

# Rationale and Goals of Japanese Education in Secondary Schools Overseas

— A Criticism based on a Study on Syllabi and Guidelines —

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According to a survey by the Japan Foundation (1988), the majority of Japanese language learners overseas, are primary and secondary school students from what have once been mostly college students. In Australia, 96 percent of the Japanese language learners are in primary and secondary schools. One of the causes of this phenomenon is globalization, which demands nations to educate their students to survive a new age of a multilingual, multicultural society and to gain a competitive edge. Japanese has also been one of the popular languages. Consequently, many countries have decided to choose Japanese as one of the foreign languages to be taught or learned at schools.

There are some countries that have provided or revised defined guidelines, rationale and educational goals of foreign language education as one of the components of school curricula. Due to the fact that children are in developmental stage, there is a need for consideration towards the learning context and approach, which must be age appropriate and relevant to the students' lives. Also for language educational goals, it is important to enhance students' critical thinking, problem solving skills and foster intercultural competence, rather than focusing on the linguistic skills including grammar and vocabulary,. However, this 'intercultural competency for globalization' (Lo Bianco, et al, eds.) is not an isolated issue for primary and secondary schools abroad, but also a matter of urgency in Japan as well.

Firstly, this paper focuses on studying and analyzing the rationale and educational goals defined in the national standards or guidelines of four countries (Australia, the United States of America, South Korea, and China). Secondly, it addresses some of the issues that should be taken into consideration in order to foster 'intercultural competency for globalization' for a multilingual, multicultural society through foreign (Japanese) language teaching and learning. Finally, it discusses the current situation in Japan.

Australia and the United States of America are both multicultural nations,

which consist of significant migrant population. Since English is the major language of both countries, historically, migrants were “encouraged” to assimilate into a homogeneous English-speaking society and foreign language education was not highly considered. “Rationale for Language Learning” in “ALL” stated that languages not only contribute to an individual learner’s intellectual, social, and affective development, it is also considered as one of the national resources which enable the nation to become prosperous. Both countries guarantee the right to learn the native language as well as English for the minority children whose home language is not English, and induce the importance of learning a second language towards the majority group with English-speaking-background.

The educational goals for foreign language written in each Syllabus and Guideline reflect the rationale. The objective that all four countries have in common is to foster communication skills using the target language. However, it can be recognized that each country has different ideas of what communication is and of approaches to nurture it.

“ALL” and “Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century” praises rationale for the realization of a multilingual and multi-cultural society; however, it can be thought that ‘intercultural competency for globalization’ needs to be discussed because they seem to lack the perspective that a multilingual and multicultural society may bring about “friction”. How learners develop the skill to cope with “friction” is still a question open for discussion.

In Japan today, English is merely one of the elective subjects determined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Moreover, there are usually no choices of foreign languages besides English, which is offered in most schools. On the other hand, Korea has established a foreign language education system, which allows students to choose from seven foreign languages. Thus, the system itself seems to send out the messages that the nation is aiming for a multilingual, multicultural society through foreign language teaching and learning. In order to educate global citizens, raising awareness and fostering ability to cope with the friction should be promoted. Language plays an important role in achieving these roles. To foster ‘intercultural competency for globalization’ in Japanese language education is essential in Japan.

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