

Required English from third grade eyed



- 1) The education ministry is considering moving up the starting year of **obligatory** English-language education in elementary schools to the third grade from the current fifth grade by around 2020, government officials said Wednesday.
- 2) The move would force the government to **considerably** boost the number and quality of English teachers and native-language assistant teachers at more than 22,000 six-year elementary schools with 7.1 million children across the country.
- 3) During his daily press briefing, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said children should be given more English lessons and at an earlier age in elementary school.
- 4) “The government will consider **concrete** education reforms, including moving up the starting year from the current fifth,” Suga said.
- 5) The education ministry **came up with** the idea in response to a government education panel’s call for developing human resources needed in this age of globalization. The idea was included in the panel’s policy recommendation report published in May.
- 6) Under the current system, a 45-minute English lesson is held once a week for fifth- and sixth-graders in elementary school.
- 7) Currently the **emphasis** is on getting children **accustomed to** the English language through simple verbal communication, such as singing songs and playing games, rather than teaching grammar and reading and writing skills.
- 8) The education ministry is now considering upgrading the lessons for fifth- and sixth-graders to **full-fledged** language classes, including written English, a ministry official told The Japan Times, noting these classes might take place three times a week.
- 9) Right now, about 10,000 native speakers are working as assistant language teachers (ALTs) at elementary, junior high and high schools across the country.
- 10) If the reform plan is formally adopted by the central education panel under the government, the education ministry would probably boost the number of ALTs, the official said.
- 11) Some experts, however, expressed concern over the government plan.
- 12) Goro Tajiri, a professor at Kansai University in Osaka, said teachers in elementary schools are **in no way** prepared for such a program.
- 13) “I don’t think (the plan) is a good idea. (Schools) are not ready at all,” said Tajiri, a noted expert on English education who often observes English lessons in elementary schools.
- 14) Tajiri said most teachers handling English lessons in elementary schools have not had specialized language-teaching training, and some **end up** teaching incorrect pronunciation and grammar.
- 15) With just seven years until 2020, there wouldn’t be enough time to retrain them or develop good English-teaching materials for them to use, Tajiri warned.
- 16) He said that to develop human resources that can help Japan in the age of globalization, what really counts and needs reforming is English education in high schools and universities, as elementary school teachers, after all, can only teach simple conversational phrases.

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*eye: 視野に入れる obligatory: 義務的な、必須の considerably: かなり、相当に concrete: 具体的な
come up with: 考え付く emphasis: 強調、重要視 get accustomed to: ~に慣れる full-fledged: 本格的な
in no way: すこしも~ではない end up ~ing: (結局)~に終わる*

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. When was the first time that you encountered English? Please share the experience.
2. Why do you think the government decided to lower the age to start learning English? Do you support the change or not? In your opinion, from what age should Japanese students start learning English? Why?
3. Please explain about the current English education in Japan. What are advantages/disadvantages of it?
4. If you were the teacher of an elementary school, how could you teach English to the 3rd graders?
5. What is your definition of “globalization”? What do you think is the most important in order to raise global-minded people.
6. Make sentences using the following words : eye, obligatory, concrete, come up with, emphasis, full-fledged, in no way and end up ~ing.

NEWS de TALK by PHILOS

小学校の英語は5年生から「外国語活動」として必修化されていますが、歌やゲームで英語に親しむレベルに留まっています。文部科学省は、この開始時期を3年生からに前倒し、5、6年生からは正式教科として教科書の使用や成績評価を導入する事を決定しました。グローバル化に対応した教育を早期から充実させ、世界で戦える人材を育成する狙いとのことですが、教員の確保や質など、課題は山積しています。