



Achieving University Entrance Exams that Test Practical English Abilities

**—Connections with English Education Reform in Primary
and Secondary Education and International Standardization—**

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I. Introduction

Japanese companies are struggling to acquire human resources that can compete on a global level and it has been pointed out that Japanese have little experience overseas and are overly inwardly looking. One of the factors behind these issues are the poor foreign language abilities (English) of Japanese people.¹ While in some aspects English is only a means of communication, it is also an effective tool for getting one's opinion across and building mutual trust. Currently one in four people across the world speak English (approximately 1,700 million people, less than 400 million of which are native speakers), making it the language with the largest impact on business opportunities (Chinese is the second most influential language, while Japanese is in eighth place).² In the past, the basic competencies were considered to be reading, writing, and arithmetic. Now however, the basic competencies can be considered to be reading, writing, IT, and English.

Despite the many hours that are devoted to teaching English at educational institutions in Japan, these efforts do not lead to improvements in practical English abilities. The government of Japan has also recognized the necessity of reform in English education and has started initiatives to this end. However, the thing that parents and children are interested in is advancing to a good university which is considered to provide a good education and a good job in the future. For this reason a focus is placed on exam-oriented English centered on grammar and translation in order to pass university entrance exams.

Therefore we urge that a focus be made on reforming these university entrance exams that have the largest impact on the education of children by adopting an internationally-recognized third-party qualification exam (TOEFL) that tests practical English abilities as the English entrance exam (general entrance exam) for Japanese universities.

¹ According to the ETS-Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL Internet-based and Paper-based Tests JANUARY 2010-DECEMBER 2010 TEST DATA, a TOEFL results ranking by country, Japan ranked 135th out of 163 countries around the world, and 27th among 30 Asian countries.

² Source: Lecture by Ms. Ilona Budapesti Linguistic Advisor to Rakuten, Inc. (The CEO and Academic Manager of Executive Training at Supeek) (Second PT Meeting: August 30, 2012)

II. Proposal

Achieving University Entrance Exams That Test Practical English Abilities

Adopt an internationally-recognized third-party qualification exam (TOEFL) that tests practical English abilities as the English entrance exam (general entrance exam) for Japanese universities.

[By 2016, supported by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and some university officials]

[Concrete actions]

1. Use a third-party qualification exam that comprehensively measures the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing required for practical communication³ for the English entrance exam for universities (general entrance exams)
2. Use TOEFL(Test of English as a Foreign Language)⁴ as an internationally-recognized third-party qualification exam
3. The government is to clarify the responsible parties, achievement period, and targets values, and support reform of the English entrance exams for universities (general entrance exams)

³ In accordance with the new Course of Study, instruction is to focus on listening and speaking during elementary school (years 5 and 6) and comprehensive development of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing during junior high school. (Source: MEXT website)

⁴ TOEFL is a test for measuring the English communication abilities for people whose native language is not English. Of the English proficiency test around the world, it has been adopted by the broadest range of countries. At over 8,500 institutions in 130 countries, including almost every university in the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the TOEFL test score is used as a proof of English ability and as a standard for university admission, admission upon recommendation, scholarships, and graduation. Since the TOEFL was started, it has been taken by over 27 million people, and it is taken by nearly 1 million people around the world every year. In Japan, the test is conducted 30 to 40 times every year at about 100 different locations. The TOEFL iBT test that is currently available in Japan is composed of four sections (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) that can all be taken on the computer. (Source: Japanese website of the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE))

[Note] In contrast to the TOEFL test that is used to measure the ability to use and understand English at the university level, the TOEIC test that is widely used in Japan is a listening and reading test that covers a wide range of fields, from familiar topics to business.* The TOEIC SW test that measures speaking and writing is also separately available.

III. Concrete Actions

1. Use a third-party qualification exam that comprehensively measures the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing required for practical communication for the English entrance exam for universities (general entrance exams)

[Current issues]

- Currently, university entrance exams are biased towards listening, reading, translation, and detailed grammar. In addition, there are characteristics and tendencies in test development that differ for each university. With the adoption of revised Course of Study, although some issues will remain, education reforms that aim for a balance of the four English skills has been commenced through steps such as starting English education from elementary school and having English lessons being conducted in English for high school. However, if no changes are made from school entrance screening being the thing that teachers, parents, and students are most interested in, it will not be possible to avoid traditional exam-oriented English study centered on grammar and translation aimed at passing university entrance exams.
- Because they only get one chance for university entrance exams, there is a high burden on students. Furthermore, in order to allow many students to take exams at one time, it is not easy for universities conduct screening through essays and interviews which require time and labor.
- Simply passing or failing an entrance exam does not provide feedback that will lead to improvements in the skills of students.

[Points to be improved through implementation]

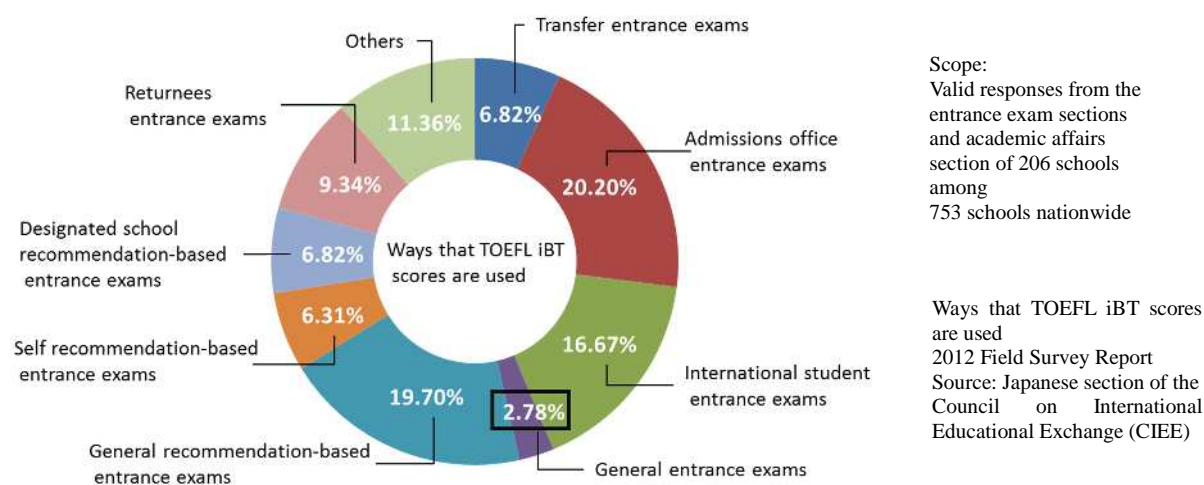
- Factors measured by university entrance exams can be connected to the learning made through comprehensive and integrative instruction aiming to achieve a good balance of the four skills that is being promoted in primary and secondary education reform, and schools, teachers, and students can actively shift from exam-oriented learning to the fostering of practical English skills.
- By changing English screening into achieving a standard score set as an application requirement by each university department, students would be able to take exams multiple times per year and the burden that university entrance exams represent will be reduced.
- Universities would be able to save time and costs required for individual test development and test operations while still being able to conduct English screening as deemed appropriate for each university.
- English learning would no longer end at simply passing or failing an entrance exam. Feedback would be provided that could be used in the measuring of English skills after university entrance or graduation, and this feedback would help to sustain the eagerness

of students towards learning.

2. Use TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) as the internationally-recognized third-party qualification exam

[Current issues]

- TOEFL, an international standard, is used in Japan for credit recognition in educational institutions, preferential treatment for entrance exams, and screening for overseas dispatching. However, preferential treatment for entrance exams is limited to admissions office entrance exams, general recommendation-based entrance exams, international student entrance exams, and TOEFL is rarely used for general entrance exams.



[Points to be improved through implementation]

- One of the advantages of using TOEFL is that even if the test is taken for the purpose of university entrance, it will allow many students to assess their own skill levels compared to the score required for studying overseas. By being able to visualize which overseas university they can attempt to enter at their current skill level or how many more points they need to get into a famous university, students will begin to see studying overseas as a more attainable goal, and this will lead to an increase in the number of students studying abroad.
- Universities will also be able to compare the practical English abilities of students for each academic year and make comparisons with other universities around the world, and acquire information which can be applied in the formulation of university operational strategies, such as future course planning and overseas study support planning.

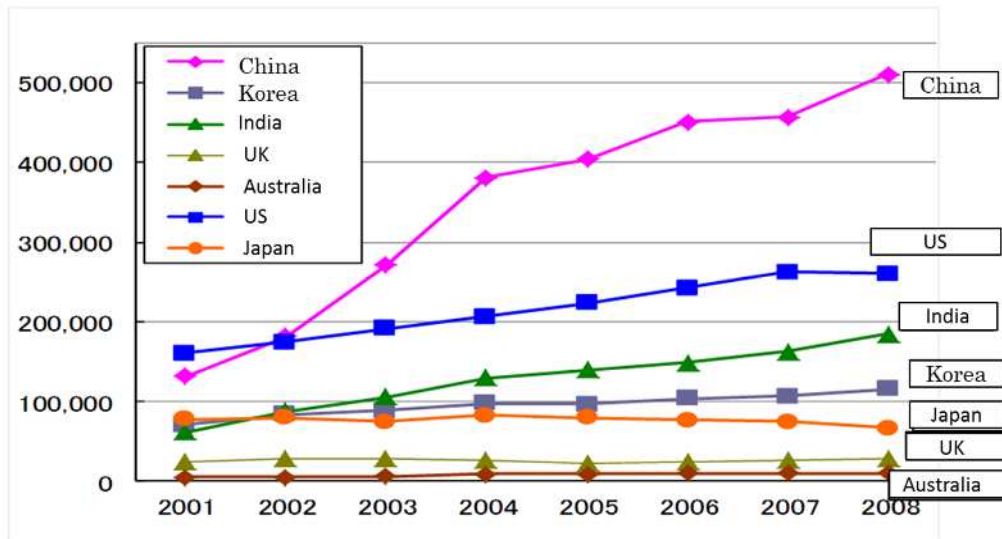
[Challenges for achievement]

- Because there are approximately 600,000 test takers in Japan every year, there could be operational issues with using TOEFL on a large scale. Considerations are required on developing test venues equipped with the equipment required for Internet testing and

developing a scoring system. The government and universities need to work together with TOEFL development and management bodies to create a roadmap for achieving these goals.

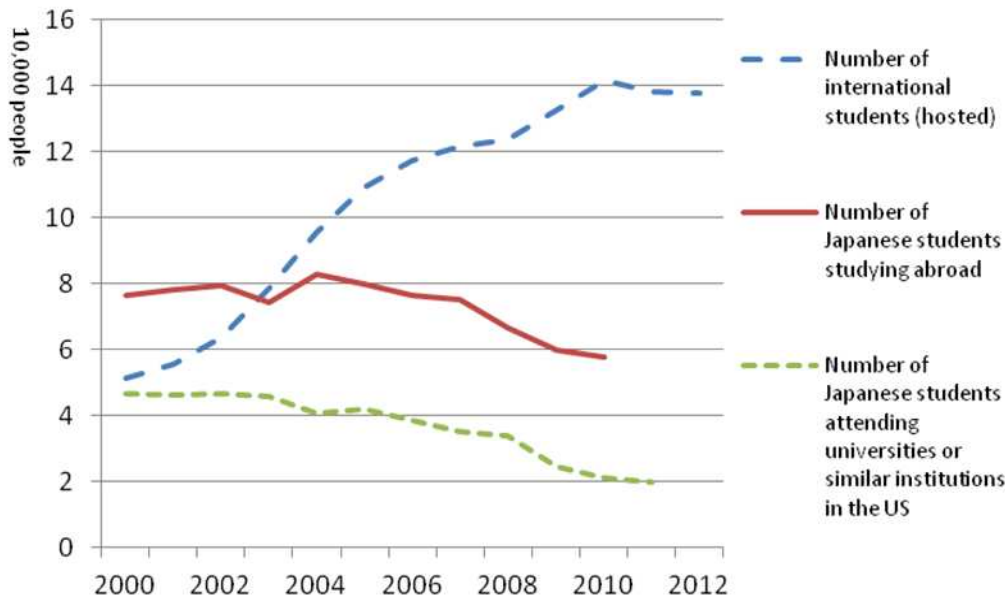
(Figure 2) Number of students sent abroad by each country⁵

China Korea India UK Australia US Japan



Source: Report of The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development (Education at a Glance, OECD; Open Doors, IIE, etc.)

(Figure 3) Number of international students and Japanese students studying abroad



Prepared by Secretariat based on MEXT announcements (UNESCO Cultural Statistics Yearbook, Education at a Glance, OECD; Open Doors, IIE, Japan Student Services Organization, etc.)

⁵ Over a period of approximately 30 years from 1975 to 2009, the number of international students around the world increased over four times from 0.8 million to 3.67 million.

Source: MEXT Higher Education Bureau materials (OECD, "Education at a Glance 2011" Box C3.1)

(Chart 1) Issues with using TOEFL for university entrance exams (general entrance exams) and countermeasure proposals

	Examples of issues associated with use	Solutions (proposals)
1	Securing venues with PC for exam takers (up to about 600,000 exam takers per year in Japan)	(1) Increase the number of test venues and the number of exams per year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the PC classrooms of universities and high schools with the government's support • Increase the number of organizations that manage venues
2	Increase the number of exam graders (When grading the speaking section, the audio data is evaluated by a foreign native speaker)	(1) Increase the number of exam graders
3	Responding to testing issues (equipment failure, etc.)	(1) Increase the frequency of exam holding (2) Consider recovery measures when there are testing issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct the exam once again at a later date on an individual basis - Provide an early report on scores after the exam is conducted again
4	Issues with removing security at venues (Security needs to be removed at venue when conducting exams)	(1) With government support, promote the removal of security at educational institutions during test time (2) Prepare test programs that don't require an Internet connection
5	The exam scope does not match with Japan's Course of Study	(1) Because it is an internationally-recognized exam that tests practical English abilities, the fact that there is a mismatch is not really a problem (2) There is no need for much concern towards this matter as universities set a point standard and the exam does not involve competition over a few points
6	Highly difficult, there is a range that cannot be measured	(1) Consider handling as a point-addition scoring system for universities with low scholastic ability requirements
7	Exam fee is high (currently USD 225)	(1) Support by the government and solicitation and consideration of private-sector scholarship systems

Prepared by the Secretariat based on exchanges with Educational Testing Service (ETS), the body that developed TOEFL and the Japanese representatives, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), which serves as the secretariat for TOEFL

3. The government is to clarify the responsible parties, achievement period, and targets values, and support reform the English entrance exams for universities (general entrance exams)

[Current issues]

- Many policy proposals and action plans from organization such as the Cabinet Office and MEXT propose that third-party qualification exams such as TOEFL and TOEIC be used as university entrance exams.⁶ However, the University Entrants Selection Implementation Guidelines released every year by MEXT⁷ are only guidelines and

⁶ Adoption has been proposed in the Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication prepared by the Commission on the Development of Foreign Language Proficiency established by MEXT (June 30, 2011), the Action Plan of the Industry-University Cooperative Roundtable Meeting for Human Resources Development (May 7, 2012), the Report of the Global Human Resources Development Strategy of the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development chaired by the Chief Cabinet Secretary (June 4, 2012), and the Execution Plan for University Reform of MEXT (June 5, 2012).

⁷ Based on discussions held with public and private university and high school officials, the University Entrants Selection Implementation Guidelines are sent under the name of the Senior Vice Minister of MEXT to public and private

actual operations are left up to each university and accordingly little progress has been made in the adoption of third-party qualification exams for general entrance exams.

- In this era of declining university enrollment, major entrance exam reforms led by an individual university are difficult to implement because of the risk of a reduction in university admission applicants that could result from them.

[Points to be improved through implementation]

- With the support of the government, university entrance exam reform will be possible to be developed as overall social reform without imposing significant risks on specific universities. South Korea was much like Japan in the past in terms of English skills. However, after the globalization policies adopted by the Kim Young Sam administration in 1995, the government promoted large-scale and swift English education reform and improvements in English skills were achieved as a result. Currently, PC-based exams that test practical English abilities are being developed and studies are being conducted to have these English exams replace those being conducted at universities.
- With active government participation in university entrance exam reform, it will be possible to link these reforms with the primary and secondary education reforms that are being promoted. While it will be particularly important to increase the number of foreign teaching staff so that English classes can be conducted in English, it will also be important to promote the development of the ICT environments of educational institutions and the adoption of distance learning that can be used by globally active human resources.⁸

(Chart 2) TOEFL results in Asia by country

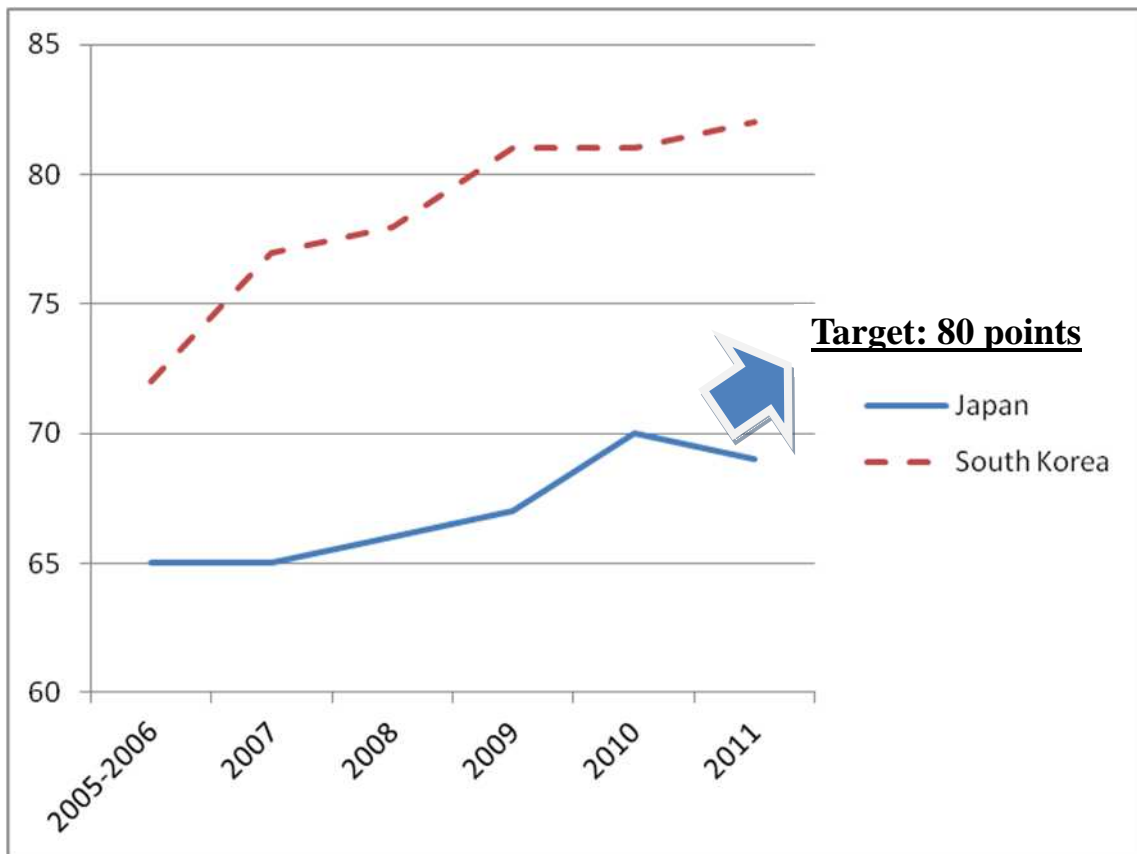
Country	2005-2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
China	76	78	76	76	77
Hong Kong (official language = English)	80	80	80	81	81
South Korea	72	77	78	81	81
Japan	65	65	66	67	70

Source: Materials from a lecture by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea

universities as guidelines for conducting university entrance exams. The guidelines suggest that the result of practical English aptitude exams such as STEP and TOEFL be used for the purpose of properly evaluating the foreign language communication ability of university admission candidates (Utilization of short essays, interviews, practical skill tests, third-party exams, etc.).

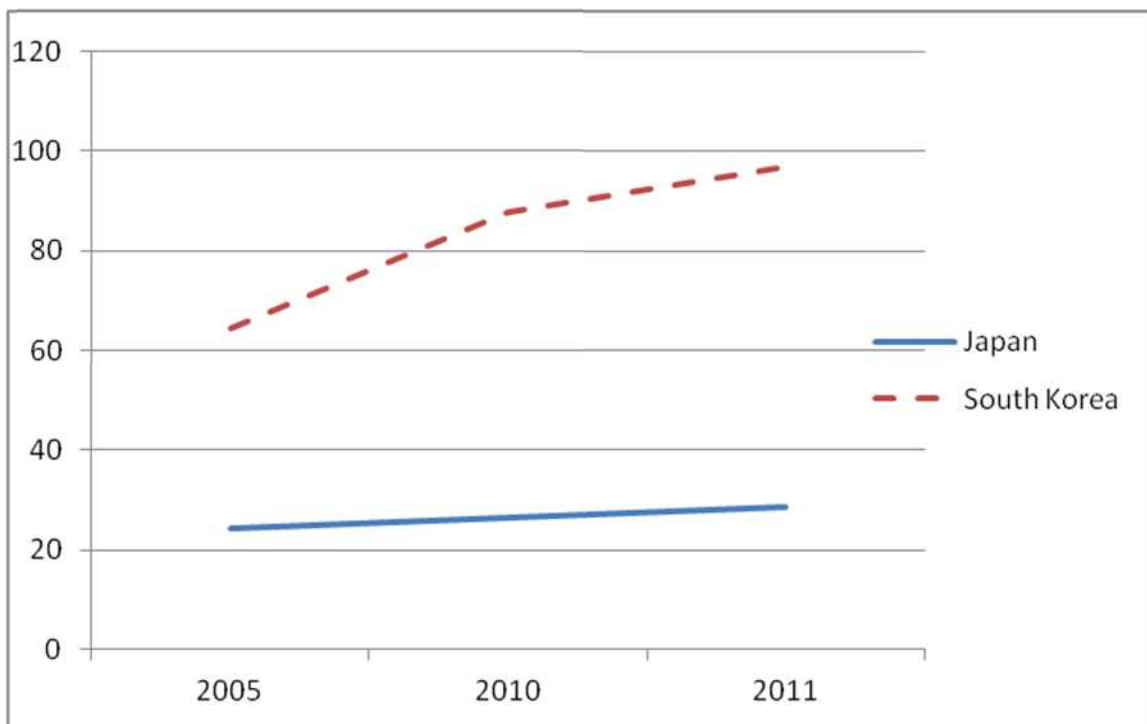
⁸ Receiving education remotely over the Internet

(Figure 4) TOEFL results in South Korea and Japan



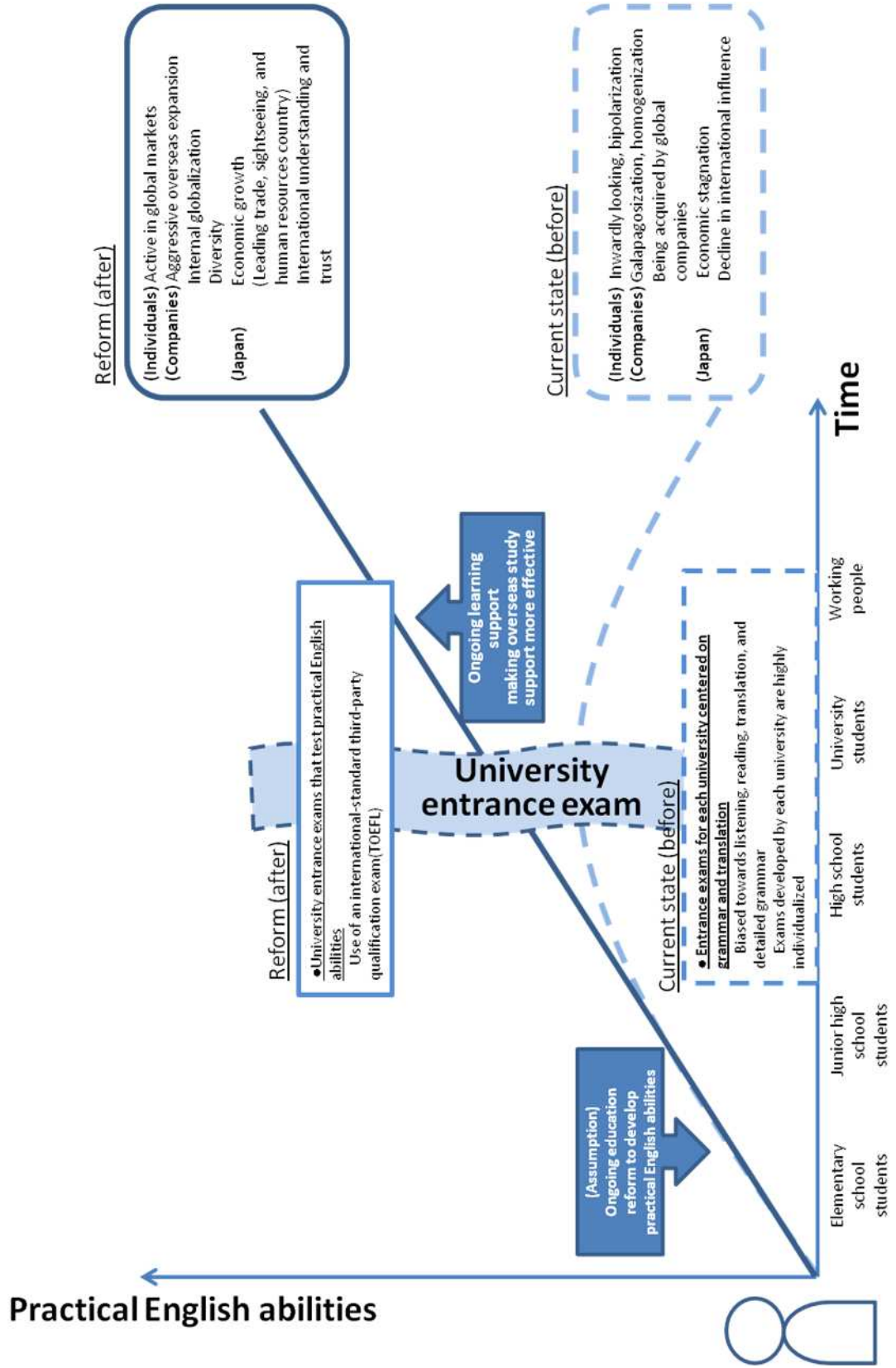
Source: Prepared by Secretariat based on

(Figure 5) Total trade to GDP ratio for South Korea and Japan



Prepared by Secretariat based on the Total Trade (Exports and Imports) to GDP Ratio (International Trade Comparative Statistics) prepared by the Institute for International Trade and Investment

(Figure 6.) Importance of English entrance exam reform (before/after)



IV. Conclusion

The world is rapidly becoming more and more border-less. Especially with the widespread popularization of SNS, it is becoming possible for individuals to come in contact with global knowledge and best practices in real-time. However, if no action is taken, Japanese people, and by extension Japanese companies and Japan as a whole could be left behind. In order for Japan to improve its global competitiveness, in addition to the development of Japanese people capable of being active on the global level, it will also be essential to attract as many as possible of the world's best and brightest, such as high-level engineers, to Japan. While Japan is favorably regarded as safe and an easy place to live by foreigners, language barriers often lead to obstacles in the workplace. For this reason, improvements in practical English abilities throughout Japan will greatly boost opportunities for Japan.

Of course, in addition to English abilities, other important aspects include what is actually being said, specialized capabilities, leadership abilities, and our identity as Japanese people. However, in healthy rivalries with the world's top talents, communication in English is critical in order to express them as your own opinion. By teaching the study of modern Japanese history that has recently been regarded as a problem, it will deepen international understanding as well as understanding among Japanese people, and this will lead to more mutual trust with the world.

The good qualities of Japan are not created by only a few leaders, but by Japanese society as a whole. Improving the English ability of all people in Japan rather than a select few will enable Japan to broadly communicate a picture of the country throughout the world worthy of being proud of. Above all, we believe that one of our roles is providing the children that will lead the next generation in Japan the ability to succeed in the world today.