

# Curriculum Development for English Classes in the Fifth Grade of Elementary School

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The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has announced that English is to become a formal subject in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school by 2020. However, nothing concrete has been decided yet about the curriculum. Therefore, we propose a curriculum that we created taking theories of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002) and autonomy (Benson, 2011) into account. We also introduce background information about MEXT's policies. To help young learners become self-regulated and autonomous, we developed a portfolio with can-do lists based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The curriculum for the fifth grade as well as the portfolio aimed at promoting self-regulation and autonomy are also included in this paper.

文科省は2020年から英語を小学校の5、6年で正式教科とすると公式に発表した。カリキュラムに関してはまだ何も具体的な事は決まっていない。それゆえ文科省の方針についてその概要を紹介致すと共に、自己調整学習と自律性を取り入れた我々独自のカリキュラムをここに提案する。本論文では、若い学習者が自己調整学習者となり、自律した学習者となるように、ヨーロッパ共通言語参照枠 (CEFR) とヨーロッパ言語ポートフォリオ (ELP) を参照にCan-do listsを含むポートフォリオをカリキュラムとともに草案した。それらを取り入れて我々の言語学習見解を具体化したものとして1年間の5年生向けのカリキュラムとポートフォリオの例を紹介する。

# JALT2014 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



**B**ASED ON the course of study proposed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in 2008, English has been introduced to fifth and sixth graders since 2011. In addition, reflecting the wave of globalization, MEXT has decided that English education should start from the third grade and that English will be introduced as a formal subject starting in the fifth grade in 2020 (MEXT, 2014a). Although nothing concrete about curriculum has been decided yet, it is important to consider what should be taught and how it should be taught in the fifth grade when English becomes a formal subject. In this paper, we discuss how the concepts and content of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) from the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) can be introduced into elementary school English education in Japan.

Our rationale for proposing a curriculum for fifth-grade students is that no concrete guidelines have been presented yet. However, before starting to teach English as a subject, an initial proposal about what to teach and how to teach it is urgently needed. Therefore, in this paper, a full year curriculum and portfolio with can-do lists for fifth-grade students is presented in the hope of providing concrete ways for effectively introducing English as a formal subject.

### Guidance from MEXT

MEXT regards English proficiency as key to the future growth of Japan (MEXT, 2014e) and the curriculum guidelines offered by CEFR could be used as a benchmark for developing an English curriculum.

Since 2011, fifth- and sixth-grade students have been learning English as part of foreign language activities. However, according to a proposal by MEXT (2014b), which will be implemented in 2020, third-grade students will start learning English as part of foreign language activities, which is 2 years earlier than in the current course of study (MEXT, 2008). At the same time, English will

become a formal subject for fifth and sixth graders. For third- and fourth-grade students, one of the goals is to foster positive attitudes toward communicating with others in English while familiarizing them with English, on the assumption that earlier introduction of a foreign language will make children feel more receptive to foreign languages (Yoshida, 2014).

For English classes in the fifth and sixth grades, the goal is to develop all four skills equally while improving communicative abilities (MEXT, 2014c). MEXT has stated that students need to cultivate reading and writing skills as well as listening and speaking, in order to lay the foundation for communication skills (MEXT, 2014d), and this requires teachers to give lessons that facilitate a balanced acquisition of all four skills. Students will have the equivalent of three English lessons a week. This will include two 45-minute lessons and three 15-minute *module* lessons each week. The module lessons are mainly for students to confirm and review what they have learned during the other two lessons. This time is to be used for checking, listening, and reviewing pronunciation and expressions (MEXT, 2014f). During class, teachers should put greater emphasis on supporting and encouraging students' interest, motivation, and attitude towards English communication rather than on vocabulary or grammatical knowledge (MEXT, 2014d).

The aim of language learning, as stated in the CEFR, is to help students become good language learners who are able to continue lifelong language learning (Council of Europe 2001). The document points out that it is the teacher's responsibility to create an environment in which students can enjoy learning English while knowing the important role that English plays in the world as a global language and in which they are encouraged to be good language learners who can regulate their own learning and continue to learn English of their own accord. Therefore, careful consideration is needed for effective instruction of English to young learners.

## Self-Regulated Learning and Autonomy

Self-regulation is the process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills, which is important because a major academic function of education is the development of lifelong learning (Zimmerman, 2002). Self-regulated students are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning (Zimmerman, 1986). In the cyclical process of self-regulated learning, which was proposed by Zimmerman (2010), there are three stages: the forethought phase, the performance phase, and the self-reflection phase. In the forethought phase, learners analyze tasks and set motivational beliefs, such as the belief that they can accomplish a task. Based on the analysis of the task, they set goals and adopt strategies. In the performance phase, they observe and control their own learning. At the self-reflection stage, they evaluate themselves and react to their previous performance, and this self-feedback can be used to start another forethought phase. The introduction and effective use of these cyclical phases enables elementary school children to become self-regulated learners.

From an early stage of learning English, cultivating students' autonomy is also important. Autonomy is the capacity to control one's own learning, and is considered a natural product of the practice of self-regulated learning, or learning in which the objectives, progress, and evaluation of learning are decided by learners themselves (Benson, 2011). Autonomous learners can continue to learn and adjust their learning throughout their lives (Cameron, 2001).

## The ELP for English Classes in Elementary School

In the CEFR, it is stated that language learning is a lifelong task that is promoted and facilitated throughout educational systems, from preschool through to adult education (Council of Europe, 2001). It is considered important to lay a proper foundation for English

learning as a lifelong task in elementary school. The ELP, which reflects the concepts of the CEFR, “provides a format in which language learning and intercultural experiences of the most diverse kinds can be recorded and formally recognised” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5). One example for young language learners is the junior version of the ELP (National Centre for Information on Language Teaching, 2006), which is composed of “my language biography,” “my language dossier,” and “my language passport.” The language biography is used to keep a record of progress and record how learners learn, using can-do lists. The purpose of the language dossier is to keep examples of what learners have done in the new languages. The language passport shows which languages they know and what they know and can do in those languages.

In the junior version of the ELP, all four skills are integrated. Children often focus only on the spoken language for several years (Cameron, 2001). However, by the time they are 10 years old, their L1 literacy skills have been firmly acquired and they are aware of language, so reading and writing should be integrated into foreign language learning. According to a survey about English at elementary school in 2011 (MEXT, 2011), about 80% of junior high school students who had learned English through activities in elementary school answered that they would like to have studied reading and writing as well. From the standpoint of their cognitive development and after 2 years of experience with English through activities in the third and fourth grades, fifth graders are ready to learn writing and reading. The junior version of the ELP, which includes reading and writing, may give some suggestions for a new curriculum. In addition, some concepts and ideas from the ELP that can promote learners' self-regulation and autonomy may provide a firm foundation for the new curriculum in Japan.

## Can-Do Lists

The ELP allows learners to keep a record of progress in learning languages and to record how they learn with can-do lists. Utilizing

can-do lists along with other self-assessment tools helps students understand their English abilities. MEXT (2014d) has proposed the adoption of can-do lists because they show clearly the academic achievement goals that students are expected to attain. As of 2013, 17% of junior high schools and 34% of high schools nationwide had implemented can-do lists in their learning accomplishment goals (MEXT, 2013). However, with no formal textbooks for elementary schools, few can-do lists for elementary students are available. One source is the Society for Testing English Proficiency (Eiken, 2008), which produces the STEP or Eiken test and can-do lists for each level. The Grade 5 Eiken can-do lists are equivalent to the level of English beginners in junior high school. The goals are for students to understand familiar topics like families, hobbies, and sports. Being able to read and listen (see Figure 1), and speak and write (see Figure 2) about these familiar topics will help students strengthen their foundation in English. These lists can also help students monitor and understand their current level, which cultivates their autonomy. We used Eiken's can-do lists as a reference to draft our curriculum for the fifth grade by considering what fifth-grade students need to learn.

EIKEN Can-do List	
Grade 5	
<b>Reading</b>	<b>Can recognize the letters of the alphabet and punctuation marks, and can understand basic English words, phrases, and sentences.</b>
	Can read the alphabet (A to Z).
	Can recognize both upper case and lower case letters of the alphabet (e.g. A and a, F and f).
	Can understand the meaning of periods (.), question marks (?), quotation marks ("..."), and exclamation marks (!).
	Can understand familiar words from everyday life (e.g. dog, eat, happy).
	Can understand basic sentences describing familiar activities from everyday life (e.g. "I play tennis every day.").
<b>Listening</b>	<b>Can understand basic English words and phrases and set expressions.</b>
	Can understand which letter was referred to when the letters of the alphabet are spoken aloud (e.g. in the spelling of people's names).
	Can understand the meaning of familiar words from everyday life (e.g. dog, eat, happy).
	Can recognize dates and days of the week.
	Can recognize numbers used in familiar ways for everyday purposes (e.g. telephone numbers, the time, a person's age).
	Can understand everyday greetings (e.g. "How are you?" / "Nice to meet you.").
	★ The statements in bold at the head of each skill section are summaries of the significant features of the can-do statements ascribed to that level for that skill. The summary statements themselves were not included in the questionnaire surveys. ★ Each level of the EIKEN Can-do List can be assumed to include the can-do statements in each of the levels below it.

Figure 1. Eiken can-do list for grade 5: Reading and listening. Reproduced by permission of Eiken Foundation of Japan (Eiken, 2008).

EIKEN Can-do List	
Grade 5	
<b>Speaking</b>	
<b>Can use basic English words and phrases and set expressions.</b>	
Can pronounce the names of the letters of the alphabet (A to Z).	
Can pronounce familiar words from everyday life (e.g. dog, eat, happy).	
Can express numbers used in familiar ways for everyday purposes (e.g. telephone numbers, the time).	
Can exchange simple greetings (e.g. "Good morning." / "Good night.").	
Can apologize and express thanks (e.g. "I'm sorry." / "Thank you.").	
Can answer yes/no questions about familiar topics from everyday life (e.g. about likes and dislikes).	
<b>Writing</b>	
<b>Can write the letters of the alphabet and basic English words and use punctuation marks.</b>	
Can print the letters of the alphabet (ABC...XYZ).	
Can use upper case letters, lower case letters, and punctuation marks correctly (e.g. A/a, ?, !).	
Can write his/her own name.	
Can write familiar words from everyday life (e.g. dog, eat, happy).	
Can write numbers as English words (e.g. five, eleven).	
<small>★ The statements in bold at the head of each skill section are summaries of the significant features of the can-do statements calibrated to that level for that skill. The summary statements themselves were not included in the questionnaire surveys.            ★ Each level of the EIKEN Can-do List can be assumed to include the can-do statements in each of the levels below it.</small>	

Figure 2. Eiken can-do list for grade 5: Speaking and writing. Reproduced by permission of Eiken Foundation of Japan (Eiken, 2008).

## The Curriculum

With reference to MEXT's policies regarding improving the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing with an even balance (2014d), can-do lists for the fifth grade from STEP (2008b) and the ELP for junior version (National Centre for Information on Language Teaching, 2006), as well as theories of self-regulated learning and autonomy, we propose a curriculum for fifth-grade English education (see Table 1).

Table 1. Proposed Curriculum for Fifth-Grade Elementary School Students

Objective of the Course: The objective of this course is to help students cultivate basic communication ability in not only listening and speaking but also reading and writing, and to help them become self-regulated and autonomous learners who will be able to continue to learn English of their own accord as a life-long process.			
Theme	Contents	Key sentences	No. of Classes
1. Let's say your name	The alphabet and names	What's your name? My name is Yuko.	2
2. Let's say hello	Phonics and greetings	Hello, Tom. How are you? Nice to meet you.	2
3. Let's say numbers	Numbers 1~10	How old are you? There is one (a) dog.	2
4. Let's talk about your after-school activities	Days of the week and after school activities	What do you do on Mondays? I have soccer practice.	4
5. Let's talk about your favorite food	Food and drink	What do you want for lunch today? Let's make pancakes.	4
6. Let's ask the price	Big numbers and shopping	How much is this pencil? Can I have five apples, please?	4
7. Let's say the dates	Months, dates, and birthdays	What's the date today? When is your birthday?	4
8. Let's talk about colors and animals	Colors and pets	What color do you like? What color is the dog?	4

Theme	Contents	Key sentences	No. of Classes
9. Let's talk about your house	Words for places	The cat is in the living room. There are a lot of books in the box.	4
10. Let's talk about school and school subjects	School and school subjects	What subject do you like? David is in the library.	4
11. Let's talk about your feelings	Parts of the body and feelings	Touch your head. How do you feel? I'm happy.	4
12. Let's talk about your country	Names of countries	Where is Emi from? Where does Mary live?	4
13. Let's talk about your schedule	Time and daily routines	What time do you get up? When do you play tennis?	4
14. Let's talk about sports	Sports and possessions	What are Tom and David doing? That cap is mine.	4
15. Let's talk about your holidays	Places, nature, trips, and transportation	I'm going to the mountain. How will you go there? I go there by car.	4
16. Let's talk about the weather and the seasons	The weather and the seasons	How's the weather in Tokyo? Jun goes swimming every summer.	4

Theme	Contents	Key sentences	No. of Classes
17. Let's talk about environment	Environment	We have to clean the beach. Let's look after old people.	4
18. Let's talk about your hobbies	Hobbies	Can you dance? Does she play the piano?	4
19. Let's talk about your family	My family and jobs	He's my father. My mother is a doctor.	4
20. Let's talk about your future	Future plans	I want to be a police officer. I'm going to study abroad.	4

The proposed curriculum includes themes, content, key sentences, and numbers of class hours. In the present course of study, English is introduced as an activity once a week and the total number of classes for fifth-grade students is 35 classes (MEXT, 2008). In the proposed curriculum, the total number of classes is set as 70, which is based on the proposal of introducing two classes a week in the fifth grade starting in 2020 (MEXT, 2014a). At that time, the foreign language activities that fifth- and sixth-grade students are engaging in now will be shifted to third- and fourth-grade students. After 2 years of practice with communicative activities those students will be ready to start reading and writing. Furthermore, it is possible for fifth- and sixth-grade students to cultivate their ability to read and write because of their level of cognitive development (Allen-Tamai, 2012). Therefore reading and writing are included in the proposed curriculum.



In Unit 1, the alphabet and students' names are introduced. The goal is for students to trace capital and small letters first, then write them down by themselves and finally write their own names. When reading English letters, phonetic and phonological awareness is essential for young learners, since the sounds of English and Japanese are significantly different. For this reason, in Unit 2, phonics is introduced to develop learners' awareness of the sounds of the alphabet. In addition, general greetings are introduced.

The topic of Unit 4 is *Days of the week and after-school activities*. In order to get students involved in learning English, the topics should be familiar to them. Usually, fifth- and sixth-grade students belong to clubs at school, practice sports, and do extracurricular activities outside of school, such as piano lessons. The features of our proposed curriculum are based on situations that are related to students' daily lives.

### Portfolio with Can-Do Lists

Table 2 shows a portfolio with a can-do list for the entire fifth-grade curriculum. Although MEXT has proposed the adoption of can-do lists, there are few textbooks with can-do lists for elementary school students. Using can-do lists based on our curriculum will be beneficial for students to confirm what they have learned and what they have yet to learn. The objective of the inclusion of can-do lists is to make use of theories of self-regulated learning and autonomy to help students to understand the learning goals before each unit and reflect on their own learning after each unit.

Table 2. Portfolio With Can-Do Lists

Unit	Topic	☺ = I CAN ~:		☹ = I CAN ~ A LITTLE :		☹ = I CAN'T	
		Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing		
1	The Alphabets and names	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
2	Phonics & greetings	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
3	Numbers from 1 to 12 and age	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
4	Days of the week and after-school activities	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
5	Food and drinks	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
6	Big numbers and shopping	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
7	Months, dates, and birthdays	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
8	Colors and pets	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
9	Words for places	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
10	School and subjects	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
11	Parts of the body and feelings	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
12	Names of countries	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
13	Time and daily routines	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
14	Sports, possessions	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
15	Places, nature, trips, and transportation	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
16	The Weather and the seasons	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
17	Environment	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
18	Hobbies	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
19	My family and jobs	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		
20	Future plans	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺		

Each unit should also have a can-do list. Table 3 shows a portfolio with a can-do list from Unit 4. The self-reflection section is placed at the bottom of the can-do list. This is a place for students to reflect on their own learning and leave feedback and comments for themselves.

The lesson plans for the unit are as follows: First, students listen to a conversation about school or club activities and days of the week. Then they read the textbook, making sure they fully understand the vocabulary and grammar. Next they are encouraged to talk about their own after-school activities in pairs or in groups, using sentences such as “I have soccer practice on Mondays” or “I have a swimming lesson on Tuesdays,” after learning days of the week. It is very natural for them to talk about their activities using the days of the week. Finally, they write about their activities.

Through various kinds of activities, learners develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and in this way acquire the target language. Our proposed curriculum aims to foster these four skills as well as to recognize and reflect on what students can do.

Table 3. Can-Do Statements for Unit 4

Unit 4: Days of the week and after-school activities				
Contents	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Days of the week	I can listen and understand days of the week. ○	I can say days of the week. ○	I can read days of the week. ○	I can write days of the week. ○
After school activities	I can listen and understand different school activities. ○	I can say my own school activities. ○	I can read other students' school activities. ○	I can write about my own school activities. ○
Self-reflection ふりかえり				

## Conclusion

Based on the policy of MEXT, that English will be introduced as a school subject in the fifth grade in 2020, in this paper, we have proposed a curriculum for fifth-grade English, taking theories of self-regulated learning and autonomy into account. Our curriculum, which includes can-do lists and a portfolio, is proposed with reference to the junior version of the ELP, MEXT policies, and can-do lists for Grade 5 from STEP, and is aimed at helping young students become self-regulated and autonomous learners at the early stages of learning English as a school subject. In our curriculum, the integration of literacy skills is also proposed, based on fifth-grade

students' level of cognitive development as well as their having studied English for 2 years in the third and fourth grades.

In the current situation, in which a concrete English curriculum starting in 2020 has not yet been decided, providing a curriculum proposal for future English education at the elementary school level is urgently required. Though this curriculum is only a proposal, we hope it plays a role in paving the way toward framing a curriculum for English education in elementary schools from 2020.

## Bio Data

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