

Overview of Business Segments | Domestic Education (Japan)

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Focus

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Setting sights on the future of English language education reform

Shinkenzemi: Developing learning material for English four skills

Material to teach each child English that is actually useful

Leveraging knowledge and expertise from correspondence course support to adapt our materials to changes in English language education

Education develops the skills that children will need to be successful members of society in the future. Children living in this age of rapid globalization and technological innovation have a greater need than ever for the skills to think on their own and collaborate with others while carving out the future. Japan is reforming its education system and entrance examinations in order to help students acquire these skills.

With more emphasis on this future vision, English language education in Japan is now undergoing drastic change. The new university entrance examination to be implemented in the 2021 academic year will comprehensively evaluate examinees on all four English language skills, including listening and speaking in addition to reading and writing which the examination has tested up to now. This is because Japan needs human resources who are just as capable of confident communication in English, with people from other countries, as they are at communicating in Japanese.

In April 2019, Benesse released Level-Specific English Four Skills Training, a digital learning material made continuously available to



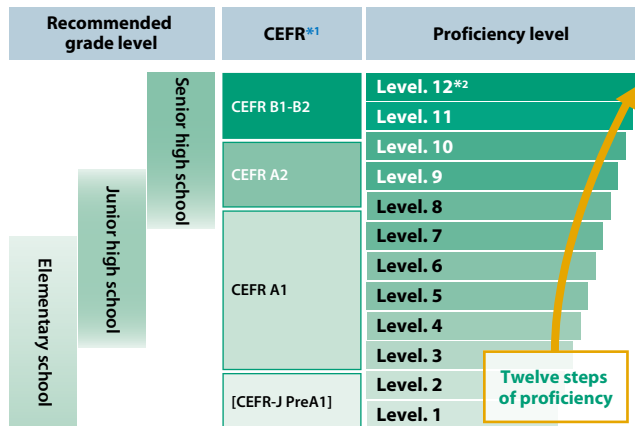
See articles featuring interviews with members of this project team, check here
<https://www.benesse-hd.co.jp/en/ir/library/ar/2019/focus/index.html>

Shinkenzemi enrollees at no additional charge. Through Shinkenzemi, Benesse has long been supporting correspondence courses which are the cornerstone of self-study and self-learning. Some parents have voiced anxiety and confusion about the changes in English language education. Benesse developed English Four Skills Training in response to their concerns.

Providing close support to each enrollee to steadily raise their proficiency

Enrollees have different skill levels, and English Four Skills Training is designed to allow each of them to advance level-by-level starting from the level they can currently handle. The defining characteristic of this training is that it provides a service broken down into 12 stages according to the proficiency level of the enrollee, rather than learning materials according to grade level as the practice has been in the past. The level assessment test determines the English level of each enrollee and offers lessons that match their individual levels. Starting in 2020 elementary schools in Japan will begin teaching Foreign Language Activities in third and fourth grades to familiarize students with English and will begin teaching English as a subject in fifth and

Twelve proficiency level training progression



^{*1} European standards for measuring English language proficiency

^{*2} Level 12 is in development, to be ready in 2020

sixth grades. Students will be graded in English as a subject. Due to varied learning opportunities each student has had until now, right now English skill levels vary significantly even between students in the same grade. For that reason, there is good reason to be optimistic about lesson material tailored to different proficiency levels which can effectively boost English skills starting with what students can currently handle.

Another feature of the learning material is its emphasis on output. Lessons encourage students to organize their thoughts and ideas then communicate them in their own words by enabling them to communicate back and forth with their instructors.

The learning cycle is also designed to enable enrollees to steadily acquire greater English skills. They can set their own achievement goals based on the results of the level assessment test, and the cycle is supported by highly detailed suggestions about when and how to use the learning materials. Designed to keep each enrollee on track while learning on their own, follow-ups and re-assessments determine the optimal level to proceed according to the progress and proficiency of the learner.

Other companies also offer English four skills learning materials, but Benesse has its greatest strength in continuously being able to facilitate the progress of each and every enrollee from elementary school students through senior high school students with a streamlined service. Combining the knowledge and expertise we

have built over the years in materials development and academic skill assessment, we attentively guide enrollees along their learning paths.

Tremendous response immediately after release Steady use by enrollees remains strong

Response to English Four Skills Training immediately after its release was tremendous. And while data on usage trends is still accumulating, actual usage has shown to be even greater than we initially expected.

One example is that over 50% of enrolled elementary school first graders have started using it. Having analyzed the situation, we believe this is a result of large numbers of parents coming on board in the leadup to English becoming a required subject.

At the same time, we have also come to understand what challenges we will need to overcome to further expand enrollment. Since junior and senior high school enrollees have expressed desire to use this training to prepare for English four skills proficiency tests and for entrance examinations, we will be providing one-on-one online lessons with foreign instructors who know how to address the specific test format, timed according to the testing schedule. We will also work on improving the assessment test by analyzing past data to be able to produce highly accurate assessments even with a small number of questions.

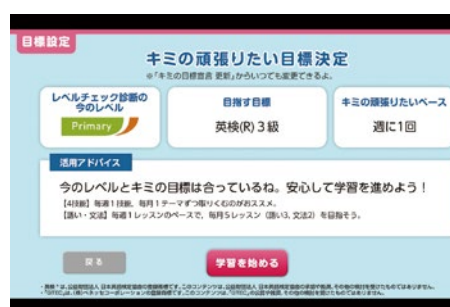
Seeking progress and evolution in the form of English learning material that is genuinely useful

Benesse has accumulated enrollee response data from having provided Shinkenzeremi and upwards of 900,000 online English conversation lessons per year, in addition to a vast collection of learning history including data of conversations with foreign instructors. Utilizing this data along with our customer base, we will aim to achieve further progress and evolution. We will execute phased implementations of learning through conversation with AI. Some children want to boost their spoken English skills but find it difficult to engage in conversation with foreign instructors. In cases such as these, we could reduce their resistance to English conversation by having English-speaking AI characters that can present the right topics for the enrollee.

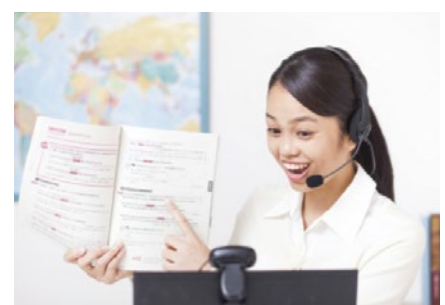
We will enhance our learning materials for improving scores on tests and entrance examinations, but that is only one side of things. "Fostering the skills in children that will be useful for their future." Based on this strong conviction, Benesse will utilize the learning data it has accumulated to create learning material to acquire useful English, which takes four skills learning to the next level for all enrollees while also being receptive to their opinions and those of their parents.



Proficiency level assessment by checklist



Setting goals for each test to enable structured learning



Online English conversation with foreign instructors for a fee is available, allowing for personalized instruction