

A study on Japan's government policy to raise a global leader

Tsuyoshi Koizumi* (平成25年2月6日受理)

Summary

We examine Japan's government policy to raise a global leader and propose our better policy to raise a global leader. We focus to improve English ability. According to a study on TOEFL Score ranking (ETS, 2010), Japan's ranking is 135th out of 163 countries in the world. It is 27th out of 30 countries in Asia. We propose a policy to improve this score: to introduce English education at nursery schools and kindergartens and explain this by the recent brain studies and our empirical English teaching experiences.

keywords : Global leader, English education, Brain study

Introduction

Now we have faced a global economy since Berlin's Wall breakdown in 1989. We have one economy rather than two economies (capitalist worlds and communist ones) before. The main type of international economic dealings has shifted from trade to FDI (Foreign Direct Investment). The new phenomenon of this shift is people's movement. When people move among countries, they need to speak a common language, which is English now. However, Japanese English ability is so low, based on TOEFL ranking, "in the world 135th out of 163, in Asia 27th out of 30", (ETS, 2010). According to Swiss IMD, 2012 International Competitiveness Ranking, Japan's weak point is English education (IMD, 2012).

In this paper (1) we explain problems of Japan's government policy to raise a global leader, (2) we propose to introduce English education at nursery schools and kindergartens and explain the reason by the recent brain studies, (3) we also explain the reason by our empirical teaching English experiences. (4) We explain conclusion and

future research.

(1) The problems of Japan's government policy to raise a global leader

Japan's government decided to have the strategy to raise a global leader at the Promotion Committee to raise a global leader on June 4, 2012 (Japan, 2012). This shows factors which a global leader should have as follows: factor 1 (language ability and communication ability), factor 2 (positive attitude, challenge spirit, cooperation, flexibility, responsibility and commitment) and factor 3 (cross-cultural understanding and Japanese identity). In order to raise a global leader who has above factors, this strategy asked the educational societies and the industrial ones to solve their problems. In the educational societies, this strategy shows the first group (from elementary to senior high school) and the second group (colleges and universities). In the first group, this strategy states to strengthen English education. Here is a problem. This strategy does not include nursery schools and kindergartens. English education should

(* こいずみつよし 保育科准教授 英語教育)

start from nursery schools and kindergartens. We explain why, based on recent brain studies and our empirical teaching English experiences.

(2) Why we should start English education from nursery schools and kindergartens?

Any language consists of sounds and letters. When a baby is born, the baby starts to get sounds from mothers rather than letters. The baby's listening ability is very good.

The recent brain studies show this. For example, OECD project group (OECD, 2007) shows brain studies are important to learn foreign languages.

Tokyo University Professor, Kuniyoshi Sakai (Sakai, 2002) shows brain science is important to learn English. If we can learn both Japanese and English by the age of 6, we can learn both languages.

President Nakajima of International Liberal Arts University in Akita (Nakajima, 2011) shows "Multilingual Language Policy in Europe" and "Chinese Translator in Edo Period). According to "Multilingual Language Policy in Europe", if we learn plural languages, they stimulate each other and improve mother tongue. According to a material of "Chinese translator in Edo period", Chinese translators should be raised by the age of 9. This is related to brain studies and critical period hypothesis.

Critical period of English (Modern Chemistry, 1997) is said to exist during 6 to 9 years old. Thus we propose to teach English sounds to students at nursery schools and kindergartens.

(3) Our empirical teaching English experiences

We proposed to start teaching English

from nursery schools and kindergartens. Here we show this reason, based on our empirical teaching English experiences.

While I was studying at Ph.D Program, University of Hawaii at Manoa from late 1970s to early 1980s, I and my wife had four children. I and my wife were Japanese from Japan, not local Hawaii; so, we spoke Japanese at home. However, our children played outside with friends in Hawaii; they spoke English. When they went to nursery schools and kindergartens, they were taught in English. They spoke more English than Japanese.

We came back to Japan in 1984 for teaching at Hyogo college. From now on, we mainly show the eldest child who was a 7-year-old daughter. She was in the 1st grade in Hawaii. She was admitted to the 1st grade in Japan. She faced a lot of cross-cultural problems at a Japanese school. In 3 months she started to speak Japanese. We wanted to keep her English; so, we started to listen to English songs and stories at breakfast each day. This was just like background music. Then we encouraged them to take English Proficiency Test (Eiken).

When they went to the junior high school, they started to learn English. They got good scores for mid-term and final exams; they had confidence in English, especially listening test. We asked them to listen to the tape of the textbook. They naturally memorized all lessons of the textbook. Then they were admitted to the English Course at Akashi-Nishi high school. While the eldest child was at the high school, she went to study in Hawaii for 1 year. This experience improved her English ability and cross-cultural understanding. After she graduated from the high school, she was

admitted to the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her TOEFL score was enough to enter; however, most Japanese students' TOEFL scores are not enough and they should take ESL classes. She majored in journalism and finished the university within 4 years. After that, she was admitted to Kobe University Graduate school (MA) to teach English. While she was at Kobe University, she worked for NHK's morning drama as program staff of Hawaiian English tutor. She also passed Eiken 1st. She got perfect score at the interview test; so, she was awarded by President of Japanese Chamber Commerce. After she had several working experiences at private companies, she was admitted to Kyoto University Graduate School (Ph.D) to teach English. She is presenting her papers at several academic conferences now. When we compare my learning with her learning, she has more sense of English. From her learning experience, she is a native speaker of English. This shows we can make native speakers of English if we start to teach English from nursery schools and kindergartens.

(4) Conclusion and future research

We propose to raise ranking of Japanese English ability from starting teaching English from nursery schools and kindergartens. The recent brain studies show this validity. My empirical teaching English experience to my daughter verified this brain studies. Next question is "how we teach English to students at nursery schools and kindergartens?" Thus we want to contribute to raise a global leader.

"References"

1. ETS-Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL Internet-based and Paper-based Tests January 2010-December 2010 Test Data (ETS, 2010)
2. Swiss IMD, 2012 International Competitiveness Ranking, 2012 (IMD 2012)
3. Japan's Government Policy to raise a global leader, Japan's Government Committee To raise a global leader, June 4, 2012 (Japan, 2012)
4. OECD, Understanding Brain, 2007 (OECD, 2007)
5. Kuniyoshi Sakai, Brain Science on Languages, July ,2002, Chuou Koron new publishing (Sakai, 2002)
6. Mineo Nakajima, "What is real English?", The extra volume of Treasure Island, No.1759, May 2011, Treasure Island Publishing (Nakajima, 2011)
7. "Why cannot we master a foreign language?" Modern Chemistry, November 1997 (Modern Chemistry, 1997)