

Comparison of Textbooks at the Beginning Stage of English Learning

in Japan and Finland



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1) Outline

Based on previous studies about education in Finland, analysis of textbooks in Finland and comparison of textbooks in Japan and Finland, I am going to research the differences between textbooks at the beginning stage of English learning in Japan and Finland. Besides, I am going to find suggestions from the results of the research.

2) Background

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced that foreign language activities are introduced from third grade of elementary school and treats as a subject from fifth grade since 2020. Accordingly, the textbook for foreign language activities which is the beginning stage of English learning was changed from “Hi, friends!” to “Let’s try!”.

3) Why I chose Finland as a comparison?

1. Keeping high ranks in TOEFL.
2. Early English education has already started.
3. Linguistic distance is similar to Japan.



Table1: Difficulty of learning languages from the perspective of native English speakers

Category	Level	Country
Category I	A language that is very close to English	Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish
Category II	A language that is similar to English	German
Category III	A language that is linguistically or culturally different from English	Indonesian, Malaysian, Swahili
Category IV	A language that is linguistically or culturally very different from English.	Czech, Finnish, Greek, Icelandic, Polish, Russian, Turkish
Category V	A language that is extremely difficult for native speakers of English	Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean

Source: Ohtani (2019)

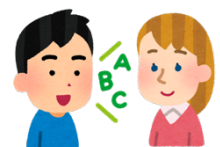
4) Previous studies

Analysis of textbooks in Finland

There are several previous studies analyzing Finnish elementary school textbooks and they were studied mainly from the following five perspectives

- Vocabulary
- Practice
- Autonomy
- Critical thinking
- Culture

Part of the reason why Finnish can speak English with only "School education"!!!



Comparison of textbooks in Japan and Finland

Tabata and Matsuda (2018) researched the differences between Japanese and Finnish textbooks at the beginning stage of English learning. They compared the textbook "Hi! Friends!1 and 2"(2015) in Japan to "All Stars 3 and 4 reader (2008~10)" in Finland.

Table2: The differences between Japanese and Finnish textbooks at the beginning stage of English learning.

	Japan	Finland
Grammar and sentences	①present tense only ②only "I" and "You" are listed as pronoun. ③simple idiomatic expressions that can be used in conversation.	①present tense and present progressive tense ②"I", "You" and " They " are listed as pronoun. ③idiomatic expressions that can be used not only in conversation but also in real life.
Activities related to critical thinking	①a question-and-answer format ② Studying with pair and groups.	① a question-an answer + additional information or an answer + question format ② Studying with pair or groups.
Culture and topics	①the main places and scenes are set in Japanese schools, towns, and homes ②The countries that appear in the textbook are more than 10.	①the main places and scenes are set as English houses, forests, clubhouses and party places. ②The country that appears in the textbook is England.

4) Research questions

Q1. How many words and phrases do English textbooks in Japan and Finland have?

Q2. How many "5W1H" expressions do English textbooks in Japan and Finland have?

5) Method

Comparative study

I am going to compare a textbook "Let's try!" in Japan to "Go for it!3" in Finland to reveal the results of my research questions and suggestions for early English education in Japan.



6) References

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