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Japan's biggest English school in trouble

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27th October, 2007

THE ARTICLE

Japan's biggest English school in trouble

Nova Corporation, Japan's largest English conversation school chain is in serious financial trouble. The company, which employs some 4,000 non-Japanese English teachers, was given court protection from creditors on October 26th. It has debts of around \$357 million and has given up any efforts to try and clear them. Nova's directors are hoping to find sponsors to keep the majority of its 900 schools operational. The company's disgraced president is nowhere to be found. Nozomu Sahashi, 56, owns a 16 percent stake in the company but was fired on Thursday. The board accused him of financial wrongdoing, as he could not give an adequate explanation for his "opaque way of fund-raising and negotiating with potential business alliance partners."

Nova's collapse has angered thousands of teachers, many of whom have not been paid. A union representative, Katsuji Yamahara, expressed his concerns saying: "This is a serious development that could force many students, instructors and employees to suffer losses." Some teachers now face eviction from their company-provided accommodation. There have even been cases of Nova deducting rent from teachers' salaries and then not paying landlords. Teachers at the scandal-hit school went on strike last week to protest against the company's malpractices. The final nail in the coffin for Nova seems to have been a discovery that its advertising lied to potential students about its services. Nationwide ads claimed students could take lessons any time they wanted, which proved to be untrue.

WARM-UPS

1. ENGLISH SCHOOLS: Walk around the class and talk to other students about English schools and lessons. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your original partner(s) and share what you found out.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

conversation / financial trouble / debts / sponsors / getting fired / wrongdoing / teachers / eviction / landlords / scandals / malpractice / false advertising

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. ENGLISH ADVERTISING: Discuss this with your partner(s) which of these adverts you would believe or have had experience of. Change partners and share your ideas:

- Our new system means you can take a lesson whenever you want.
- Learn English in four weeks!
- Learn to speak like an American
- The new no grammar English course
- Learn English online for best results
- You will study using the best course book in the world
- Our study system is the best in the world

4. ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL: With your partner(s), assess your English school. 10 = top marks, 0 = I want my money back.

_____	your teacher	_____	the lessons
_____	the course book	_____	homework
_____	the school	_____	computers
_____	the classrooms	_____	learning

5. TEACHER: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'teacher'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think it is possible to learn English in four weeks. Students B think it isn't possible to learn English even in four years Debate this with your partners. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Japan's largest English school may collapse with money problems. T / F
- b. The company is doing its very best to clear its debts. T / F
- c. The company president is working night and day helping students. T / F
- d. The president was fired for his shady business practices. T / F
- e. The school has made sure all of its teachers received their salaries. T / F
- f. It is likely that many of the school's students will be out of pocket. T / F
- g. Many teachers will be evicted and lose their apartments. T / F
- h. Students could take English lessons at any time that suited them. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. serious | a. the last straw |
| 2. debts | b. discredited |
| 3. disgraced | c. cloudy |
| 4. stake | d. cave-in |
| 5. opaque | e. removal |
| 6. collapse | f. grave |
| 7. eviction | g. negligence |
| 8. malpractice | h. share |
| 9. the final nail in the coffin | i. possible |
| 10. potential | j. financial obligations |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. in serious financial | a. to protest |
| 2. given court protection | b. is nowhere to be found |
| 3. It has debts | c. eviction |
| 4. The company's disgraced president | d. and negotiating |
| 5. his opaque way of fund-raising | e. from creditors |
| 6. thousands of teachers, many of | f. trouble |
| 7. teachers now face | g. students about its services |
| 8. went on strike last week | h. whom have not been paid |
| 9. its advertising lied to potential | i. to be untrue |
| 10. ...which proved | j. of around \$357 million |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Japan's biggest English school in trouble

Nova Corporation, Japan's largest English conversation school _____ is in serious financial trouble. The company, which employs _____ 4,000 non-Japanese English teachers, was given _____ protection from creditors on October 26th. It has debts of around \$357 million and has given up any efforts to try and _____ them. Nova's directors are hoping to find sponsors to keep the _____ of its 900 schools operational. The company's disgraced president is nowhere to be _____. Nozomu Sahashi, 56, owns a 16 percent stake in the company but was fired on Thursday. The board _____ him of financial wrongdoing, as he could not give an adequate explanation for his "opaque _____ of fund-raising and negotiating with potential business alliance partners."

court

some

way

found

chain

clear

accused

majority

Nova's collapse has _____ thousands of teachers, many of whom have not been paid. A _____ representative, Katsuji Yamahara, expressed his concerns saying: "This is a serious development that could force many students, instructors and employees to _____ losses." Some teachers now face _____ from their company-provided accommodation. There have even been cases of Nova _____ rent from teachers' salaries and then not paying landlords. Teachers at the scandal-hit school went on strike last week to _____ against the company's malpractices. The final nail in the coffin for Nova seems to have been a discovery that its advertising lied to _____ students about its services. Nationwide ads claimed students could take lessons any time they wanted, which _____ to be untrue.

suffer

protest

union

proved

eviction

deducting

angered

potential

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Japan's biggest English school in trouble

Nova Corporation, Japan's largest English conversation _____ serious financial trouble. The company, _____ 4,000 non-Japanese English teachers, was given court protection _____ October 26th. It has debts of around \$357 million and has given _____ try and clear them. Nova's directors are hoping to find sponsors to keep the majority of its 900 schools operational. The company's disgraced president is _____. Nozomu Sahashi, 56, owns _____ in the company but was fired on Thursday. The board accused him of financial wrongdoing, as he could not give an adequate explanation for his "_____ fund-raising and negotiating with potential business alliance partners."

Nova's collapse has angered thousands of teachers, _____ have not been paid. A union representative, Katsuji Yamahara, expressed his concerns saying: "This is a serious development _____ students, instructors and employees to suffer losses." Some teachers now _____ their company-provided accommodation. There have even been cases of Nova _____ teachers' salaries and then not paying landlords. Teachers _____ went on strike last week to protest against the company's malpractices. The final nail in the coffin for Nova _____ a discovery that its advertising lied to potential students about its services. Nationwide ads claimed students could take lessons any time they wanted, which _____.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'English' and 'school'.

English	school

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• chain• court• clear• nowhere• stake• opaque	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• collapse• force• face• strike• coffin• proved
--	--

STUDENT ENGLISH SCHOOL SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about English schools in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1	STUDENT 2	STUDENT 3
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What is your opinion of English language schools?
- c) Do you think Nova should try and clear its debts and continue operating?
- d) What do you think should happen to the president of the English school, who is on the run evading police capture?
- e) How do you think the board of directors could let such a huge debt to build up?
- f) What are your experiences of paying for English lessons?
- g) Do you think going to an English language school is the best way to learn the language?
- h) What do you think Nozomu Sahashi is thinking at the moment?
- i) Do you think the directors should go to prison?



STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Thousands of teachers are now stuck in Japan with no job, no money and no flight ticket home. Who is responsible for them?
- c) What would you do if a big corporation did not pay your salary?
- d) How would you feel if you took out a large loan to study English and the school collapsed?
- e) Do you think the Japanese government should find new accommodation for the evicted teachers?
- f) What do you think of Nova lying in its advertising?
- g) Do you think people would really believe you can take an English lesson any time you want?
- h) What questions would you like to ask Mr. Sahashi?
- i) Did you like this discussion?

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

Japan's biggest English school in trouble

Nova Corporation, Japan's largest English conversation school chain is in (1) ____ financial trouble. The company, which employs (2) ____ 4,000 non-Japanese English teachers, was given court protection from creditors on October 26th. It has debts of (3) ____ \$357 million and has given up any efforts to try and clear (4) _____. Nova's directors are hoping to find sponsors to keep the majority of its 900 schools operational. The company's disgraced president is nowhere to be (5) _____. Nozomu Sahashi, 56, owns a 16 percent stake in the company but was fired on Thursday. The board accused him of financial wrongdoing, as he could not give an adequate explanation for his "(6) ____ way of fund-raising and negotiating with potential business alliance partners."

Nova's collapse has (7) ____ thousands of teachers, many of whom have not been paid. A union representative, Katsuji Yamahara, expressed his concerns saying: "This is a serious development that could force many students, instructors and employees to (8) ____ losses." Some teachers now (9) ____ eviction from their company-provided accommodation. There have even been (10) ____ of Nova deducting rent from teachers' salaries and then not paying landlords. Teachers at the scandal-hit school went (11) ____ strike last week to protest against the company's malpractices. The final nail in the coffin for Nova seems to have been a discovery that its advertising lied to potential students about its services. Nationwide ads claimed students could take lessons any time they wanted, which (12) ____ to be untrue.

1. (a) serious (b) series (c) seriousness (d) serial
2. (a) any (b) some (c) many (d) a lot of
3. (a) near (b) round up (c) round (d) around
4. (a) it (b) those (c) them (d) this
5. (a) foundation (b) finding (c) find (d) found
6. (a) opaquest (b) opaqueness (c) opaque (d) opaquely
7. (a) angered (b) angry (c) anger (d) angers
8. (a) surfer (b) suffer (c) suffocate (d) suffice
9. (a) skull (b) scalp (c) head (d) face
10. (a) cases (b) cased (c) casing (d) case
11. (a) in (b) on (c) off (d) out
12. (a) proven (b) prove (c) proved (d) proof

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about Nova Corporation. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. ENGLISH: Make a poster about the different ways of learning English (language school, university, online...). Give the pros and cons of each. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all include similar things?

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about the best ways to learn reading, writing, speaking and listening. Include imaginary interviews with students and English teachers.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down new words and expressions.

5. LETTER: Write a letter to the bosses of Nova. Ask them three questions about their school and why their adverts lied. Give them three pieces of advice on what they should do in the future. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. T b. F c. F d. T e. F f. T g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. serious | a. grave |
| 2. debts | b. financial obligations |
| 3. disgraced | c. discredited |
| 4. stake | d. share |
| 5. opaque | e. cloudy |
| 6. collapse | f. cave-in |
| 7. eviction | g. removal |
| 8. malpractice | h. negligence |
| 9. the final nail in the coffin | i. the last straw |
| 10. potential | j. possible |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. in serious financial | a. trouble |
| 2. given court protection | b. from creditors |
| 3. It has debts | c. of around \$357 million |
| 4. The company's disgraced president | d. is nowhere to be found |
| 5. his opaque way of fund-raising | e. and negotiating |
| 6. thousands of teachers, many of | f. whom have not been paid |
| 7. teachers now face | g. eviction |
| 8. went on strike last week | h. to protest |
| 9. its advertising lied to potential | i. students about its services |
| 10. ...which proved | j. to be untrue |

GAP FILL:

Japan's biggest English school in trouble

Nova Corporation, Japan's largest English conversation school **chain** is in serious financial trouble. The company, which employs **some** 4,000 non-Japanese English teachers, was given **court** protection from creditors on October 26th. It has debts of around \$357 million and has given up any efforts to try and **clear** them. Nova's directors are hoping to find sponsors to keep the **majority** of its 900 schools operational. The company's disgraced president is nowhere to be **found**. Nozomu Sahashi, 56, owns a 16 percent stake in the company but was fired on Thursday. The board **accused** him of financial wrongdoing, as he could not give an adequate explanation for his "opaque **way** of fund-raising and negotiating with potential business alliance partners."

Nova's collapse has **angered** thousands of teachers, many of whom have not been paid. A **union** representative, Katsuji Yamahara, expressed his concerns saying: "This is a serious development that could force many students, instructors and employees to **suffer** losses." Some teachers now face **eviction** from their company-provided accommodation. There have even been cases of Nova **deducting** rent from teachers' salaries and then not paying landlords. Teachers at the scandal-hit school went on strike last week to **protest** against the company's malpractices. The final nail in the coffin for Nova seems to have been a discovery that its advertising lied to **potential** students about its services. Nationwide ads claimed students could take lessons any time they wanted, which **proved** to be untrue.

LANGUAGE WORK

1 - a 2 - b 3 - d 4 - c 5 - d 6 - c 7 - a 8 - b 9 - d 10 - a 11 - b 12 - c