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About English education in Japan

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In modern Japan, honestly, there is no opportunity to use English. Maybe some people use English at work, but that's only a small number of people. After finishing their school education, most people will have little connection with English anymore.

A study by The Foreign Service Institute (FSI), an affiliate of the U.S. Department of State, also found that Japanese is one of the languages most “distant” from English. Japanese is classified in the most difficult category, "III. exceptionally difficult," for English speakers.  
While it takes English speakers 600-750 hours to learn Spanish or Italian, it takes 2200 hours to learn Japanese. In other words, English and Japanese are languages that are "too different" from each other, so learning Japanese is hard for English speakers. Because of this, learning English is also harder for Japanese speakers compared to speakers of other languages.

I think the most difficult thing about learning English for me is talking to foreigners. Speaking with foreigners is one of the few opportunities to use English in daily life, but it’s challenging. First, Japanese people lack confidence, so it’s difficult to speak confidently with foreigners. Even if they have studied the language properly, speaking and having a conversation out loud is still challenging. I have had conversations with foreigners in class, but I couldn’t think of the words I wanted to say. Also, when speaking with other Japanese people, it's okay if the grammar is messy. However, when talking to foreigners, just using words sometimes doesn’t get the message across. Pronunciation is also one of the difficult elements in conversation.

I think there is a problem with English lessons in Japanese schools. They focus too much on learning vocabulary and grammar, and there is very little training for speaking. Also, in English lessons, students are always required to translate English sentences into Japanese. By constantly translating, they develop the habit of translating English into Japanese first. Moreover, to translate English naturally, it’s necessary to "translate from the end". Because of this habit of "thinking by translating," students may end up taking too long to respond in English conversations and have difficulty keeping up with the conversation.

I believe that more speaking practice should be done during compulsory education. Learning grammar is important, of course. However, being able to quickly turn what you want to say into a sentence when communicating with foreigners is even more important. I think it’s also important to increase pair work so that students can speak without feeling embarrassed. The most important thing is having the experience of speaking English, even if your pronunciation isn’t perfect or you can only use simple words. I feel that it would be great if English classes focused less on test preparation and included more practical conversation and pronunciation practice, so that students can gain confidence in using English.

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