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Introducing English Education into Japanese Elementary Schools:
A Case Study Examining Goals and Issues

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Japanese young people tend to be less interested in going to study abroad or wish not to work overseas. However, the Japanese government points out that “In order for Japan to reemerge as a country with a growing economy despite having undergone the recent serious crisis of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and while it continues to face the issues of decreasing population and drastically aging society, it is an urgent issue to cultivate members of the young generation who possess creativity and vitality. As globalization gathers speed for the international economy of the 21st century, it is of great necessity to continuously develop *Global Human Resources* who possess rich linguistic and communication skills and intercultural experiences, and thrive internationally.” (2011) In addition to the necessity of raising *Global Human Resource*, Japan is going to hold the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, which will lead to an increase in opportunity for the younger generation to communicate in English that has changed the Japanese citizens’ awareness about the necessity of English communication skills. Thus, the Tokyo Olympics has accelerated the government’s goal to raising *Global Human Resource* rapidly.

According to “The plans for English education reform due to globalization” (2014) , the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (below referred to MEXT) formed a experts committee (Yushikisya Kaigi) in 2014. At the committee, they decided to take three actions by 2018. First, organize language teacher training and guidelines. Second, accomplish the project to strengthen English education at designated schools of every prefecture (Eigo Kyouiku Kyouka Chiiki Kyotei Jigyou). Third, accomplish pilot lessons at the schools which are not under government course guidelines (kyouikukatei Tokureikou). After that, they formed a committee based on the results of these projects at Central Council for Education to carry out the new English education system by stages in 2018 and will tackle that in earnest in 2020. This reforming project is related to the “Project for Promotion of *Global Human Resource* Development”. According to the MEXT, they “aims to overcome the Japanese younger generation's "inward tendency" and to foster human resources who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in the global field, as the basis for improving Japan’ s global competitiveness and enhancing the ties between nations.” Therefore, they would like students to learn and understand their own and other cultures through English activities at elementary school. However, the government has underestimated the problems and issues related to the actual educational reality.

Accordingly, the aim of this thesis is to argue the necessity of introducing English education into elementary schools in Japan and describe how the Japanese government should solve the issues and problems.

Chapter 1 describes the history of English education, the process of English education’s revision in Japan, and the English education under the newest course of study to understand what the Japanese government did and tries to do. Chapter 2 summarizes the supportive and unsupportive opinions about introducing English

education to elementary school by some experts of English education to describe advantages and disadvantages of this English revision. Chapter 3 presents the research question and methodology. The actual results and findings are summarized and analyzed in chapter 4. Chapters 5 discuss findings to clarify the reality of English education in Japanese elementary schools. In a conclusion, a brief summary of findings is solutions are presented.

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