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## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY ENGLISH CURRICULA OF JAPAN AND INDONESIA

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### Abstract

Primary English education in Indonesia and Japan is developing rapidly nowadays. Children in both countries have started to learn English since they are at least in grade four or five. Although English is not a compulsory subject in primary schools, the interest of schools in the two countries toward English education for children is getting higher. This paper tried to reveal the similarities and differences of primary English curriculum contents in Indonesia and in Japan in order to understand better about the development of English education in primary schools in the two countries.

**Keywords:** Comparative study; primary school; English education; English curriculum

### Abstrak

*Pendidikan bahasa Inggris dasar di Indonesia dan Jepang berkembang pesat saat ini. Anak-anak di kedua negara tersebut sudah mulai belajar bahasa Inggris setidaknya sejak mereka kelas empat atau kelas lima. Meskipun bahasa Inggris bukan mata pelajaran wajib di sekolah dasar, minat sekolah-sekolah di kedua negara terhadap pendidikan bahasa Inggris untuk anak-anak semakin tinggi. Tulisan ini mencoba untuk mengungkapkan persamaan dan perbedaan isi kurikulum bahasa Inggris dasar di Indonesia dan di Jepang untuk memahami lebih baik tentang perkembangan pendidikan bahasa Inggris di tingkat sekolah dasar di kedua negara.*

**Kata kunci:** Studi banding; sekolah dasar; pendidikan Bahasa Inggris; kurikulum Bahasa Inggris

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## Introduction

In Indonesia and in Japan, foreign language teaching in primary school is not something new. Many primary schools in big and small cities of both countries have bravely introduced English, especially from grade five to six.

## Primary “English Activities” in Japan

Beginning April 2000, primary schools in Japan can introduce a new "Period of Integrated Studies" into their curriculum for cross-curriculum study. Some of the areas that are possibly covered in this period are international understanding, the environment, welfare, and information technologies.

In 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) issued a guidance to primary school English activities to provide schools with possible teaching contents for international understanding (Okihara et al, 2009). This guidance book mentions three activities, namely “Foreign Language Conversation”, “International Exchange Activities”, and “Learning through Project Work”. The foreign language conversation centers on English activities, in which children can listen to and speak simple and familiar English expressions through songs, games, and quizzes. The aim of international exchange activities is to build international awareness by exposing children to different languages and cultures through various kinds of events and exchanges with local non-Japanese people. Learning through project work itself consists of activities that help students make contact with another culture, as well as the teaching of easy words and expressions of various languages.

Since April 2002, English conversation classes or English activities, aiming for

‘International Understanding’ was introduced at all public primary schools in Japan. By “the international understanding education”, MEXT hopes to promote Japanese children's understanding of foreign culture through the use of English. The MEXT proposes that primary schools should teach children more communicative English. It may be necessary for the children to be able to speak English in some cases (Tanaka, 2009).

International understanding education has three main goals:

1. Development of attitudes which is respectful of other cultures and qualities, and development of the abilities necessary for living together with people from different cultures
2. Establishment of a strong Japanese identity to better contribute toward international understanding
3. Development of basic foreign language skills, the ability for self-expression and other communication skills for expressing one's own thoughts and intentions, while respecting the position of others in an international society.

Since 2002, based on a survey by the MEXT, about 97 percent of public primary schools have introduced English classes, with 82.9 percent of them starting in the first grade. But in reality, according to Tatsuya Kitaoka, a ministry spokesman, the frequency varied greatly, and the national average for sixth-graders was only 13.5 hours (Kato, 2009).

In December 2003, MEXT revised a part of the course of study becoming the new one where title “International Understanding” to “English Activities” in which the government restricted its offering to grade 5 and 6 school children respectively. However, the MEXT did

not issue any curricula for “English Activities” so schools had problems in introducing the subject.

In February 2004, Mr. Takeo Kawamura, the Minister of MEXT, stated that he wanted to make English a compulsory subject for primary school. He mentioned that English education should be given as early as possible in order to develop communication ability (From ‘Kodomo Eigo’, May 2004 issue as cited by Sari Hosoya and Makoto Ushida, 2006).

Based on the MEXT 2005 survey, English was taught at 92.1% of all the primary schools in the country in which the number of teaching hours spent on this lesson ranged widely throughout Japan. Some schools spent only one or two hours a year, while others taught English for as many as 71 hours a year.

In March 2006, a panel consisting of MEXT’s Central Council for Education proposed that English should be compulsory for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders with one hour of instruction per week. However, the panel still agreed on the policy that English is treated as non-academic subject like Japanese language arts and Mathematics. In other words, English is still the part of the integrated studies; therefore, it needs any grades or evaluations for the students (Buttler Y.G, 2007).

In 2007, MEXT investigated again how English activities were implemented, and reported that 21,220 out of 21,864 national public primary schools (97.1%) offered English Activities (MEXT, 2009 as cited by Monoi, 2010).

In April 2008, MEXT announced that English activities would be stipulated as a compulsory lesson in primary schools from 2011 academic year for the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

The English Activities, which nationally start in April 2011, is held once a week – or 35 times a year – with each lesson lasting 45

minutes. It is hopefully that by the time the children leave primary school, they can know 285 English words and 50 expressions. Hiroshi Noguchi, a staff of the ministry's international education section as cited by Justin McCurry Guardian Weekly, Tuesday 8 March 2011, said that the main purpose of the English Activities was to ease the transition from primary to junior high school and to expose young children to other cultures. The schools have been given the choice of how to structure their lessons and set their own targets so that by doing so, the children will leave knowing the basic expressions that will help them on their way with English learning.

## **English as a Local Content Subject at Primary Schools in Indonesia**

In Indonesia, local content curriculum has a share of up to 20 percent of the school curriculum content that must be developed at the local level under the responsibility of the regional officers of the Ministry of National Education and Culture.

The main goal of the local content curriculum is to give students the opportunity to develop to some extents their abilities to suit the needs of their respective regions. The objectives of the local content curriculum for students are (1). to gain a better knowledge of their immediate natural and social environment and (2). to acquire basic skills, life skills, and income producing skills to become useful members of their communities (Erry Utomo et al, 2002).

The local content curriculum in each province may vary, such as local culture, basic and life skills, income producing skills, environmental education, and foreign language (English or Arabic).

Based on KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*) or School Level Curriculum,

primary schools in Indonesia may introduce English as a local content subject for two hours (80 minutes) every week. The English lesson is mainly given for the students of grade 4, 5 and 6.

## **Foreign Language (English) Activities Curriculum in Japanese Primary Schools**

### **Overall Objectives**

The objective of foreign language activities in Japanese primary schools is to form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.

### **Basic Content**

It is mentioned in the teaching guideline that teachers should give lessons on the following items in order to help pupils (the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders) actively engage in communication in a foreign language: to experience the joy of communication in the target language, to actively listen to and speak in the language, and to learn the importance of verbal communication. Furthermore, the lesson should aim to deepen the experiential understanding of the languages and cultures of Japan and foreign countries, to become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the target language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language, and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness, to learn the differences in ways of living, customs and events between Japan and foreign countries and to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking, and to experience communication with people of different cultures.

## **Lesson Plan Design and Handling the Content**

In designing the syllabus, teachers should select English for foreign language activities, try to have pupils understand language and culture experientially; avoiding giving too detailed explanations or engaging pupils in rote learning, and make the instructions on the content and activities be in line with pupils' interest. Teachers can take advantage of what pupils have learned in other subjects and get more people involved in lessons by inviting native speakers of the foreign language or by seeking cooperation from local people who are proficient in the foreign language. When dealing with sounds; teachers should make active use of audio-visual materials such as CDs and DVDs.

When giving pupils chance to experience communication in the target language, teachers should select appropriate expressions and focus on the target language sounds and use letters of the alphabet and words as supplementary tools for oral communication by setting the communication situations and functions.

For language activities in grade 5, teachers can introduce basic expressions about familiar things and events and engage pupils in communication activities where they experience interactions with one another. For language activities in grade 6, teachers engage pupils in communication activities, focused on interactions with one another, including intercultural exchange activities, in addition to activities related to pupils' daily lives or school lives.

## **Lesson Content and the Number of English Classes**

The MEXT stated that the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders of primary school were supposed to learn a total of 285 English words and 50 expressions the English Activities. In a school year, 35

classes (meetings) are held for each grade. The students learn the words and expressions with textbooks compiled by the MEXT titled “Eigo Noto,” (English Note) with CD. The 50 expressions are currently taught in the first year of middle school.

The lesson content (topics) lists mentioned in the “Eigo Noto“ text books for grade 5 and 6 students can be seen in the table 1 and table 2:

Table 1. Lesson Content for Grade 5

Unit	Lesson/Topics
Unit I. Greeting	1. “Hello” in nine different languages 2. "Greeting with good manners and eye-contact"
Unit II. Gestures In Communication	3. Introducing one- self with a positive attitude. 4. Expressing emotions and communication with gestures 5. The importance of using the right gestures 6. Positive communication with facial expressions
Unit III. Numbers	7. Expressing emotions verbally and non-verbally 8. Numbers in languages from around the world 9. Continuing with numbers 11-20, a listening quiz 10. Review 1-20 using ESL games in the classroom
Unit IV. Verbs Usage	11. Reviewing 11-20: Keyword Games and Snakes and Ladders 12. "Getting familiar with the word and verb: "like" : "I like apples!" 13. "Do you like milk?" "Yes, I do, or No, I don't." 14. The Lesson 4 Quiz and Interview
Unit V. Colors	15. Presentations (Jiko Shokai)... 16. Do you like green? How about green pants? 17. Do you still like green? How about those green pants?...
Unit VI. Expressing Desire	18. Do have a green shirt, an orange skirt, or red pants? 19. "I have a green shirt..." Presentations... 20. "What do you want?"... 21. I want a new TV, a new computer... 22. "I want strawberry, apple, kiwi... Flavors, so, no articles necessary..."
Unit VII. What’s This?	23. Shopping, a Guessing Game, ... 24. Teaching about "What's this?"... 25. The Black-box Game... Using props in the ESL classroom 26. Creating your own quizzes for ESL activities in the classroom....
Unit VIII. School Subjects	27. Playing your quizzes with your fellow students 28. "I study Japanese" Teaching School Subjects. 29. Teaching School Subjects and the Days of the Week. 30. Making Class Schedules as part of ESL teaching
Unit IX. Food	31. Teaching School Subjects and Presentations 32. What would you like?" Teaching food lessons 33. Chants and Bingo as a way to practice ESL conversations 34. Teaching about Lunch Menus and Kids ESL presentations 35. What's your lunch?" Lunch Group Presentations

Table 2. Lesson Content for Grade 6

Unit	Lesson/Topics
Unit I. Alphabets	1. “That’s right” Brush up on the alphabet! 2. Improving understanding of A-Z by listening skills 3. There are many Alphabetical letters around you!
Unit II. Letters And Numbers	4. Studying lower-case letters and numbers 1-100 5. Studying numbers and listening quizzes 6. Numbers, Upper and Lower Case Letters of the Alphabet.
Unit III. Months Of	7. Build interest in the alphabet and writing. 8. Learning the 12 Months

Unit	Lesson/Topics
The Year	9. Reviewing the Twelve Months and your Birthday 10. Consolidating: How to say your birthday in English. 11. So really, when is your birthday? Can you say it?
Unit IV. Expressing Ability And Disability	12. Can you...?" 13. Can you...?" Practice-Review 14. Can you...?" The Interview Game. Lesson 15. The Presentations: The Class Presentations with English speaking exercises for "CAN" and "CAN'T"
Unit V. Showing And Following Directions	16. "Turn right " Following Directions. 17. Review: Buildings, Stores, Shops. "Turn right " Following Directions 18. Town Guide Game and Giving Directions. Town Guide Game/Giving Directions 19. Town Guide Game and a New Board Game!...
Unit VI. Expressing Plans	20. I want to go to Italy. (How about you?) 21. I want to go to... I like... I want to see.... I want to go to Italy. (How about you?) I want to see, play and... 22. "I want to eat kimchi. / I want to play soccer.... 23. - Students Classroom Presentations: "I want to go to ....
Unit VII. Daily Routines	24. Teaching about "What time do you get up?" ... Teaching Time, Verbs, and Daily Routines 25. Teaching Time, Verbs of Routine, and a little writing 26. Preparing for Presentations, Consolidating Target Language... What time do you get up?: 27. Presentation Day! and a little dictation practice... Teaching Time, Some Verbs of Routine, and a little memo writing in the textbook
Unit VIII. Listening to Story	28. Teaching how to follow an English Story: "The Big Daikon" 29. Preparing for a Skit Activity: Please help me. Please help us 30. Teaching Stories in English! Skit Activity for My Original Story.
Unit IX. Jobs and Obsessions	31. I want to be a teacher." Teaching about Job Names and Dreams. "I want to be a ..." 32. Chant and a Quiz: Teaching about Job Names and Dream 33. Job Names, Dreams and Why?: Last Class Presentations

## Indonesian Primary English Curriculum

The aims of the English teaching in primary school are to socialize the English language to the children, to build basic knowledge, and to motivate them to learn English by considering their need of this language in the future.

The scope of learning English includes 1). English language skills namely listening, reading, speaking and simple writing. 2). The elements of language, covering grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. 3). Topics and language function, which include topics and language functions associated with the daily lives of students at home and at school.

## Content of English Instructions

Below is the description of competency standards and basic competency of English for the students of grade 5 and 6. Competency standards refer to the minimum qualifications of the ability of learners to describe the mastery of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are expected to be achieved in each class and / or a semester on the subject learn.

Basic competence is a number of abilities to be mastered by students in certain subjects as a reference for the development of indicators of competence in the lesson.

1. Competency Standards and Basic Competency for Grade 5 Semester 1

There are four standard competences namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For listening, it consists of two basic competences: students can respond simple instructions by action in the context of the classroom and school, and respond simple instructions verbally.

For speaking, it has four basic competences: students can master language functions for a). giving an example to do something, giving the signal and instruction; b). asking for help, giving help, asking for goods, and providing goods; c). introducing ourselves, inviting, asking for permission, giving permission, approving, disagreeing, and prohibiting; d). expressing manner involving: Do you mind... and Shall we...

For reading, it consists of two basic competences: students can read aloud words, phrases, and simple sentences with appropriate stress and intonation; and they can understand sentence, written messages, and short illustrated descriptive text in the context of school.

For writing, it consists of two basic competences: students can spell very simple sentences appropriately, and they can copy and write simple sentences correctly to express congratulations, gratitude, and invitation.

2. Competency Standards and Basic Competency for Grade 5 Semester 2

There are four standard competences namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For listening, it consists of two basic competences that are the same as in the first semester. For speaking, it has four basic competences: students can master language functions to a). giving an example to do something, giving the signal and providing

direction; b). asking for help, giving help, asking for goods, and providing goods; c). giving information, expressing opinion, and asking for clarification; and d). expressing politeness involving: Do you mind... and Shall we...

For reading, it consists of two basic competences that are the same as in the first semester. For writing, it consists of two basic competences: students can spell and copy very simple sentences appropriately; and they can copy and write simple sentences correctly to express: congratulations, gratitude, and sympathy.

3. Competency Standards and Basic Competency for Grade 6 Semester 1

There are four standard /basic competences namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For listening, it consists of three basic competences: students can respond to simple instructions by action inside and outside of classroom, in various kinds of games, and they can understand short oral story with the help of pictures.

For speaking, it has four basic competences: students can master language functions to a). giving an example to do something, giving the signal and instruction, b). asking for help, giving help, asking for goods, and providing goods, c). giving warning, stating likes / dislikes, expressing numbers, asking condition, making comments, giving opinions, and proposing ideas, and d). expressing politeness involving expression: Would you...and May I ...

For reading, it consists of two basic competences: students can read aloud a short functional text with appropriate stress and intonation and understand a very simple

illustrated descriptive text in the context of students.

For writing, it consists of two basic competences: students can write a short functional text and write a short greeting card.

#### 4. Competency Standards and Basic Competence for Grade 6 Semester 2

There are four basic competences namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For listening, it consists of three basic competences like those in the first semester. For speaking, it has four basic competences: students can master language functions to a). giving an example to do something, giving the signal and instruction, b). asking for and giving help, asking for and providing goods, c). expressing feelings, responding to expressions, expressing doubts, and asking for clarification, and d). expressing politeness involving expression: Would you...please and May I...

For reading, it consists of three basic competences: students can read aloud a short functional text with appropriate stress and intonation, understand a very simple illustrated descriptive text in the context of students, and understand short illustrated narrative text.

For writing, it consists of two basic competences like those in the first semester: students can write a short functional text and write a short greeting card.

#### Lesson Content and the Number of English Classes

In the Primary English Basic Course Outline Book, it is mentioned that in one academic year, the students receive 35 times of English Lesson. Each lesson meeting is for 80 minutes. In the textbook that is written by Otong Setiawan (2006) entitled in **Active and Interactive English**, in one academic year, there

are 10 units of English lessons for grade 5 students and 15 units for grade 6 students. Table 3 and table 4 show the lesson content for each grade.

Table 3. Lesson Content (Topics) for Grade 5

No	Unit	Topics
1	I	Time/Days/Month
2	II	Daily Activities
3	III	What are your hobbies?
4	IV	Expressing Thank You
5	V	Food and Drink
6	VI	Clothes and Costumes
7	VII	Toys and Games
8	VIII	Types of Transportation
9	IX	Shapes
10	X	Health and Hospital

Table 4. Lesson Content (Topics) for Grade 6

No	Unit	Topics
1	I	In a Fruit Stall
2	II	In a Green Grocer
3	III	What kinds of Drink is it?
4	IV	I like ....But I don't like .....
5	V	In the School Library
6	VI	Which do you prefer?
7	VII	What place is it?
8	VIII	Where is my ....?
9	IX	North or South?
10	X	Take it and Don't leave it!
11	XI	Could you show me the way to...?
12	XII	Welcome aboard
13	XIII	What is the weather like?
14	XIV	Which one is bigger?
15	XV	What did you do?

#### Discussion

This research reveals some similarities. First, the goal of primary English education in both countries is to develop basic communication skills and building positive attitude toward the language and culture. Basic communication skills are the bases for children to be able to deliver and understand the spoken and written messages in English. For achieving this purpose, the positive attitude is required and it needs teachers' creativity.

Secondly, schools in both countries have the same responsibility dealing with the



implementation of the curriculum, that is designing English teaching syllabus and teachers are obliged to make English lesson plans for each academic year. The number of English lessons to be conducted during one academic year is also the same: thirty-five lessons per year.

English curricula in both countries require the elements of language to be introduced to the students. These language elements are grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. There are thirteen kinds of the same topics or themes in the Japanese and Indonesian English textbooks as listed in Table 5.

The differences found in the Japanese and Indonesian Primary English Curricula can be explained as following. Firstly is the history. The primary English education in Indonesia is introduced earlier than in Japan. In Japan, the teaching of English in primary schools was introduced in 2002; while in Indonesia, it was officially introduced in 1993. Secondly, the name and its status. In Japan, the primary English is called a compulsory English Activities; while in Indonesia it is called English as an optional local content subject. Thirdly is the

focus of skills to be mastered by students. In Japan the two language skills namely listening and speaking are focused; while in Indonesian primary schools, all the Basic English language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing are taught. Fourthly is the time allocation. In Japan, starting from April 2011, primary schools have to open English class for forty minutes per week; while in Indonesian primary schools, English is taught for eighty minutes per week. Therefore, Indonesian children get more time than Japanese to study English at primary schools.

The next difference is the age-target of the learners. In Japan, English is mainly introduced for the students of grade 5 and 6. In Indonesian primary schools, English is taught to students of grade 4, 5, and 6. Furthermore there is also difference on the themes/topic of English learning. There are some themes not found either in the Japanese or in Indonesian English textbooks.

Table 6 shows the lists of different themes or topics in the Japanese and Indonesian English textbooks.

Table 5. List of the Same Topics in the Japanese and Indonesian English Textbooks

No	Topics	Japan	Indonesia
1.	Greeting & Gestures in Communication	Grade 5	Grade 4
2.	English Alphabets	Grade 6	Grade 4
3.	Counting (Numbers)	Grade 5/6	Grade 4
4.	Colours	Grade 5	Grade 4
5.	Point of the Compass (Giving Directions)	Grade 6	Grade 4/6
6.	Time/Days/Months	Grade 6	Grade 5
7.	Daily Activities	Grade 6	Grade 5
8.	Food and Drinks	Grade 5	Grade 5
9.	Clothes and Costumes	Grade 5	Grade 5
10.	I like..but I do not like ....	Grade 5	Grade 5
11.	Listening to Story	Grade 6	Grade 5
12.	School Subjects	Grade 5	Grade 4/5
13.	Jobs and Obsessions	Grade 6	Grade 4

Table 6. Lift of Different Topic in the Japanese and Indonesian English textbooks

NO	JAPAN	INDONESIA
1	Can you? (grade 6)	
2	I want to (plan) (grade 6)	What is your hobby? (grade 5)
3		Thank you (grade 5)
4		Toys and Games (grade 5)
5		Types of Transportation (grade 5)
6		Shapes (grade 5)
7		Which do you prefer? (grade 6)
8		What place is it? (grade 6)
9		Where is my...? (grade 6)
10		What is the weather like (grade 6)
11		Which one is bigger? (grade 6)
12		What did you do... (grade 6)

In addition, the primary English curriculum in Japan points out the importance of native speakers of the foreign language or the cooperation from local people who are proficient in the foreign language for the success of the English Activities program. In contrast, the involvement of native speakers nor local people in the teaching and learning processes of English lesson in Indonesian school is not highlighted.

The next difference is the text book and teaching guideline. Starting from 2011 academic year, primary schools in Japan may use “Eigo Noto” published by MEXT. However, since the textbooks (English Note 1 and 2) are not MEXT-designed textbooks that all schools must use, the individual school may use textbook other than “Eigo Noto” or supplement them with commercially available materials. Beside the textbooks, MEXT also published a teaching guideline book for teachers called “Shogakko Eigo Katsudo Jisen no Tebiki” (Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities). The government of Indonesia, on the other hand, does not issue any English textbooks or teaching guide books for primary schools. Therefore, each school may choose English textbooks published by private companies. The last difference is the evaluation method. As in Japan English in primary school is treated as a non-subject like Mathematics or the

Japanese language, it does not require any test for evaluation; but in Indonesia, because English is considered as a subject matter, students have to do the language test in which their achievement is recorded in their book report or academic achievement card at the end of each semester.

### Conclusions

Primary English education in Indonesia and in Japan has been growing rapidly and the two countries have tried to develop English lesson curriculum where English is considered not as a compulsory subject matter, but as Language Activities in Japan and as local content subject in Indonesia. Japan has been more progressive because the MEXT has issued the text-book for English language activities for all primary schools in Japan; while Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture gave freedom to each school to issue and use the English textbooks. It is suggested that Indonesian teachers can wisely use local human resources with good English mastery and even foreigners to be involved in the teaching and learning process to give more motivation to learners like that the Japanese teachers have implemented.

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