

Comparison of Finnish and Japanese English Textbooks

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Abstract

Recently, Finland has attracted the attention of the world, as it is ranked at the top of two major international assessments in education. Many researchers and educators in Japan have thus been focusing their attention on the success of the Finnish school system. While the above-mentioned international assessments do not show the ranking of English abilities, the study of English in Finland is quite well-respected internationally. In particular, international English tests such as the TOEFL have shown Finland to continually be ranked near the top every year. In a survey of foreign language proficiency in Finland, Latomaa & Nuolijärvi (2005) found 66 % of Finnish people could speak at least some English. In comparison, Japan has been shown to consistently rank between the middle and the bottom of such tests at the TOEIC and TOEFL. The different learning outcomes in Finland and Japan has provided the impetus for this presentation. To learn more about how each country approaches English education, in this presentation, I compare the two textbooks of each country, and analyze them. I have conducted a survey of two course book series: "English for you too!" from grades 3-6(used in Finnish elementary schools) and "New Crown" from grade 1-3 (used in Japanese junior high schools). However, "Eigo no-to" is quite different from "English for You, too!". I compare the Japanese junior high school textbooks, with Finnish textbook for elementary school students. I mainly focused my analysis on two features: (1) number of new words introduced at each grade, and (2) the organization and grading of grammatical structures of the textbooks. Regarding the result of (1), in Finland, students are required to acquire about 2000 words when graduating from elementary school. However, in Japan, students acquire only 1200 words when graduating from junior high school. Regarding the result of (2), in Japanese junior high school textbooks, there are about 90 of grammatical items. On the other hand, there are 110 grammatical items in Finnish textbooks. Further, in Finnish textbooks, moreover, key grammatical items appear repeatedly. Thus, in Finland, students are able to acquire grammatical items by repetition. In conclusion,

Finnish English textbooks have different features. The size of vocabulary is larger in Finland than in Japan. We should increase the number of words student learn at junior high school. Repeated instruction of grammatical items in Finland is a good way for students to acquire basic grammar needed for communication. And, it would be good for Japan to adopt some effective characteristics of Finnish education such as repetition learning.

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