

Key Points of the Revised Foreign Language National Curriculum Standards (Course of Study) at Elementary School and Lower Secondary School Levels

Introduction

The Japanese national curriculum standards, called the “Course of Study,” set the overall frameworks and goals of each subject and explain specific objectives, contents and guidelines for syllabus design and lesson delivery. The Course of Study has been revised about once every 10 years since its implementation in 1947.

In 2017, the 7th revised Course of Study for elementary schools and lower secondary schools was announced, while the Course of Study for upper secondary schools was announced in 2019. Accordingly, the revised elementary school curriculum was implemented in 2020, whereas the revised lower secondary school curriculum has just implemented in the academic year 2021. Following that, the revised upper secondary school curriculum will be implemented in 2022.

With the rapid progress of globalization, the ability to communicate in foreign languages is expected to be required in various situations throughout one's life, and improvement of this ability has become an ongoing concern. Given these facts, the Japanese revised curriculum focuses more upon foreign language education, namely English.

According to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2018), the revised Course of Study has placed particular emphasis on the perspective of forming a foundation for communication with others, and has also organized the qualities and abilities: “Ensuring that knowledge and skills are acquired,” “developing students' abilities to think, make decisions and express themselves” and “cultivating the motivation to learn and humanity” which are necessary for the communication skills that the Course of Study aims to develop (MEXT, 2018). For this purpose, the goals and contents of the foreign language education curriculum for elementary schools, lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools were improved. For example, the foreign language Course of Study goals from elementary to upper secondary school were set from the viewpoints of connecting the learning across the school levels and clarifying what students will be able to do using foreign languages (MEXT, 2018). Additionally, the revised Course of Study content emphasizes interactive language activities in which students communicate their thoughts and feelings to each other in foreign languages in order to enable students to communicate on a wider range of subjects and topics (MEXT, 2018). Thus, this new foreign language Course of Study is attempting to make language activities more practical by enriching activities in which students actually use the vocabulary and expressions they have learned by setting specific tasks (MEXT, 2018).

This article examines the key points of the revised foreign language curriculum standards, especially at the elementary school and lower secondary school levels, which are compulsory education levels, from the perspective of the discussed concerns to improve foreign language education in Japan.

Moving Up Starting Year of Foreign Language Education

One of the main revisions in the foreign language curriculum was move up the starting year of the introduction of “Foreign Language Activities” from the fifth grade to the third grade at elementary schools in order to familiarize students with foreign languages and motivate them to study foreign languages through activities focusing on “listening” and “speaking.” Moreover,

the new Course of Study for Elementary Schools provides for comprehensive and systematic subject learning by adding reading and writing to the curriculum in a step-by-step manner according to the stage of student development from the upper grades: the fifth and sixth grades. Also, it emphasizes the connection to lower secondary school.

Since the implementation of the former elementary school Course of Study in 2011 to 2019, “Foreign Language Activities” have been officially introduced in the upper grades, which are the fifth and sixth grades, with 35 lesson hours per year, approximately one lesson hour per week. Especially, “listening” and “speaking” skills were made central in the instruction rather than “reading” and “writing” skills, and the enrichment of these activities has resulted in a high level of motivation for learning among students and an increase in positive attitudes toward foreign language education (MEXT, 2018). Furthermore, implementing integrated foreign language education in elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools has deepened the understanding of language and culture (MEXT, 2018). On the other hand, it has been pointed out that there is a problem that what is learned in “listening” and “speaking”-centered learning is not smoothly connected to the shift in learning from phonetics to writing. There are also some challenges in learning the differences between Japanese and English sounds, the relationship between English pronunciation and spelling, and sentence structure. Moreover, because the ability to think abstractly develops at the ages of the upper grades, more systematic learning is required (MEXT, 2018). Based upon these achievements and discoveries from the formerly implemented curriculum, teaching foreign languages at elementary schools was accelerated from the upper grades to the middle grades; students in the third and fourth grades participate in “Foreign Language Activities.”

The revised Course of Study sets the goal of “Foreign Language Activities” for the third and fourth grades as follows:

The aim of this course is to develop the following qualities and abilities that will provide the basis for communication through listening and speaking language activities in a foreign language, applying perspectives and ideas in foreign language communication.

“Perspectives and ideas in foreign language communication” means the perspective and way of thinking about how to perceive things and how to think about things in foreign language communication. In order to express and communicate in a foreign language, it is necessary to understand the foreign language and the culture behind it, focusing on the relationship with society, the world, and others, and to formulate and reconstruct ideas while organizing information according to the purpose, situation, and circumstances of communication.

- (1) Through a foreign language, deepening their understanding of language and culture through experience, noticing the differences in sounds between Japanese and foreign languages, and becoming familiar with the sounds and basic expressions of a foreign language
- (2) Developing the ability to communicate one's thoughts and feelings by listening and speaking in a foreign language about familiar and simple matters
- (3) Deepening the understanding of the language and the culture behind it, and developing the attitude to communicate proactively in a foreign language with consideration for others (MEXT, 2018)

After fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing middle grade students with the sounds and basic expressions of English, fifth and sixth graders learn a “Foreign Language” as an official course in which they receive grade points (MEXT, 2018).

The revised Course of Study sets the goal of “Foreign Language Course” for the fifth and sixth grades as follows:

The aim is to develop the following qualities and abilities as the basis for communication through language activities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing in a foreign language, by applying perspectives and ideas in foreign language communication.

- (1) To become aware of the differences between Japanese and a foreign language in terms of speech sounds, letters, vocabulary, expressions, sentence structure, and language functions, and to understand this knowledge, as well as to become familiar with reading and writing, and to acquire basic skills that can be utilized in actual communication through listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
- (2) To develop the basic ability to communicate one's thoughts and feelings by listening and speaking about familiar and simple matters according to the purpose, situation, and circumstances of communication, reading while making guesses as to the meanings of unknown vocabulary and basic expressions of a foreign language with which one is sufficiently familiar through speech, and writing while being aware of the word order.
- (3) To deepen their understanding of the culture behind the foreign language, and develop an attitude to communicate independently using foreign language with consideration for others (MEXT, 2018).

Thus, the “Foreign Language Activities” are conducted for third and fourth graders at elementary schools for 35 unit-hours per year which is about one unit-hour per week, and a new textbook titled “Let’s Try!” is provided by MEXT together with digital teaching materials containing sounds, animation, and videos. The “Foreign Language Course” is conducted for fifth and sixth graders at elementary schools for 70 unit-hours per year which is about two unit-hours per week. Hence, the number of class periods is increased from one unit-hour per week to two unit-hours per week compared to “Foreign Language Activities.” Also, various certificated textbooks are provided by seven publishers. At the elementary school level, students learn foreign language with a vocabulary of 600 to 700 words in total (MEXT, 2018).

Smooth Connection from Elementary and Lower secondary schools on English Education

As one of the issues in foreign language education, what students learned at the elementary school level could not be connected well to the lower secondary school syllabus and the students could not make the best use of their prior knowledge and skills from lower secondary school. In the context of the revision of the Course of Study, connection and cooperation between elementary and lower secondary schools are emphasized. Some districts and schools are already dealing with this matter and exchanging their syllabi and lesson plans between elementary and lower secondary schools or having Lesson Study between elementary and lower secondary school teachers, which normally involves studying the Course of Study and teaching materials, discussing lesson plans, observing a teacher’s lesson, and discussing the findings from the teacher’s lesson. According to the Survey of English Education Implementation Status at lower secondary schools, 82.0% of lower secondary schools build collaborations with elementary schools on English education (MEXT, 2020). 73.8% of them are exchanging their efforts and practices such as class observation and sharing annual teaching plans (MEXT, 2020). 56.0% of them have further communication on foreign language education research and have discussions on teaching methods, have discussions after observing classes, and lower secondary school teachers conduct their lessons at elementary schools. 17.1% of schools are creating their curriculums and learning objectives in cooperation with elementary and lower secondary schools (MEXT,

2019). Thus, connecting the curriculums from elementary schools to lower secondary schools in order to make efficient improvements of student knowledge and skills is one of the challenges teachers are currently working on. The revised lower secondary school Course of Study also states that it is important not only to emphasize the connection between elementary and lower secondary schools, but also to enhance students' ability to express their thoughts and ideas by repeatedly using vocabulary and expressions in different situations in order to provide instruction with an awareness of the continuity of learning (MEXT, 2018).

Improvisational Oral Interaction and Grammar Learned through Language Activities

As mentioned above, the introduction of foreign language activities at the elementary school level in the former Course of Study allowed students after entering lower secondary schools to develop an attitude of actively communicating in English and have become accustomed to listening and speaking activities. Furthermore, the frequency of conducting classes in English by teachers and the proportion of students' language activities in English have improved (MEXT, 2018). These are achieved positive examples of the smooth connection from elementary school to lower secondary school English education due to hard work by teachers.

However, there are still some issues in the foreign language classes at lower secondary schools. Since the emphasis in the English classes is still on how much knowledge of grammar and vocabulary has been acquired, there is a need to develop communicative competence in foreign languages, especially in "speaking" and "writing." Furthermore, there needs to be consideration of implementing lessons with sufficient language activities that involve students sharing ideas about a variety of topics actively (MEXT, 2018).

In consideration of these issues, the Course of Study has organized the qualities and abilities that it aims to cultivate through foreign language education as a whole, with particular emphasis on the perspective of forming the basis for communication with others. Also, it has clarified the qualities and abilities that it aims to cultivate from other aspects: creative thinking, sensitivity and emotion, etc. For this purpose, the goals of foreign language education are to enable students to apply "ways of seeing and thinking in communication through foreign languages" and to understand and think about things around them (MEXT, 2018). The Course of Study has made improvements to further develop the qualities and abilities of "knowledge and skills," "ability to think, make decisions, and express themselves," and "motivation to learn and cultivating human nature" that are necessary for communication to understand and express information and ideas through language activities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing (MEXT, 2018).

The revised Course of Study sets the goal of "Foreign Language Course" for lower secondary schools as follows:

The aim is to develop the following qualities and abilities to understand, express, and communicate simple information and ideas through listening, reading, speaking, and writing language activities in a foreign language, using views and ideas in foreign language communication.

- (1) To understand the phonetics, vocabulary, expressions, grammar, and language functions of foreign languages, and to acquire the skills to use this knowledge in actual communication through listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

- (2) To develop the ability to understand simple information and ideas about every-day and social topics in a foreign language, and to use this information to express and communicate with each other, according to the purpose, situation, and circumstances of communication.
- (3) To deepen their understanding of the culture behind foreign languages, and develop an attitude to communicate independently in foreign languages while paying attention to listeners, readers, speakers, and writers.

Thus, in the new Course of Study, the focus is not on how much individual knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar has been acquired, but knowledge and skills are utilized in actual communication throughout the learning process of students.

Additionally, compared to the elementary school Course of Study, the lower secondary school Course of Study emphasizes more improvisational oral interaction. For instance, the goal of speaking (interaction) in the Course of Study is to be able to communicate extemporaneously about matters of interest using simple words and sentences (MEXT, 2018). Similarly, the goal of speaking (presentation) also is to be able to speak extemporaneously about matters of interest using simple words and sentences (MEXT, 2018). MEXT considers that "improvise" is an important condition for achieving goals. This is because information and ideas are often exchanged immediately between the sender and the receiver and they do not have much time to formulate English sentences in their mind in actual communication situations (MEXT, 2018). MEXT (2018) continues to state that "improvise communication" means not to prepare a manuscript for speaking in advance, and not to have time for practice to speak. It is to communicate facts, opinions, and feelings without any inappropriate pause. When communicating, it is important to respond to the utterances of the other party, and to continue and develop the dialogue in cooperation with each other by asking questions and stating opinions (MEXT, 2018).

In addition, one of the goals of "speaking [exchange]" in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary schools includes "to be able to communicate by asking questions and answering questions on the spot." While the lower secondary school goal is to be able to improvise speech, the elementary school goal is to be able to react on the spot. Therefore, the revised Course of Study places importance on improvising to implement well-organized lessons.

Also, the revised Course of Study highlights that grammar should be learned through language activities. The Course of Study explains that since grammar supports communication, instruction should be effectively related to language activities, such as having students realize the necessity and usefulness of grammar in achieving the purpose of communication, having them use their knowledge of grammar, and having them become aware of the regularity and structure of grammar items through repeated use (MEXT, 2018). The Course of Study states that if lessons have so far focused on explaining grammar in Japanese or translating English into Japanese, teachers should reconsider the nature of such lessons and improve them by considering how to convey the necessary meanings in English (MEXT, 2018).

In terms of the vocabulary the lower secondary school students acquire, the number of words which is "about 1,200 words" has been revised to "about 1,600 to 1,800 words" in addition to the 600 to 700 words studied in elementary school. The vocabulary also should be learned through communication activities applied in context. Furthermore, the total number of English classes is increased to 4 unit-hours per week in order to enrich the language activities. New textbooks for lower secondary schools are provided by six publishers which have all been adopted by MEXT.

From Structural Syllabus to Communicative Syllabus, Incorporation with CEFR

As mentioned above, foreign language education in Japan has been focusing on English language itself since World War II. One of the reasons for this was that there were not enough opportunities for students to experience communication in English inside or outside of their school compared to the present. So, it has been said that their circumstances caused foreign language education in Japan to have too much emphasis on knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Yoshida (2020) also stated, in the post-World War II era, that English education in Japan has consistently advocated the acquisition of four skills and the development of communicative competence, but in the actual field of English education, grammar translation and reading have been done dominantly. The focus has been on acquiring knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and to develop reading comprehension skills using that knowledge, and little importance has been placed on developing oral communication skills or writing skills in English (Yoshida, 2020).

Moreover, in the curriculum, a “structural syllabus” that is also known as a “grammatical syllabus” has been used. A structural syllabus is a language curriculum which focuses on the forms and structures of language such as grammar, phonology, and lexicon. Therefore, the Japanese curriculum for each grade was organized according to the complexity of grammar, such as “present tense” should be taught in the first grade of lower secondary school or “present perfect tense” should be taught at the level of the third grade of lower secondary school. The curriculum was created based on the linguistic forms such as pronunciation, letters, sounds, collocations, idiomatic expressions, and grammar and sentence patterns even though the goal was to be able to communicate in English. Even though it has been argued that it is necessary to acquire four skills and develop communication skills, in actual English education, grammar and translation instructions were conducted.

Given such facts, the purpose of the revised Course of Study is to give priority to communication and teach the necessary structural knowledge of English for that, not to teach communication with priority on structure. The new Course of Study announced in 2017 indicated a shift from the acquisition of "knowledge and skills" to the development of "thinking ability, decision ability, expressive ability, etc." utilizing the knowledge and skills. At present, there is a shift from such knowledge-oriented education to education that fosters the three elements of academic ability across all subjects. Emphasis is placed on fostering "basic knowledge and skills," "thinking ability, decision making, expressiveness, and other abilities necessary to solve problems by utilizing these basic knowledge and skills" and an "attitude to independently engage in learning." In addition, "active learning" has been advocated as a teaching method to realize these three elements of academic ability. In other words, unlike one-sided lecture-style education by teachers, it is a lesson method that incorporates the active participation of learners in learning, such as discovery learning, problem-solving learning, hands-on learning, research learning, group discussions, debates, group work and so on are emphasized on the new curriculum (Yoshida, 2017).

Also, there were no concrete specifications as to standards explaining what kind of content students should be able to speak, listen to, read, and write. Consequently, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning teaching, assessment (CEFR) was referred to and incorporated in the goals and contents of language activities in the new Course of Study. CEFR was developed by the Council of Europe to provide common norms for a clear description of objectives, content and methods in foreign language education (Council of Europe, n.d.). The CEFR describes what a person can do in a language and it consists of descriptions that are linked to each of the four skills (British Council, n.d.). These descriptions are called Can Do Statements and they put emphasis on the different things a person ‘Can Do’ with the language (British Council, n.d.). CEFR indicates six common

reference levels using Can Do statement descriptors to define the user's proficiency at each level: A1, A2 level (basic language user), B1, B2 (independent language user), C1, C2 (proficient language user) dividing "listening", "reading" (these two are "understanding"), "interaction," "expression," (these two are "speaking"), and "writing." The content of language activities is shown by dividing them into these five categories (see Table 1 & 2 of Appendix A). The revised Course of Study standards are also specified in Can Do statements based on the Japanese version. In other words, it is essential to be able to communicate in English for what students can do in English, not what they know. Thus, the goal was set based on the communicative syllabus instead of the structural syllabus referring to CEFR in this revision.

Considering Content and Situational Settings for Language Activities

As mentioned above, the English educational goal is focused on not only students' acquisition of knowledge of the English language but also on what students are able to do in English. Furthermore, the goals and assessments as to what students are able to do are specified; therefore, how teachers make lesson plans and conduct lessons in order to accomplish Can Do statement goals become the key. One of the key points when conducting language activities in English is considering the content and situation of the language use. In the revised Course of Study, it is emphasized to plan communication activities which have contents in specific situation settings. Both the elementary and lower secondary school Course of Studies touch upon the connection of English learning with other subjects and show example contents. For example, the considerations for creating teaching plans in the lower secondary school Course of Study state that "the subjects to be covered in language activities should be those that match the students' interests, should make use of what students have learned in other subjects such as Japanese language studies, science, and music, and should be related to the contents of school events." In the case of linking up with Japanese language classes, students can apply their prior knowledge and skills they learned in Japanese language studies, such as how to enhance expressions to convey their thoughts in an easy-to-understand manner while considering the reactions of others, and how to discuss while grasping the topic and its development, and connecting each other's statements and summarizing ideas, to the English learning activities: speech, discussion in groups, and exchanging opinions based on what students have read (MEXT, 2018). In the case of teaching science subjects related to solar power generation in foreign language studies, for example, "Energy and Energy Resources" learned in the science course can be used as background knowledge. In the case of linking up with music classes, students can use the prior knowledge they have learned through the appreciation of the characteristics of traditional music in their own country and homeland, as well as various types of music from other countries, and the diversity of music born from these characteristics (MEXT, 2018).

Thus, by linking learning content with other subjects, students can use English as a tool. This idea comes from the theory of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL is an approach to content-based language teaching that encompasses any activity in which both the language and the subject have a joint role (Coyle, 2007). Caravaca (2019) noted that CLIL is not only for developing communicative competence but also it aims to turn students into active participants who gain knowledge and skills through a process of inquiry and active cognitive engagement. This methodology is also introduced in the English textbooks which are adopted along with the implementation of the revised Course of Study. Especially, some new elementary English textbooks adopted by MEXT clearly mention the connection with other subjects such as science, social studies, music, arts and crafts, etc. employing the term "CLIL." By dealing with topics in English that students commonly have learned in other subjects, students will be given opportunities to produce outputs in English through cooperative learning and to deepen their thinking.

Additionally, the lower secondary school Course of Study clearly specified language use situations such as self-introduction, shopping, meals, directions, travel, telephone correspondence, letter and email exchange, home life, school learning and activities, local events, etc. Furthermore, as a content of language activities or goals, the terms, "daily topics," "things of interests," and "social topics" are noted (MEXT, 2018). For example, one of the goals of listening in the lower secondary school Course of Study states "being able to listen and comprehend the information needed about daily topics when spoken clearly." "Daily topics" in this goal are those related to the daily life of the students, such as school life and family life that are familiar to the students. Specifically, explanations of duties at school events, and lists of things to bring to school, weather forecasts, traffic information, etc. are described as examples (MEXT, 2018). Moreover, one of the goals of speaking (interaction) of the lower secondary school Course of Study is set as "to be able to improvise with simple words and sentences about things of interest." "Things of interest" include sports, music, movies, television programs, school events, holiday planning, daily events, and other things that students have in common with their surroundings (MEXT, 2018).

On the other hand, since students in elementary school are exposed to a foreign language for the first time, it is important to set up a familiar communicative situation, and use expressions students are accustomed to that match the developmental stage and interests of the students. The Course of Study for elementary schools (2018) presented examples for foreign language activity topics in the middle grades stating that the aim is to deepen relationships with friends through exchanges about oneself and familiar topics such as "greetings," "self-introduction," "shopping," "school life," "play," "daily life," and "meals. The aim of the foreign language classes for the upper grades is to develop activities related to global connections while placing importance on relationships with friends. Topics in order to broaden students' horizons to the world such as "countries and regions they would like to visit" and "the lives of children around the world" are listed. Additionally, topics such as "traditional Japanese culture," "Japanese people who are renowned in the world," and "the Olympic and Paralympic Games" will also help students develop an interest in Japanese culture, the Japanese language, and themselves (MEXT, 2018).

In the elementary school curriculum guidelines, emphasis is placed on expressing oneself, whereas in the lower secondary school curriculum, the subject of expression is expanded from oneself to the community, society, and the world around oneself. Specifically, expressing "social topics" newly appears in the lower secondary school Course of Study. The Course of Study (2018) explains that "social topics" are topics related to events and issues occurring in society. For example, energy related issues, international cooperation, environmental issues, various situations related to world affairs and peace, human rights issues, development of science and technology, coexistence with nature, social contribution as well as learning content in other related subjects can be considered. It is also written that while the foreign language education in elementary schools deals only with "familiar and simple matters related to daily life," lower secondary school deals with a wide range of topics from everyday topics to social topics (MEXT, 2018). Thus, these situational settings and contents became more specific in the new curriculum. MEXT (2018) claims that in order to enable students to communicate in a wider range of subjects and topics, emphasis should be placed on interactive language activities in which students can communicate their thoughts and feelings in foreign languages. While emphasizing interactive language activities to communicate with each other, the Course of Study is enhancing activities to utilize the vocabulary and expressions that students already learned by setting specific tasks. By conducting these language activities, the English curriculum aims to deepen students' own opinions and impressions through active learning as well.

Skill integration curriculum - 4 Skills 5 Areas -

The former Course of Study was revised in 2008 to deepen understanding of language and culture through foreign language by implementing consistent foreign language education in elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools as well as to acquire the attitude of trying to communicate actively using foreign languages. Goals were set to acquire the ability to accurately understand and properly convey information and thoughts. It was also revised with the aim of comprehensively nurturing "listening," "speaking," "reading," and "writing" and the Courses of Study have been enhanced through various efforts from the previous ones. However, it revealed that in particular, there were issues such as a lack of appropriate language activities for speaking and writing, insufficient language activities with the aim of "interaction" and "improvisation," and insufficient language activities that integrate multiple domains, such as having students discuss what they have read and exchange opinions. (MEXT, 2018). Given these facts, the most major revision of the new Course of Study is that "speaking" skill was divided into "interaction" and "presentation"; goals are set in five areas of four skills, which are "listening," "reading," "speaking (interaction)," "speaking (presentation)," and "writing".

The "speaking [interaction]" goal was set considering the fact that there are many opportunities for two-way communication in which the roles of speaker and listener are alternately repeated, ranging from daily conversation to discussion. One of the goals of "speaking [interaction]" in the foreign language subject which is for 5th and 6th graders in elementary school is "to be able to give instructions, requests, and respond to them using basic expressions." The lower secondary school goal is "to be able to improvise with simple words and sentences about things of interest" (MEXT, 2018). In accordance with this goal, students in lower secondary school will acquire the ability to improvise and interact in conversations about things of their interest, and to convey their thoughts and feelings to each other. Additionally, one of the goals of "speaking (presentation)" in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school is "to be able to speak about oneself using simple words and basic expressions after organizing what one wants to say," while the lower secondary school one is "to be able to organize facts, thoughts, and feelings about everyday topics, and speak coherently using simple words and sentences." Thus, as the students move up in grade, they are required to improvise, express their own ideas and speak coherently instead of having simple exchanges with a set pattern.

Furthermore, the goal of communication activity became concrete from the perspective of skill integration. For example, one of the goals of "reading" in lower secondary school states "to be able to capture the gist of short sentences written in simple words and sentences on social topics." When teachers make lesson plans, they are able to integrate not only reading but also speaking communication activities. Consequently, in order to achieve the goal of "reading," the skill integration of "speaking" what students read and thought in English will be presented in the lesson. In other words, the understanding of what students read can be confirmed and established by stating their own thoughts. Thus, the emphasis is not only put on reading as a mere "skill" but also on reading in "communication activities."

Conducting Lessons in English at Lower Secondary Schools

According to the Survey of English Education Implementation Status conducted by MEXT in 2020, 18.5% of participant lower secondary school teachers conduct their lessons speaking mostly in English (more than approximately 75%). 58.3% of participant lower secondary school teachers use English for more than half of their speech (more than approximately 50% to less than approximately 75%). 23% of participant lower secondary school teachers use English for less than half of their speech (less than approximately 50%). The percentage of the total number of teachers who use English for at least 50% of their speech is 76.9% (MEXT, 2019). The last 2009 Course of Study for upper secondary schools initially stipulated that

"classes shall be conducted in English as a basic rule." The revised lower secondary school Course of Study also newly stipulated that classes should be conducted in English as well. MEXT (2018) addressed that in order to give students more opportunities to be exposed to English and to create a real communication situation in a class, the class should be conducted in English. In doing so, English should be used according to the level of understanding of the students. MEXT (2018) notes that creating such an environment so as to make the most of the extensive use of English by teachers and students is important. MEXT (2018) also warns that conducting lessons in English should not be misunderstood as simply changing the language of instruction from Japanese to English. Thus, teachers are required to organize lessons in order to encourage students to make the most use of English in the appropriate activities.

Building an Inclusive Education System

According to the Basic Survey on English Education in Lower Secondary Schools which targeted public lower secondary school teachers, the factors contributing to students feeling uncomfortable or stagnant in English learning, teachers think, were: "Difficulty in memorizing words (pronunciation, spelling, meaning)" (68.8%), "Lack of study habits" (68.0%), "Low motivation for learning overall" (61.0%), "Inability to read letters and sentences (inability to convert letters to sounds)" (50.2%), "Inability to understand grammar" (45.7%), "Inability to achieve desired results on tests" (33.8%), and "Resistance to learning English" (27.5%) (Benesse, 2009). Thus, the challenges teachers were facing were profoundly relevant to meeting each student's needs. Each student has different abilities and needs. In addition to low motivation, difficulties in memorizing words, reading sentences, and understanding grammar require careful analysis and a professional support system. To overcome the challenges that teachers and students are facing, the revised Course of Study gives advice when considering teaching plans as follows: for students with disabilities, the content and methods of instruction should be organized in a planned and systematic manner to meet the difficulties that arise when conducting learning activities. MEXT (2018) also explains that in order to build an inclusive education system and to further promote students' independence and social participation, it is necessary to ensure sufficient learning for students in regular classes, special support classes, and special support schools, and to further enhance the guidance and support to meet the disability status and developmental stage of each student. On the premise that students with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, may be enrolled in regular classes as well, it is important to clarify the intentions and methods of devising guidance not only for each type of disability but also for possible difficulties in the learning process of each subject, so that detailed guidance and support can be provided in accordance with each student's educational needs in all subjects. The revised Course of Study further explains that in teaching students with disabilities, it is important to consider the following issues for each student: difficulty in seeing and hearing, difficulty in operating tools, limitations in mobility, limitations in health and safety, difficulty in pronunciation, psychological instability, difficulty in forming relationships, difficulty in reading, writing, and calculation, and difficulty in maintaining attention. In each subject, it is indicated that the content of instruction and teaching methods should be devised in accordance with the difficulties of individual students, taking into consideration the different difficulties that arise in learning activities, such as difficulty in maintaining concentration. In doing so, it is necessary to take into account the goals of foreign language studies, the purpose of the content, and the aims of the learning activities. Also, it is important to take into consideration the learning burden and psychological aspects of the students, as well as to be careful not to easily change the learning content or substitute learning activities. According to MEXT (2018), for example, the following considerations can be made in foreign language studies: in the case of students who have a strong sense of anxiety or resistance due to their insistence on clear rules, consideration should be given to activities that aim at writing and pronouncing words, such as not requiring students to pronounce words on the spot, but allowing them to work at ease according to the

aim, or selecting words with similar rules so that they can pronounce them with ease. In schools, it is necessary to create support system by preparing individual teaching plans, making descriptions of the necessary considerations, share them with homeroom teachers and other subject teachers, and passing them on to the next year's homeroom teachers. Thus, the revised Course of Study puts emphasis on creating an inclusive system as well as meeting each student's needs as well.

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Table 1: *Common Reference Levels: global scale*

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

Table 2: Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grid

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING	Listening	I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialized articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialized articles and literary works.
SPEAKING	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
WRITING	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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日本の義務教育段階における外国語教育 － 新学習指導要領改訂を中心に (要約)

2017年、小学校及び中学校の新学習指導要領が公示された。これに伴い、移行期間を経て小学校の新学習指導要領が2020年に全面実施され、中学校では2021年度より全面実施を控えている。今回の改訂において、外国語教育が抜本的に強化された。本稿では、小・中学校段階での新学習指導要領の大きな変更点について触れている。

例えば、小学校では3学年から「聞くこと」「話すこと(やり取り・発表)」を中心とした外国語活動を実施し、高学年である5・6学年では、段階的に「読むこと」「書くこと」を加えて正式な教科とすること、小・中・高等学校との繋がり・連携を意識した内容であること、4技能5領域(「聞くこと」「読むこと」「話すこと[やり取り・発表]」「書くこと」)別の目標が設定されたこと、国際基準CEFRを参考にし、「何ができるようになるか」という観点から「can-do statements」の目標が設定されたこと、中学校の英語教育では、互いの考えや気持ちなどを伝え合う対話的な言語活動を通して即興的にコミュニケーションを図ることができるように目標が具体化されたこと、教科横断的な観点から他教科との連携など言語活動の内容や場面設定が重視されたこと、中学校においては、外国語で授業を行うことを基本としていること、インクルーシブ教育を大切にしていることなどが大きな変更点となっている。