7C-21-2025-01-09-rev1

Problems in the Japanese educational system for English

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These days, English is an important subject in schools in Japan. From 2020, English education in elementary school started. Japanese students start studying English from the third grade. Furthermore, before graduating from high school, students receive a total of approximately 1000 hours of English language instruction. However, the Japanese educational system for English is not very effective. Firstly, students study mainly reading and writing. In English classes, they read English sentences and answer the questions or translate it. They sometimes practice writing an English essay. Secondly, most teachers of English are Japanese. Of course, they are English teaching professionals, but their pronunciation is not as good as native speaker’s one.

Because of these situations, the Japanese educational system for English has a serious problem. It is that there are few opportunities for students to talk with native speakers in English. In fact, according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, less than half of the time in language activities is devoted to speaking activities in junior high and high schools. This problem can cause bad outcomes. Firstly, students are not able to develop abilities to communicate with foreign people. Communication skills can be developed by talking with people in English. If students study only reading and writing, they cannot have a chance to talk with foreign people. As a result, they will suffer from communicating with people in English. That’s a real shame. Language acquisition should be done to communicate with others. Secondly, English may be just a tool to pass the exam. Speaking skills cannot be measured by exams. On the other hand, reading and writing skills can be measured by exams easily. Therefore, students try to learn only grammar and spelling in order to get good grades on exams. As a result, they see English as a tool to pass exams and overlook the importance of communication skills.

What can we do to solve this problem? I have three ideas. Firstly, increasing speaking classes is effective. By doing so, students will have more chances to learn speaking skills. Of course, it is hard for schools to increase classes. However, by reducing the number of reading and writing classes, they can generate time for speaking classes. Secondly, hiring more foreign teachers will work. Foreign teachers can teach students correct pronunciation and conversational expressions. However, there are only 2,214 ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) working in public high schools while there are 3,438 public high schools in Japan. Japanese schools need to hire more foreign teachers. Thirdly, it is good to promote study abroad. Studying abroad is a good chance for students to communicate with foreign people in English. According to an article, when you study abroad, you can learn live and usable English through conversations with host families and friends. It also says that you can gain an international perspective. Therefore, schools should encourage students to study abroad. Subsidies for studying abroad may be important.

There are few opportunities for students to talk with native speakers in English. To solve this problem, Japanese schools should take action.

【2025/01/13 22:35 本文514語】