For decades the Japanese government has advocated the increasing necessity for functionally “fluent” English speakers among its predominantly Japanese population (Blair, 1997). In the prior 20-30 years there have been continuing efforts by the Japanese branch of the Education Ministry known as MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) to bring about reforms and updates to all forms of education.

“The Japanese have an inferiority complex when it comes to English because a lot of people here study for ten years, beginning in junior high school, without achieving conversational proficiency. Businesses have lobbied for change because they want to hire university graduates who can hit the ground running” (Takayasu, 2020).

In particular English language education has been of notable importance due to its close relationship to global involvement and international trade. International rankings of English language proficiency have continuously shown Japan with a less than desirable placing. The year 2011 showed Japan as ranked 14<sup>th</sup> while as recently as 2019, Japan sank to 53<sup>rd</sup> on the EF EPI (EF English Proficiency Index). Even with years of schooling by way of 3 years junior high and 3 years of senior high school, Japan is unable to display strong results from the number of expenditures that are put forth. An example being the JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) program which brings foreigners to Japan to assist in the English language process. In 2014 the Expert Government Panel on Improving English Education declared that Japan should strive to produce “students with among the best English skills in Asia” (Tada, 2016). This unfortunately has not occurred even with all the previous investments. The year 2020 would appear to be a major threshold in English language education in Japan; previous studies, meetings, discussions, and governmental reforms have all culminated in major modifications to the overall system and style of how Japanese learn English.

Commencing from April 2020, all Japanese primary schools will conduct courses for English language education at the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade levels. While the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades have had sporadic lessons at various schools from the late 1980’s henceforth they will become graded courses. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades on the other hand will not be marked but instead regarded as a more introductory level of English

language education. All four grades will be assigned a textbook and activity book for lessons that in theory will majority of the time be taught in a team-teaching environment. This ‘team’ consisting of a JTE (Japanese Teacher of English) along with a NTE (Native Teacher of English) will conduct lessons according to the units of the assigned texts.

For the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade learners and teachers this means a more structured and stressful environment for grasping a foreign language. The lesson time will actually be doubled so that classes meet twice a week (70 hours). The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades will only get together for English language instruction half of that time or once a week (35 hours). This is in consideration of the normal class time at primary schools in Japan which is 45 minutes.

Although there are many positive points in the new curriculum, undoubtedly, one of the biggest challenges for teachers during this transition period is to expand the content, blend the old and new materials, and gradually facilitate a smooth transition for children, as the hours and scope of English lessons increase. (Nemoto, 2018)

This sounds relatively easy enough but what many individuals do not realize is that any time there are consequential alterations to the daily schedule it can have notable corollary effects. The phrase ‘there is only so much time in a day’ rings true at any type of school. The day cannot be extended, usually around 16:00 is when the final students are going home at primary school in Japan. For the lower grades, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, it may actually be sooner. Therefore, by increasing the study time in one subject, another area (recess, lunch time, another subject) has to be shortened or phased out. Japan eliminated Saturday class attendance in 2002. From conversations with teachers, I found that a majority of these instructors

favored Saturday morning classes as it enabled them to cover extra material or review other topics that they felt crucial. Now those supplementary lessons and learning opportunities are not accessible at the same time that classes are supposed to be augmented.

## 2. Background

Briefly, English education began to become an influence in Japanese society around the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the first British traders. From the Meiji era up to the present, two broad purposes have motivated the Japanese resolve to learn English. The first has been to understand and absorb a different culture. The second has been to communicate with English speaking people (Shimizu, 2010). Without going into extensive historical detail; it should be noted that the importance of English language learning in the eyes of the Japanese government has continuously ebbed and flowed as the needs and requirements changed. Since the end of WWII there has been a miraculous rebuilding effort that has seen Japan rise to a major economic power in countless industries and areas of trade throughout the globe. Roughly since the mid to late 1980's there has been a realization in Japan for a further need for globalization with regards to international trade, science and even the entertainment sector. The frequent language utilized in transactions is most commonly English in addition to others. For this reason, there has been a push among leaders at MEXT through of series of education reforms that have covered many scholastic subjects including the instruction of the English language. During the 1980's, native speaker teachers (NST) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) appeared for the first time in masse in schools (McConnell, 2000).

There was and still is much debate about the effective and efficient use of native speakers in the Japanese English language classroom. Overall though it has

seemed to produce affirmative reactions to students. The original group of participants numbered less than 900 in 1987 while the current representatives are close to 6000 (JET, 2019). Browne and Wada (1998) stated that the positive effect of JET on both Japanese Teachers of English (JTE) and students alike cannot be underestimated. “Before [JET] most students and teachers [...] had never seen a foreigner beyond television or the movies, much less had a chance to use English as a tool for communication” (Browne & Wada, 1998) ; it was a major step on the road to reform of language education in Japan (Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001). The current MEXT homepage site links to numerous YouTube videos which were updated in December 2020 ; they have been constructed to informalize and assist new foreign arrivals acclimating into the Japanese teaching system. The ease of integration for foreign language instructors has been made considerably smoother over the years.

For Japanese students though, who a majority of never use English in their daily lives the reasoning behind the necessity of all these English lessons must seem bewildering at times. Compared to the circumstances of a child who is starting a new life abroad, children in non-English environments have limited opportunities to practice the language outside school and no immediate need or motivation to use and learn English (Pinter, 2015). Thusly motivation and a clear purpose for learning may often be missing in the hearts and minds of Japanese students. It is therefore imperative ...that for any learning situation to be meaningful, learners have to have a meaningful learning set, and also the learning task itself has to be potentially meaningful (Brown, 2000). So, while it may be slightly more manageable to instructors there are the underlying difficulties involved in all teaching which are motivation and learning relevance. This is no different in the Japanese English language classroom.

### 3. Previous Language Reforms

After the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) test was introduced to Japan in 1979 a strong interest and requirement emerged for the learning and comprehension of English beyond a classroom environment. The Japanese government realized the need for a transformation from English classes of the past to more modern and interactive lessons. This is when the involvement of actual native English speakers was inaugurated by way of the JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) Program. As earlier mentioned, through this plan hundreds of foreign speakers were able to visit Japanese junior high schools. Since this early introduction these NTE's as they are now referred; have substantially increased in numbers and are now able to interact with students at primary schools throughout Japan.

Some of the crucial educational reforms that have influenced English language education in Japanese primary schools in the past twenty years have included among others :

#### **2003 : Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities**

The Action Plan presents various measures, including specifying the level of English to be attained and standardized assessment devices to measure such attainment, as well as steps to improve education and students' motivation to learn English (Butler & Iino, 2004) Although there were many complaints from both Japanese and native English instructors that the plan did not offer enough details.

The 2003 Action Plan, like the 2002 Strategic Plan, maintains only two objectives in spite of its large quantity : in short, (1) to have Japanese acquire

English abilities, and (2) to have them develop their ability to express themselves in their first language, Japanese. To attain these objectives, the plan also proposed to establish a system for cultivating those abilities specifically in five years. All language teachers found it quite unique that an action plan which promotes English language teaching also includes promotion of the Japanese language education (Tanabe, 2004)

Overall, then this plan was met with mixed enthusiasm and resulted in disparate end results. Thus, the need for further adjusts in teaching was soon under consideration.

### **2011 : New Curriculum for Introducing English to Japanese primary schools.**

Under this change, lessons entitled ‘foreign language activities’ were fully implemented for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. It should be understood that the phase ‘foreign language activities could indeed refer to any language other than Japanese ; although it was almost always English that was being demonstrated to students. During this time though nearly all of the of primary schools in Japan were already providing students with some type of activity that was centered around English. By around 2009, it was estimated by the Japanese government that nearly 99.9% of primary schools had introduced foreign language activities in their curriculum in some way or other. It was also during this time that measurable figures were being set as to the precise number of hours per week and overall school year that English was to be taught.

### **2013 : English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization**

It was at this time that English formally became a standard subject in Japanese primary schools. It led to a contradiction though in that while English was being



taught it was not being graded while other subjects such as science, music and art were. Additionally, the supplying of a textbook was left to local areas which resulted in great mismatches of acquisition and understanding on the part of the lecturers; in this case the JTE's, NTE's and the learners. No solid foundation of curriculum had been established. "English is not a formal subject in the sense that qualified English teachers are not required to teach it, and is not graded in the same way as the other formal subjects, there is no MEXT authorized textbook provided" (Yoshida, 2012). The confusion resulted in diverse outcomes. Additionally, there became a North and South gap of sorts in Japan. More southern areas which were centered around cities in the Honshu area (Osaka, Nagoya, Tokyo, for example) placed a heavy emphasis on English education. Other parts of Japan, mainly Tohoku which is sparsely populated allocated less time and resources for student's English lessons.

### **2020 : New Course of Study in Foreign Language Education**

In 2020, foreign language activities are to be commenced in middle elementary grades and foreign language class is introduced as a new subject for late elementary grades (MEXT, 2019).

3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> grades have English language lessons for exposure and initial comprehension while the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades will have more lessons that are graded and count toward their overall graduation marks.

## **4. Texts**

Textbooks for all subjects used at primary schools are provided free of charge. This policy has been in practice since 1963 in Japan. Textbooks are prepared by

private publishers and go through a MEXT screening. The ones successfully authorized are then made available for schools. In the representation of Japanese English language lessons, the texts have always been the focal point. Their importance cannot be denied or stressed enough. Due to numerous factors already stated such as JTE's lack of language teaching skills, lack of teaching experience by the NTE's, and an inadequacy of teaching materials the need for a fully supporting text is essential. From April of 2020, the official primary school texts will be entitled 'Let's Try 1 & 2' for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades respectively. The text's Let's Try are official texts supported by MEXT.

Grade 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> utilize texts that are chosen more locally on the prefectural or city board of education level. The texts scrutinized for this research are entitled 'One World Smiles 5 & 6' A text produced independently from MEXT but as having passed the requirements by MEXT to be used as an official textbook in Japanese schools. A though investigation of each text unit by unit shows us the make-up and actual language content.

#### 4.1 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

A review of the textbook Let's Try 1 for grade level 3 shows nine different units.

Unit 1 *Hello!* Which as the students first lesson in the English language introduces them to greetings. This unit not only covers merely saying "hello" but also different greetings, flags, and people of various countries other than Japan. Initially an underlying theme of globalization is presented to the students.

Outside of the structured lesson opportunities to introduce greetings of other languages or countries could be pursued. Card games involving flags, greetings, to

match ; any other activities that involve the entire class in the whole lesson.

Unit 2 *How are you ?* This unit is one which seems to be one of the more practical lessons ; allows students to ask about each other while at the same time expressing themselves. Simple in nature it allows for students to communicate back and forth at an early stage in their language development. There is also room for expansion beyond the core vocabulary and simple conversation. This is an important unit with regards to confidence building. In this unit students can come away thinking “I can speak English”.

Unit 3 *How many ?* Learning numbers which it seems that a majority of students may already know. If they have had any sort of prior English lessons in the lower two grades or even preschool or attendance at some sort of English conversation school this would not be difficult. This unit may require a considerable amount of preparation time from the JTE and NTE to put the topic (numbers) into a viable working lesson.

Unit 4 *I like blue.* This unit introduces the phrase of “I like...” It introduces colors but additionally students can be taught to insert any subject matter to personalize their response. In the same degree the question form is also introduced in this unit. “Do you like...” expands their conversational abilities if at only the simplest level. A yes or no response permits students to again express their own personal feelings and likes.

Unit 5 *What do you like ?* This section is the first section that actually coincides with another part ; being that of unit 4. This unit can further expand student’s vocabulary, question and answer response while at the same time building

confidence in their English language abilities.

Unit 6 *Alphabet*. This unit begins to familiarize students with the alphabet. While stressing the importance of individual letters can not be denied in more recent year's phonics has shown to play an indispensable function in helping young learners. This is seemingly a very simple unit of recognizing and identifying the differences in letters or their subsequent higher or lower casing. In actuality this is one of the more important segments in that it could form the way students recognize words that they know but to also figure out the pronunciation of those that they do not. Progressing from this point with little or no phonics is a major error in their language learning development. Even if there is not sufficient time to go over a majority of the sounds some attempt should be made to show students the differences certain letters can make. Simple vowel sounds could be easily reviewed and continuously practiced from time to time throughout the year and over their course of 4-year studies.

In English there are 21 consonant letters, making 24 sounds, and 5 vowel letters making 20 sounds. In the light of this, it is clear that vowels will be the most likely cause of pronunciation or spelling difficulties for learners of English (Kelly, 2011).

Japanese kana characters on the other hand correspond to whole syllables rather than single phonemes: か responds to the syllable 'ka', さ to 'sa', き to 'ki', and し to 'shi' (Cook and Singleton, 2014). At this introductory stage now would be an essential time to explore basic phonics with new learners to set them on a stable path for further learning as they progress to junior and senior high school.

When phonics is introduced in a more child-centered way, it can be a wonderful tool for encouraging creativity and active learning, and can give Asian EFL learners the confidence to approach the reading and writing English with positivity and enthusiasm, one great advantage of phonics is that it gives children an effective strategy for reading words they have not seen before. This is particularly relevant when we are teaching children who have little exposure to English words and are constantly coming across words that they have never seen before. (Paul, 2005).

Simply put, without some sort of way to differentiate the letters and words after the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of English language study the words and letters will all begin to look and sound the same. If children are taught by a wholly look and say approach, they may appear to achieve success, but eventually there will be too many words which are alike to be distinguishable (Croll and Hastings, 1998).

Unit 7 *This is for you.* By the examples in the text, this section could possibly be introduced around some holiday such as Christmas or New Years. Since Japan follows the Chinese calendar with regards to the changing of years the twelve animals could be shown. More questions could be asked and replied to such as “what do you want?”. Previous lessons that discussed the colors, numbers, and other things that the children like could be combined into this lesson. It has relevance and some other subject matter could be added to expand student’s vocabulary.

Unit 8 *What’s this?* Providing a useful question that has unlimited answers. This lesson could be expanded into a number of different activities for the learners. Places such as a restaurant or store could help in involving all the students to partake

in some activity. Large preparation time could be necessary for the JTE and NTE ; it depends on how involved and elaborate they would want to make the lesson.

Unit 9 *Who are you ?* This is the final lesson for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year language learners. It seems to be a strange question to be going around to ask to individuals. Native speakers of English could consider this question rude depending on the place and context. The text presents this lesson in a type of hide and seek context where students have to look and find various animals. This concluding lesson does not seem to fit with the others due to factors such as lack of vocabulary and overall need to learn at this stage. Any further revisions in the text might consider alterations for this unit.

Summarizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> year lessons, there does seem to be some substance and instances for students to learn basic English while expanding on some of the topics. Overall, the material is very simple and occasionally units do not seem to fit together with previous lessons. The sections could involve a lot of preparation time for the JTE and NTE.

After Japanese students' initial year of precursory English language classes, they will then move on to the next level at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. These units are naturally a bit more advanced and include some words and phrases from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

#### 4.2 4<sup>th</sup> grade

As per the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the text used will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Let's Try series. The same number of hours (35) is expected to be covered. These lessons are again divided up into 9 units.

Unit 1 begins with *Hello, world!* This initial unit again supports the MEXT

initiative for a more global vision by Japanese students. The lesson(s) cover international greetings and likes. It is intended to review much of the vocabulary that was introduced in 3<sup>rd</sup> year English courses.

Unit 2 *Let's play cards!* Supplementarily, again attempting to blend action with words. By playing various games and moderating appropriate English language the students can learn to associate the lessons in a more pleasurable environment. This unit also introduces the types of weather to differentiate when and where to play certain types of activities. It seems that this unit may or may not require excessive preparation time by the JTE and NTE.

Unit 3 *I like Mondays.* This unit supplies learners with the English names for the days of the week while at the same time introducing common items used in Japanese school lunches. It is a novel way to present the days of the week so that they can relate them into current context. This unit like many others involves a song or two, some activities, and a video.

Unit 4 *What time is it?* This unit not only teaches basic time but also encompasses different activities that take place at home and at school. Furthermore, the international dateline is demonstrated to show how different parts of the world may be in morning or at night. Cultural differences could be further explored along with different activities that may occur at contrasting times of the day throughout the world.

Unit 5 *Do you have a pen?* Another lesson that could expand the student's vocabulary by explaining the names of objects that the learners are familiar with. Also, although not grammar-based instruction, simple concepts of nouns and

adjectives might be shown - blue pencil, new eraser. This could also lead into opposites, based on the classes ability to learn further.

Unit 6 *Alphabet*. This unit further expands on the alphabet. It starts to teach learners the basics of spelling. Again though, it stays away from any sort of phonic recognition and misses a very good opportunity in this author's opinion.

Unit 7 *What do you want?* This lesson centers around shopping and every day activities. It seems very practical and helpful to students. One task, has students in English, designing their own pizza. A lesson that could be expanded to cover various situations where language is used.

Unit 8 *This is my favorite place*. This part goes into the various places in their school. Again, trying to relate places and things that 4<sup>th</sup> graders are already familiar with to vocabulary and phrases in the English language.

Unit 9 *This is my day*. The student's activities are explored as to what they do throughout the day. This is another lesson that while seemingly simple could be expanded immensely through the use of the Internet. The lives of students around the world could be easily explored and contrasted.

This is the final lesson for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade course. These lessons were hopefully stimulating and interesting enough for the learners to progress successfully through the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years are calculated and marked for grades. There is a level of stress involved that was not present in the earlier years.



### 4.3 5<sup>th</sup> grade

The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade texts can be adjusted more locally to fit the learners needs. There is not one text in particular but instead a series of texts produced by different publishers. All these texts have to meet stringent guidelines to be allowed to be utilized in a Japanese primary school. As stated earlier the texts under review for this research are One World Smiles 5 for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and One World Smiles 6 for 6<sup>th</sup> respectively. The overall theme of globalization is additionally carried out through the One World Smiles set of texts similar to Let's Try. For each of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades the number of lessons is doubled from 35 hours (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) to 70 hours for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Thusly there is more material to teach and absorb. The vocabulary is larger but also allows the teachers and students to expand on a single topic or explore alternative ways to express themselves. Intermingled within these lessons are more exposure to other countries and cultures.

Cultural awareness has been realized to be an intricate part of learning a foreign language. It is not just merely words but also the relationship that the language holds in the world as a whole that needs to be emphasized. This is not putting one language above another but instead showing how they all fit together. Research in the milieu of modern foreign language curricula often promotes the framework of intercultural communicative competence as an effective way to prepare learners for appropriate intercultural interactions (Byram, 1997 ; Deardorf, 2006 ; Fantini, 2007 ; Kramsch, 2004 ; Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). Japan has been for years attempting to encompass globalization along with cultural awareness into a variety of subjects not solitarily English language lessons.

Lesson 1 *Nice to meet you*. Parts 1.1-1.5 Again, another lesson to familiarize students to one another. Additionally, this unit which is divided into 5 parts reviews many of the subjects and vocabulary along with the ABC's.

This particular text (One World Smiles) goes into the actually printing of the letters. This was something that used to be introduced in junior high school English but when I was teaching, I always felt it could be much earlier. Hence, they have done so.

Lesson 2 *When is your birthday?* Reviewing the months, days of the week and the dates. Holidays, different activities and historical figures are additionally covered. This is another subject matter that could be expanded toward a more global view and presentation.

Lesson 3 *I have P.E. on Monday.* This module covers a daily routine at school. In addition of time, place, and activity, for the first time there is a section comparing certain sounds and letters. It is not portrayed as phonics but more of letter recognition. It seems useful but at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level it is most likely too simple.

Lesson 4 *This is my dream day.* This is presented in an international scene as students do different activities in various countries. It seems very similar to previous lessons so the expansion or reiteration may not be necessary. Activities beyond school life could be explored with hobbies and other student pursuits.

Lesson 5 *I can run fast.* This section as the title suggests is about more activities. Again, this unit could be interspersed with those recreational pursuits that are local or on a more global scale. Festivals of other lands could be of interest.

Lesson 6 *Where do you want to go?* This is another lesson that has the

opportunity to explore more of Japan or on a broader world-wide scale. At this level most students may not have had the opportunity to travel much. Through television or the Internet, they have most likely seen many places.

Lesson 7 *I'd like pizza.* This is another unit centered around food. Likewise, with an intercultural approach these lessons could be vastly extended to include a variety of comestibles.

Lesson 8 *Where is the station?* This lesson can be used to describe the surroundings of the school or the local area. It is most likely vocabulary and phrases that would be used when meeting a foreigner in their area. This topic seems to be somewhat out of touch with today's Internet world though as now-a-days most people use smartphones or other electronic devices to find their way around. Seldom maps are used.

Lesson 9 *This is my dream friend.* The final unit in a primary school student's 5<sup>th</sup> grade English language studies centers around heroes or people that they may admire. In the style of a report, they are asked to share their information with their friends.

#### 4.4 6<sup>th</sup> grade

In their final year of English language study at the primary school level students have become exposed to hundreds of words and numerous phrases and situations to utilize them. The frequency as to how often they use this new found information could differ widely between students and also areas where they reside.

Lesson 1 *Let's be friends.* Again, this is a unit that does a lot of review of

the words learned in the previous three years. By now, students should have acquired a comfortable attitude when it comes to English language lessons.

Lesson 2 *My town is beautiful.* This section again deals with descriptive words about the area in which they live. Their favorite places and what they can and can not do in their area are presented within the unit.

Lesson 3 *Welcome to Japan.* This is again a part that carries forth about globalization and foreigners coming to Japan. Students can also think in broader terms about what is good and bad about Japan. Depending on level this could be incorporated with civic lessons or other topics.

Lesson 4 *My summer vacation.* This is centered around various activities. This unit is important in that it begins to portray the past tense to Japanese students. From this point they can talk about things that they have done utilizing the simple past.

Lesson 5 *What country do you want to visit?* Obviously, intercultural themed, this shows countries of the world and places that learners may want to visit sometime. The Internet could be used to great advantage in this unit if possible.

Lesson 6 *Olympics and Paralympics.* This seems to have been added when the Olympics were chosen to be held in Tokyo. It is a lesson that can be used to describe other people, their likes and abilities. It could be utilized to review many topics and phrases.

Lesson 7 *My best memory.* As the end of their primary school years

approaches this unit is fitting. There are many activities and events outside of the English lessons that the students can reflect on and possibly share with the other students. This lesson not only encompasses speaking but also has its main emphasis in writing and conveying feelings.

Lesson 8 *What do you want to be?* This explores the likes and dislikes of students and their potential ambitions for the future. This section could be shared orally or in written form depending on the situation and abilities of the instructors.

Lesson 9 *Junior High School Life.* The concluding section that looks toward their near future. Hopefully these previous 4 years of English language education have assisted Japanese students as they progress on to junior and senior high. By means of effective and efficient lesson planning the students should acquire a large amount of vocabulary, numerous phrases, and a broader vision of Japan and the world around them.

Both sets of texts, *Let's Try* and *One World Smiles* come with supplementary instructional materials. These include, CD's, workbooks, and other printable materials. In the back of the texts there are cards and pictures of various vocabulary used through the books.

## 5. Instructors

In theory each lesson is supposed to be conducted in a teach-teaching type of scenario which is with one JTE & NTE. Unfortunately, this can be difficult, corresponding to a variety of factors with the primary one is being that there are not enough native English speakers to go around. Due to this reason then, lessons are

commonly taught in three different type of learning atmospheres. The first being that of the homeroom teacher which in most cases is also the student's JTE, will conduct a lesson solo. The unfortunate part of this is that "Teachers who teach English are regular elementary school classroom teachers, who have never been trained to teach English." (Tada, 2016). While it is slowly changing with more and more teachers becoming familiar with English and how to teach it. For many Japanese teachers it is a struggle and can be stressful time on top of their other lessons.

The second case is that of JTE & NTE together as lessons were originally designed to be taught. The team-teaching method for English instruction introduced by JET represented a paradigm shift for Japanese teachers of English, whose teaching style is often focused on "book learning," including grammar exercises and translations (Wain, 2011). The team-teaching approach in Japan while off to a rough start due to many factors including language difficulties, culture, and contrast in age of teachers has now become the go to method in many subjects outside of English language courses. As stated from previous researchers; team teaching is becoming increasingly common, particularly when it involves pairing a native English speaking language assistant (ALT) and a Japanese teacher of English (Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Gorsuch, 2002; McConnell, 2002). Japanese teachers' exposure to new pedagogies has served to complement more traditional modes of instruction (Wain, 2011). Overall, the positive points of team-teaching have come to overshadow the negative ones.

The third and final one would be that of an NTE instructing by themselves; this is the least preferred method as NTE are not licensed teachers under the Japanese government teaching requirements. As someone who was an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) for over 20 years this author can attest that this third situation happens quite frequently. It may be beyond the control of both JTE and

NTE. Commonly, it could be due to something simple as the JTE feeling ill, required to attend a meeting, or taking care of a single student who may be ill or experiencing some type of difficulty. Instead of the entire lesson ceasing, the NTE conducts class. These points are added as a side note but team teaching is a bit more complex than has been admitted and complications may arise from time to time.

Overall though the addition of these required classes is putting more work on already overworked Japanese teachers and support staff. While the declining birth rate of Japan seems like it would be the time to reduce the numbers of teachers ; in this authors opinion it is actually an extremely beneficial period of time to increase the numbers of teachers. Japan has an excellent opportunity to reduce the teacher : student ratio while reducing class sizes to the lowest numbers possible. In this way quality education and extended time to individual students can be expanded not diminished. As it is there is much room for overall improvement. As Nakamura (2020) states when discussing the current situation and MEXT involvement :

“If they want elementary school students to learn English, then they should design a real program and allocate funds to train elementary school teachers overseas, or hire qualified English-language instructors, or even pay junior high school English teachers extra to go and teach in elementary schools. Instead, they’re trying to do it on the cheap with some training course that elementary teachers are supposed to take in their spare time.”

## **6. Internet Tools**

The Internet has become an important part of many individual’s lives.

Children today are growing up along side the expansion of computers into our daily existence. Instructors of any subject have come to realize the usefulness of the Internet in conveying information to learners. Unfortunately, a stable connection to a large facility with various lessons commencing at the same time can cause difficulties.

While there are a vast variety of tools to use from and with the Internet there can be substantial discrepancies when it comes to actual lessons. MEXT points out that It is necessary to promote the proactive use of ICT in both aspects of classes and learning and school administration, such as fostering the ability to use information, creating effective classes using ICT, including promotion of the development and use of digital textbooks, and reducing the operation burden of school personnel, etc. (MEXT, N. D.)

Currently, there are still many school districts in Japan that lack adequate Wi-Fi to allow a stable connection to the Internet. Numerous schools while connected to the Internet in the teacher's room/main office, may or not have the ability to connect to the Internet from each individual classroom. Excessive amounts of instructors have to rely on their own device (Smartphone, I-phone, etc.) while at the same time utilizing their private Internet plan during their lessons. This can cause complications with obtaining a stable and/or strong connection. Each city and prefecture are currently grappling with the predicament. Some areas that have a stronger financial base for example, Shibuya ward, Tokyo already allow their students to connect at school and additionally transfer a majority of their assignments and homework over the Internet. Similar too on a larger scale, in many other countries a digital divide is forming that may or not be able to be bridged in an appropriate manner. Japan as a higher economically advanced country does have a



better prospect than other countries to meet this dilemma.

Once a stable connection can be established though, there are now many options to enhance learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is constantly expanding. The scope of this which is too broad to go into extensive detail within this research. It should be noted to the reader that there are easily accessible and free soft and hardware that could enhance lessons considerably.

## 7. Conclusion

One of the main goals of this current reform (2020: New Course of Study in Foreign Language Education) and revision of the lessons is to bring the primary school lessons into a more logical learning process with that of the junior high school English courses. This has been a continuous problem since the introduction of English at the primary schools. Hopefully a more secure path of education can be established to give Japanese English language learners the basis that they need to become proficient language users. There is much confusion and contretemps over how this should efficiently be accomplished. Admittedly not every Japanese person needs to become masterful in English but a basic background may assist over the life of each person. Japan was, is, and shall be for the very foreseeable future a highly regarded global participant. There is a strong need for English language education to help Japanese individuals secure the continued place of Japan in the globalized management of resources and commodities.

Unfortunately, since this own author's time instructing in Japanese primary schools in the late 1980's up until around the early 2000's the textbooks chosen for Japanese schools have been wholly inadequate. They almost always seemed to be designed and selected by a group of individuals who have never taught in a Japanese Primary School. Most often it is a group of university professors or high-level

government officials connected with MEXT that construct, alter, and eventually approve the text(s). There may be gaps in the instructional process, unnatural words or phrases, and inconsistency overall.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade series amount to nothing more than groups of words, colors, vegetables, or animals for example without any concise examples of how to use them in a conversation. I can visualize students memorizing sets of words but not knowing how to put them into every day usage. Both Let's Try 1 and Let's Try 2 are designed in this similar manner. Each unit is simple to understand and may actually be too precise. As an instructor I glance at the texts and while reviewing each unit wonder "what would I teach" or "how could I possibly stretch this out beyond one lesson?". There do seem to be huge rifts in presentation and practicality toward the actual English language.

The two texts for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades while slightly better designed offers the same lack of functionality with every day English conversation at even the most basic of levels. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders look to be doing nothing more than memorizing larger clusters of English vocabulary.

While there are changes occurring the ultimate aim of studying English is to advance from senior high school and go on to university. Almost all universities have some type of English examination to pass before acceptance into their learning establishment. In addition, there is the Center Test which was recently altered to be described as the Common Test for University Admissions. As the changes to this comprehensive examination now includes sections in the English part that covers all four skills which are speaking, writing, reading and listening, the lessons for Japanese students need to correspond to these requirements. The new common test aims to measure the ability of students to discover and solve problems for themselves. Emphasis will be put on their ability to think, make judgements, and express themselves (Japan to Introduce, 2019).

It is not easy to teach English at the lower levels. The texts provided due provide a place to start. Instructing within a team-teaching format has proven to be successful provided the team members are on the same page. Japanese English education has progressed considerably over the past 30 years. While it is expanding there does always seem room for improvement.

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