

## ***Current Trends and Issues in English Language Education in Asia***

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This study has surveyed current trends and issues in English language education in Asia, that is, 16 nations including Hong Kong and Taiwan (total 18 regions). The results of the survey reveal commonalities and diversity across Asian regions in the following aspects: the starting grade, class hours, national curriculum, textbooks, the medium of instruction, the use of computer, university entrance examination, teachers, tertiary English education, and problems and concerns. English language education in each Asian nation/region seems an outcome of diverse factors including political environment, social and individual needs, and resources (e.g., teachers and computer). The findings from the survey raise five key issues to be resolved: the amount of time allotted for English language education; the use of English as the medium of instruction; centralization or decentralization; teachers; and the nation-wide university entrance examination.

**Key words: starting grade of English language education, curriculum, class hours, textbooks, medium of instruction, use of computer, university entrance English exams, English teachers, tertiary English education**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, no one would doubt the fact that English has become an international language. According to Crystal (1997), English is the language that has spread throughout the world most extensively and is dominating in a number of important fields including international commerce, education, and communication. Asia is not an exception to such a global trend. Many Asian countries have included English in the school curriculum in recognition that “it can contribute to students’ personal, linguistic, social, and cultural development” (Le, 2004, p. 167). For example, in many post-colonial countries such as India and the Philippines, English was chosen as one of the official languages and is still effectively functioning as a dominant language. Moreover, the countries which had once opposed foreign influence such as Korea, Japan, and China are now giving English language teaching and learning much greater priority in their foreign language policy (Tsui, 2004). These imply the significance of English language education in Asia. However, not much comprehensive information is available on English language education across Asian countries. Therefore, there is a need to investigate it in Asian countries from a synthetic perspective. This study has conducted a survey to gather information on English language education in Asia, that is, in 16 Asian countries (18 regions in total) including Korea, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Based on the results of the survey, current issues and challenges in English language education in Asia are discussed.

## **SURVEY ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

In order to gather information on English language education in Asia, a survey was conducted in 2007 in 16 countries: Korea, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the

Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Israel, and the UAE. One or two English language education specialists from each nation/region provided information on their nation/region. All of them are professors in ELT or English-related departments.<sup>1</sup> The survey consisted of open-ended questions on the status of English (ESL or EFL); the starting grade of English language education; English class hours per week; the national curriculum; school textbooks (e.g., types and authors); the use of computer (computer-assisted language learning); the instructional medium of English classes; nation-wide university entrance examinations; tertiary English education; teachers (e.g., native speakers or non-native speakers); English-medium subjects; and main problems and issues.

## **THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

### **The Status of English**

Is English used as a second or foreign language in Asia? It is not always easy or straightforward to answer this question, as Greenbaum (1996) states that the neat division into first, second and foreign languages “masks the untidiness in the real world” (p. 241). It may be a matter of the attitude of users towards English (Rahman, 2007); thus, it is necessary to consider “political, social, cultural and economic ideologies” (Rahman, 2007, p. 84) to explore the status of English in each Asian region. The results of the survey on the status of English illustrate that English is used as a second language (ESL) in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, as shown below, while it is used as a foreign language (EFL) in nine countries (e.g., Korea, China, Thailand, and Israel).

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<sup>1</sup> The survey participants provided information on general trends in English language education in their nation/region. Some information might not be applicable to all the areas within the nation/region due to regional or school variations.

ESL context: Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka

ESL/EFL context: Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the UAE

EFL context: Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Iran, Israel

Interestingly, it is used both as a second and foreign language in Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the UAE. These countries/regions are known as ESL context; however, English is not entirely used for intranational or intraregional communication, as David C. S. Li points out in the survey “the majority of Hong Kong people (i.e., over 95 per cent of ethnic Chinese) tend to be reluctant to use English entirely for intraethnic communication (EFL feature).” All the Asian nations/regions where English is used as a second language are post-colonial countries where English was a colonial language (e.g., Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, India, and the UAE). Is this due to the impact of the colonial period? The answer may be ‘yes’; however, the influence of the pragmatic needs of those countries cannot be neglected, as noted in Tsui (2004). In other words, it is the result of a tension between the ‘national-functional paradigm’ (Fishman, Rubal-Lopez, & Conrad, 1996) and the ‘international-critical paradigm’ (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) in order to “retain or erect neocolonial superstructures internationally for their own benefits” (Tsui, 2004, p. 6).

On the other hand, all the Asian nations/regions where English is not used for everyday communication outside class, just learned as a foreign language, are the countries/regions which were not former British or American colonies. This does not mean that in these countries English is not as important as in the British or American post-colonial states/regions. In most countries, these days, top priority is given to English proficiency and English language education for individual career or welfare as well as national development and globalization (Choi, 2007; Tsui, 2004), as Koike (2007) suggests the adoption of English as a second language in Japan.

English continues to spread extensively around the world. No one would doubt that it is a dominant second or foreign language in Asian countries/regions. English language proficiency functions as gatekeepers to individual

career or welfare as well as national development. This implies the essential role of English language education in Asia.

### **The Starting Grade of English Language Education**

English language education starts at first grade in 11 nations/regions, as shown below, which means that students study English for about 10-13 years in these regions, excluding tertiary English education.

- 1st grade: Hong Kong (including kindergarten, nursery school), Taipei in Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the UAE
- 3rd grade: Korea, China, 9 cities in Taiwan
- 4th grade: Israel
- 6th grade: Iran, Vietnam
- 7th grade: Japan, Indonesia

It starts at third grade in Korea, China, and nine cities in Taiwan; at fourth grade in Israel; and at sixth grade in Iran and Vietnam; and at seventh grade in Japan and Indonesia (no official primary English education).

The nations/regions where English is taught from first grade are all of the ESL countries except for Taipei. Although the results of the survey illustrate that in Japan and Indonesia English is officially educated at the seventh grade, it is taught at private primary schools (Kim, 2005; Suwarsih Madya, 2008). In Korea, primary English language education will start two grades earlier from 2009, which illustrates the government's effort made for strengthening English language education for national competitiveness in the age of globalization (MOE&HRD of Korea, 2006).

The results of the survey reveal that most of the Asian countries/regions start English language education from first grade, which is earlier than most of the European countries (e.g., from third grade in Germany) (Yun, 2005). This can be accounted for by the fact that they are formal British or American colonies, except for Thailand and Taipei.

### English Class Hours

More English class hours per week (from 4 to 10 hours) are noted in the primary English education of the Asian countries in ESL context (e.g., Hong Kong, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) (see Table 1). In Thailand, which is an EFL context, English is taught from first grade, as seen in the previous section, and primary English class hours per week (about 3 or 4 hours) are larger than the other Asian countries in EFL context (e.g., 1 to 4 hours). The discrepancy of English class hours per week between the nations/regions in ESL and EFL context is reduced in secondary schools, though hours of English instruction are still larger in ESL context.

**TABLE 1**  
**Primary and Secondary English Class Hours in Asia**

Nation/Region	Education System (P-M-H-T)	English Class Hours per Grade
Korea	6-3-3-4	(1)-(1)-1-1-2-2-3-3-4-4-4-4
China	6-3-3-4	0-0-3-3-3-3-5-5-5-5-5-5
Hong Kong	6-5-2-3	8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10-8/10
Taiwan	6-3-3-4	0/2-0/2-0/2-1/2-1/2-1/2-3-3/4-4/5-4/5-4/5-4/5
Japan	6-3-3-4	0-0-0-0-0-3-3-3-6-5-5
Indonesia	6-3-3-4	(2)-(2)-(2)-(2)-(2)-(2)-4-4-4-4-4/5-4/5
Malaysia	6-3-3-4	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
The Philippines	6-4-4/5 or 7-4-4/5	7.5-7.5-7.5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
Singapore	6-4-2-4	4-4-4-4-4-4-5-5-5-5-6-6
Thailand	6-3-3-4	3/4-3/4-3/4-3/4-3/4-3/4-4/6-4/6-4/6-4/6-4/6
Vietnam	5-4-3-4	0-0-0-0-0-3-3-3-3-3-3-3
Bangladesh	6-4-2-4	6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6
India	8-2-2-3	4/4.3-4/4.3-4/4.3-4/4.3-4/4.3-4.3/5-4.3/5-4.3/5-4.3/5
Iran	5-3-4	0-0-0-0-0-2-2-2-2-2-2-2
Pakistan	5-3-2-2-2	6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6
Sri Lanka	5-8-3/4	5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
Israel	6-3-3-4(3)	1/2-1/2-1/2-3-4-4-4-4-4-3/5-3/5-3/5
The UAE	6-3-3-4	4-4-4-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6-6

Note: P = primary; M = junior secondary; H = senior secondary; T = tertiary

What is further noticeable is secondary English class hours in Vietnam and Iran. Compared to the other Asian nations/regions, their hours of English language education are relatively small (2-3 hours). This might result from their political environment. For example, Vietnam was a French colony till 1954, when French was used as the medium of instruction in schools (Le, 2007), and then it had a strong alliance with the Soviet Union until the mid-1980s, which implies the need for learning Russian in the country. Since then, a need of learning English has emerged, especially for individual job security as well as national development, as part of the impact of the implementation of free-market reforms known as 'Doi Moi' (Renovation Policy) in 1986 (Le, 2007). Compared to the other Asian nations in EFL context (e.g., maximum 912 hours from grade 7 to 12 in Indonesia, Suwarsih Madya, 2007), however, English class hours are still small in Vietnam: a total 700 hours from grade 6 to 12 (Le, 2007).

Contrary to primary or secondary English class hours, the number of required credits of tertiary English for non-English majors varies with universities in all the Asian nations/regions shown below, while India requires 4 credits and Hong Kong, 6 credits.

4 credits: India

6 credits: Hong Kong

varies with universities: Korea (3-6), China (12-16), Taiwan (4-8), Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines (9), Singapore, Thailand (6-18), Vietnam, Bangladesh (0-9), India, Sri Lanka, the UAE

no required credits: Israel

Interestingly, Israeli universities do not require any fixed number of credits. Though undergraduate students must complete a course that is at the level of reading comprehension of advanced university texts in English, they may also be exempted from taking any courses if they reach a certain level on the English part of their university entrance examination.

What is also noticeable is the large number of required credits in China, where non-English majors have four English class hours per week for the

first two years (300 hours in total) (Wen & Hu, 2007) due to the college English teaching reforms in China to strengthen the nation's power at the age of globalization. This clearly illustrates the undeniably crucial function of English in Asian countries.

### **National English Curriculum**

The national curriculum functions as the basic guideline and principle on what and how to teach or learn, and what and how to test, for example, by specifying learning contents, achievement standards, and teaching methods and testing. It is commonly regarded as an effective and efficient means for achieving national educational goals (Kang, Lee, Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2006). The results of the survey reveal that all the 18 Asian countries/regions have a national curriculum for primary or secondary English, as shown below.

- 1st to 10th grade: the Philippines
- 1st to 12th grade: Taiwan (Taipei and 9 other cities), Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, the UAE
- 1st to 13th grade: Hong Kong
- 1st to graduate level: Pakistan
- 3rd to 12th grade: Korea
- 3rd to college: China
- 4th to 12th grade: Israel
- 6th to 12th grade: Vietnam and Iran
- 7th to 12th grade: Japan, Indonesia, and Taiwan (in other areas)

The national curriculum covers first-grade English to the highest high school grade English (10, 12, or 13th grade English) in the countries/regions where English is introduced from first grade (e.g., Hong Kong, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan). In Pakistan, interestingly, the national curriculum covers up to the graduate level.

In Korea, China, Israel, Vietnam, Iran, Japan, Indonesia, and Taiwan (in other areas than Taipei and 9 cities), the national curriculum covers from the grade where English is introduced to the end of secondary education, except



for China. Chinese national curriculum covers up to college English (CE). This demonstrates the central control of the Chinese government on higher education, which is illustrated by the fact that China has a professional committee responsible for CE (a government organization) (Wen & Hu, 2007).

Primary or secondary English classes are fundamentally based on the national English curriculum in all the Asian nations/regions except for India, where the curriculum can be revised depending on locally available cultural and natural resources. The curriculum can also be revised in Taiwan (in Taipei and 9 other cities), and Indonesian teachers can develop their own syllabus. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, the national curriculum is fundamentally for state-run schools.

### **School Textbooks**

The textbook is a fundamental means of achieving educational goals, as its significance has been noted in education or language learning (Lamie, 1999). It provides the basic learning contents and classroom activities. The results of the survey on English textbooks reveal that primary and secondary English textbooks are national or government-authorized commercial, especially for state-run or public schools, in 12 Asian nations: Korea, China, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Israel. This implies the government's central control on primary and secondary English language education, as Choi (2006) stated about the Korean context. In the other six nations/regions (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the UAE), however, primary and secondary English textbooks seem open to free competition of commercial books. They are also constructed by teachers in Singapore.

Compared to primary and secondary English textbooks, none of the Asian nations/regions uses national textbooks at universities, except for Sri Lanka. Each university selects a commercial textbook or develops its own textbook (e.g., Korea, India, and the UAE); teachers or English-related departments develop their own teaching materials (e.g., Korea, China, Japan, the Philippines,

Thailand, Bangladesh, and Israel). These findings suggest the lack of the government's strict control on tertiary English language education, as it is illustrated in the quality control of tertiary English teachers in Asia (Choi & Lee, 2007).

Primary and secondary English textbooks are selected by national or regional governments or governmental agencies (e.g., the National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka) in the seven countries which use national textbooks: China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Iran. In the other Asian nations/regions where the textbooks are commercial (including government-authorized commercial books), primary or secondary English teachers have the right of textbook selection (e.g., Korea, Taiwan, and Japan); school boards with or without teachers (e.g., Indonesia), school principals (e.g., the Philippines), heads of the department (e.g., Singapore), or appointed book selection committees (e.g., Thailand) are also main textbook selectors. At universities, English textbooks are mostly selected by universities, academics of universities (including department) or school boards (e.g., Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka); by department heads with or without faculty members (e.g., China, the Philippines, Singapore, and Israel); by supervisors of the English language program (e.g., Korea and the UAE); by an appointed textbook selection committee (e.g., Thailand); or by faculty members or teachers (e.g., Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, India, and Iran).

National publishers, governments, or governmental agencies are the main authors of primary or secondary English textbooks in China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the UAE, while publishers are also one of the main authors in Pakistan; English professors and teachers, in Bangladesh; and English teachers, in India. On the other hand, primary or secondary English textbooks are written by English language professors (including English language education, literature or linguistics) and teachers in six Asian nations/regions: Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia (only for secondary textbooks), and Singapore, native speakers also participate in the construction of the textbook.

In Thailand, the main authors are professors or publishers. In Hong Kong (especially experienced teachers), the Philippines, and Israel, English teachers are the main authors of the textbook.

University English textbooks are mainly written by professors in 12 Asian nations/regions: Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Israel. However, textbooks produced by international publishers are also used in Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Professors collaborate with national publishers in China. Publishers are also the main producers in Taiwan, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the UAE, while the main authors are professors and native speakers in Taiwan and native speakers in Iran.

The finding that primary or secondary English textbooks are national or government-authorized in many Asian countries/regions illustrates the direct control of the government on primary or secondary English language education and the lack of teacher autonomy in the construction of their own materials. On the contrary, a more bottom-up approach is used in the construction and selection of university English textbooks.

### **Teaching English Through English**

English is instructed in English (Teaching English Through English, henceforth TETE) regardless of school levels in the five Asian countries in ESL context: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and the UAE. Interestingly, English is also taught in English in Israel regardless of school levels, though English is not an official second language. Besides these countries, primary school English is taught in English in Taiwan (required, but not in remote areas), as shown below.

primary English: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UAE, Israel, Korea (recommended, but mostly not), Taiwan (required, but not in remote areas)

junior secondary English: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UAE, Israel, Korea (recommended, but mostly not), Indonesia

(varies with schools), Hong Kong (30%), India  
senior secondary English: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka,  
the UAE, Israel, Korea (recommended, but mostly not), Indonesia,  
Hong Kong (varies with schools), India, Bangladesh (mixed)  
tertiary English: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UAE,  
Israel, Korea (varies with schools/courses), Taiwan (mixed),  
Indonesia, Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh (mixed), China (mostly),  
Thailand (mostly)

Though in Korea TETE is recommended in the national primary and secondary English curriculum, most of the English teachers do not instruct English in English. Primary or middle school teachers sometimes use classroom English, but the whole class is seldom instructed in English (KICE, 2004a, 2004b).

In addition to the ESL countries mentioned above and Israel, English is instructed through English in junior or senior secondary English in India, Indonesia (varies with junior secondary schools, but instructed in English in senior secondary schools), and Hong Kong (30 percent in junior secondary schools and varies with senior secondary schools). In Bangladesh, English is taught in both English and the native language in senior secondary schools.

At universities, English courses are instructed in English in more Asian countries/regions, compared to primary or secondary schools, for example, all ESL countries except for Bangladesh (mixed with the native language), Israel, Indonesia, China (mostly), Thailand (mostly), Korea (varies with schools/courses), and Taiwan (mixed).

Similarly to (As in / Similar to) the results of the survey on English class hours, English is not taught in English in any school levels in Vietnam and Iran. TETE is not also implemented in Japan regardless of school levels, which might be accounted for by the English proficiency levels of Japanese teachers and students, as it is the main reason why TETE is not actually practiced in Korea (Kim, 2002; Woo, 2004; Yeo, 1998).

## **The Use of Computer for English Language Education**

Advances in information communication technology (ICT) have promoted computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Jones & Fortescue, 1987), multimedia-assisted language learning (MALL) (Warschauer & Kern, 2000), and e-learning (Khan, 2003). Along the lines of this, the computer is used for English language education in most of the Asian nations/regions surveyed, except for Japan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, and Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This trend may be closely related to ICT development in each Asian country.

The school year or level where computer is used for English language education varies with Asian nations/region. For example, it is used from 1st grade in Taiwan, Malaysia, and the UAE; from 3rd grade in Korea; from 6th grade in Vietnam; and from 8th grade in Indonesia. This is related to the starting grade of English language education in these countries. However, the facility and resources available in the nation and costs also seem to affect computer use; for example, the computer is not used at all in any schools in Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; it is used only from high schools in the Philippines and from colleges in China to compensate the lack of college English teachers (Wen & Hu, 2007).

Most of the Asian countries utilize CDs or CD-ROMs (often developed for the textbooks) (e.g., Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Israel) and power point (PPT) (e.g., Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Israel). The Internet is also commonly used in six nations/regions: Korea, China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and the UAE (for the tertiary level). Word processors are not marked as a frequently used tool in the survey, except for three countries (the Philippines, Bangladesh (only for individual work), and Israel), though students often do their assignments using them. It might be due to the fact that word processors themselves are not used as a learning or teaching tool. Taiwan is the only country which uses e-books, though Korea and Singapore also have e-books, which are not actually used in the classrooms (Kim, 2004; MOE & HRD of Korea, 2008).

ICT facilities are usually utilized for whole-class or individual work in most of the Asian nations/regions surveyed: Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Israel, the UAE, Vietnam (only for whole-class work), and Bangladesh (only for individual work). Only in Israel and the UAE is it used for group or pair work. This might be accounted for by technological limitations.

Moreover, ICT is used mainly in class or at home in most of the Asian nations/regions: Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Israel, the UAE, Vietnam (in class only), and Bangladesh (at home only). In Thailand ICT facilities are used in self-access learning centers as well as in class.

ICT is used mainly for listening, reading, writing, pronunciation or grammar in most of the Asian nations/regions surveyed: Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Israel, and the UAE. Not many countries use computer to learn or teach speaking or vocabulary.

CALL, MALL, or e-learning is a common trend in Asian countries/regions. The computer is often used for whole-class work in English classrooms. However, it should not be ignored that the use of computer itself cannot enhance the quality of English language education or replace human teachers (Kawabata, 2006; Warschauer, 1996). Training of the teachers and the students must precede computer use for its effectiveness and efficiency, as noted in Choi and Kang (2002) and Wen and Hu (2007).

### **The University Entrance Examination**

Most of the Asian countries/regions surveyed have a nation-wide university entrance examination, as shown in the list below. It was first administered in 1949 in China; in the 1950s in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Sri Lanka; in the 1960s in Korea and Taiwan; in the 1970s in Singapore, the Philippines, and Bangladesh; in the 1980s in Israel; and in 2001 in the UAE.

Nation-wide exams: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia,

Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, Sri Lanka, Israel,  
the UAE

No nation-wide exams: Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan

Malaysia, the Philippines, India and Pakistan do not administer a nation-wide university entrance examination. In Malaysia, however, an English test named Malaysia University English Test (MUET) is administered for university admission; in the Philippines and Pakistan each college or university administers its own entrance examination, as shown in the following list.

English as a required subject test area: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan,  
Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia (MUET), Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam,  
Bangladesh, Iran, Israel, the UAE, Pakistan/the Philippines  
(administered by individual universities)

No required English test: India, Sri Lanka

What is noticeable is that Sri Lankan nation-wide university entrance examination does not include an English test; thus, the Sri Lankan ELT specialist who participated in the survey suggests making general English scores mandatory for university admission.

MCQs (multiple-choice questions) are the test format most prevalently used across the Asian nations/regions, as shown in the list below. Fill-in-the-blanks are also another common format as well as TF (true-false) questions and SAQs (short-answer questions). These trends may be accounted for by the issue of practicality and reliability (Kwak, 2004).

MCQ: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the  
Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, Israel, the UAE

TF question: China, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand,  
Vietnam, Bangladesh

Fill-in-the-blank: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the  
Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh

SAQ: Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh

Essay: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan (Paragraph writing), Malaysia, the Philippines

(in some universities), Singapore, Vietnam, Bangladesh  
Oral test: China (for English majors), Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore,  
Bangladesh  
Summary test: Bangladesh  
Letter writing: Bangladesh  
Translation: Taiwan

Besides, oral or written tests are also administered in several nations/regions, most of which are in ESL context (e.g., Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Bangladesh).

As shown in the following list, most of the Asian nations/regions surveyed test reading, grammar, and vocabulary. This might be due to easiness in test construction and administration and the main learning content of secondary English.

L: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan  
S: (Korea), Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan  
R: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, Israel, the UAE  
W: (Korea), China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, (the Philippines), Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, the UAE  
G: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, the UAE  
V: Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, the UAE  
Spelling: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, the UAE  
P: Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Pakistan

Listening or writing is also tested in eight or nine nations/regions (e.g., Korea, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Pakistan). However, only four regions which are all in ESL context administer speaking tests. This can be accounted for by the low practicality of administering direct speaking tests. Lack of direct speaking or writing tests is also noted in the suggestions for reforming the university entrance examination provided by the ELT specialists



who participated in the survey as shown below.

- administration of a nation-wide test (the Philippines)
- making general English scores mandatory (Sri Lanka)
- year-round administration or multiple administration per year (Korea, Japan)
- using other criteria besides the exam (Israel)
- teachers' participation in the development of the test (the UAE)
- making the test standardized, reliable and valid (Bangladesh)
- updating the testing format and system (Pakistan)
- criterion-referencing (Hong Kong)
- including direct testing of speaking (Korea, Taiwan, and Japan) and writing (Korea, Japan, and Thailand), including listening tests (Taiwan), revision of the speaking and writing tests (Malaysia)
- using a variety of text genres (Thailand)

The administration or revision of direct speaking or writing tests is highly suggested in Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia or Thailand. Moreover, updating of the testing format (Pakistan) and standardization or validation of the examination (Bangladesh) are also suggested. This implies the need of the efforts making the university entrance examination more valid and reliable in Asian countries.

### **English Teachers**

Who teaches English from primary to tertiary schools was surveyed in 18 Asian nations/regions. The results reveal that primary English is taught by English specialty teachers in seven nations/regions (e.g., China, Malaysia, and Israel), while it is taught by generalists in five nations (e.g., the Philippines and Sri Lanka) or by either one in five nations/regions (e.g., Korea, Indonesia and Singapore), as shown below.

Generalists: the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka  
English specialty teachers: China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Vietnam, India,  
Iran, Israel

Generalists or English specialty teachers: Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia,  
Singapore, the UAE

In most of the Asian countries/regions, primary teachers teach all subjects including English. Interestingly, primary English teachers are English specialty teachers in Vietnam and Iran, where primary English education is not official or compulsory. This might be related to the primary teacher education which lacks training in English language teaching. On the other hand, some ESL countries (e.g., Sri Lanka, Singapore, and the UAE) do not prefer English specialty teachers because their primary teachers seem to have enough English ability to teach, whereas some ESL countries/regions (e.g., Hong Kong, Malaysia, and India) prefer English specialty teachers.

Whether English teachers should be native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) or non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) was surveyed since NESTs have been recruited as school English teachers as a government policy in some Asian countries including Hong Kong (since the 1950s), Singapore (since 1970), Japan (since 1985), and Korea (since 1992) (Choi, 2006; Koike, 1994; Kwon, 2000). As shown in the list below, the majority of English teachers are NNESTs throughout all the school levels; however, NNESTs have native or native-like proficiency in Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel, and the UAE, most of which are ESL countries. The number of NESTs increases at tertiary schools (e.g., Korea, China, and the UAE).

NNESTs: China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel, and the UAE (primary and secondary); Taiwan (secondary)

NNESTs (and some NESTs): Korea, Indonesia, Thailand (primary and secondary); Japan (secondary); China (tertiary)

NNESTs and NESTs: Hong Kong, Singapore (primary and secondary); Taiwan (primary and tertiary); Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Israel (tertiary)

NESTs and (some NNESTs): the UAE (tertiary)

A large number of NESTs teach English at universities in Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Israel. This clearly illustrates a demand on the higher English proficiency level of university English teachers.

### **Tertiary English Education**

All the Asian nations/regions surveyed have general English courses (English for General Purposes, henceforth EGP) at universities, except for Israel, which offers mainly EAP (English for Academic Purposes, henceforth EAP). As mentioned before, university EGP or EAP courses are instructed in English in the Asian countries/regions in ESL context except for Bangladesh (mixed with the native language), Israel, Indonesia, China (mostly), Thailand (mostly), Korea (varies with schools/courses), and Taiwan (mixed). General English programs are coordinated by both English-related departments or English language centers in Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan; only by the departments in most of the Asian countries (China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, and Pakistan); and by language institutes or English language teaching centers or units in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Israel (EAP programs), and the UAE.

Except for Israel, tertiary English courses are EGP courses in most of the Asian countries/regions. This raises a question on the aim of tertiary English education.

### **English-medium Subjects**

English is used as the medium of instruction in non-language classes (e.g., math or science) (English-medium Instruction, henceforth EMI) across school levels in four Asian nations where English is used a second language, as shown in the list below: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka.

- Primary classes: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and India (only in English-medium schools), Korea (only in immersion programs), the Philippines
- Junior Secondary classes: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Hong Kong (in English-medium schools), Indonesia (in bilingual programs), Thailand (in English programs)
- Senior Secondary classes: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Korea (only in specialized schools, e.g., international high schools) the Philippines, Hong Kong (in English-medium schools), Indonesia (in bilingual programs), Thailand (in English programs), Pakistan
- Tertiary classes: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Korea (in several universities, especially top universities), the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia (in international programs), Thailand, Pakistan, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Israel, the UAE, China (very few courses in top universities)

In India, English is also used as an instructional medium for non-language classes in the English-medium primary schools and all secondary and tertiary schools. Besides these ESL countries, junior and senior secondary non-language classes are also taught in English in Hong Kong, Indonesia and Thailand, but only in English-medium or bilingual programs. In Pakistani senior secondary schools non-language subjects are also instructed in English.

Compared to primary and secondary schools, non-language courses are taught in English more extensively in Asian universities, except for Japan, Vietnam, and Iran. In most of the Asian countries/regions, science-, technology- or business-related courses are instructed in English, which implies the essential role of English in these fields strongly interwoven with globalization or national development. In Korea and China top universities provide English-medium courses since they place high priority on globalization in order to play a leading role in the higher education of the world. Every year the number of English-medium courses increases in Korean and Chinese universities (Park & Park, 2006; Wen & Hu, 2007).

## **Problems and Concerns in Primary and Secondary English Education**

The Asian EFL specialists' responses on the problems and concerns in primary and secondary English language education are classified into nine categories, as shown in Table 2. One of the problematic areas is related to the sociocultural or linguistic context. For example, the lack of authentic language use environment is problematic in China, Taiwan, Indonesia, and even Hong Kong and the UAE, though these two regions are in ESL context. Local nativization of English is also noted as a concern in the Philippines and Singapore because it can lower the effectiveness of communication or lead to a communication breakdown in the global community. Secondly, the lack of government support for English language education is observed as national policy problems in Taiwan, India, Pakistan and the UAE, especially for primary English education, as the lack of primary English education is noted as a major concern in Japan. The third problematic area is class size and hours.

As discussed before, only one or two class hours per week are allotted to primary English education in Korea and Taiwan, and two class hours, to secondary English in Iran, which raises the issue of limited exposure to English and of inefficiency. The large class size is also pointed out as a problem in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Israel. Next, curriculum and learning contents are noted as an issue. The gap between the contents of primary and secondary English leads to the lack of continuity between primary and secondary English education in Korea: too little weighting on written language instruction in primary English conflicts with a focus on reading or a balanced approach to four skills in secondary English (Choi, Lee, Boo, & Lee, 2003). The curriculum standard is too low in the UAE. The fifth concerned area is inadequacy of teaching methods or lack of teaching materials or resources. English language education overly depends on rote learning and testing-oriented system in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the UAE, and Taiwan.

Authoritarian classroom culture is also noted as a problem in Bangladesh. Proper resources and teaching materials are not sufficiently provided in

**TABLE 2**  
**Problems and Concerns in Primary and Secondary English Education in Asia**

Areas	Specific Problems and Concerns
Sociocultural or linguistic context	- lack of authentic language use (speaking) environment: China(P/S), Hong Kong(P/S), Taiwan(P), the UAE(P/S), Indonesia(S) - nativized form of English: the Philippines(P/S), Singapore(P/S) - struggle with their native language: the UAE(P) - high state of competitiveness vs. cooperation: Singapore(S)
English language education policies	- lack of government support for English education (national policy problem): Taiwan(P), India(P/S), Pakistan(P/S), the UAE(P) - programs not suitable for the cultural milieu of the learner: India(P/S) - implementation of primary English education: Japan(P) - implementing policies (e.g., using IT in ELT, teaching): Thailand(S) - research studies for academic promotion: Thailand(S), Vietnam(S)
Class size and hours	- large class size: Korea(P/S), Taiwan(P), the Philippines(P/S), Bangladesh(P/S), Pakistan(P/S), Israel(P/S) - lack of class hours: Korea(P), Taiwan(P/S), Iran(P/S)
Curriculum and learning contents	- lack of the continuity between primary and secondary English: Korea(P) - too much focus on oral English: Korea(P) - low curriculum standard: the UAE(S) - introduction of English in class VI in some places: India(S) - ignorance of speaking and writing: Korea(S)
Teaching methods and materials	- authoritarian classroom culture: Bangladesh(P/S) - over-dependence on rote learning and testing-oriented system: Bangladesh(P/S), Pakistan(P/S), the UAE(S), Taiwan(S) - lack of proper resources and materials: China(P/S), Taiwan(S), Indonesia(P), the Philippines(P/S), Bangladesh(P/S), India(P/S), Pakistan(P/S), Sri Lanka(P/S), the UAE(P/S) - spelling problems: Singapore(P) - introducing extensive reading: Israel(P)
Students	- special needs of students (those who are from poor families, non-readers): the Philippines(P), Israel(P/S) - gap among students' English proficiency: Korea(P), Taiwan(P) - spoilt children: Singapore(P) - lack of learners' motivation: Indonesia(S), Malaysia(S), Singapore(S), Vietnam(S)
Teachers	- lack of qualified teachers: Korea(P/S), China(P/S), Taiwan(P), Indonesia(P/S), the Philippines(P/S), Thailand(P/S), Bangladesh(P/S), India(P/S), Pakistan(P), Sri Lanka(P/S), Israel(P/S), the UAE(P) - lack of teacher training: Japan(P/S), India(P), Pakistan(P/S) - lack of trained teachers in rural areas: Malaysia(P/S), Sri Lanka(P/S) - senior teachers' resistance to new teaching strategies: Taiwan(S) - teachers' excessive workload: Japan(S)
Parents	- lack of parents' support for English education in rural areas: Malaysia(P)

Note: P = primary; S = secondary

China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the UAE. It seems a common problem shared by many Asian countries. Introduction of extensive reading is also a concern in Israel.

The last three problematic areas include concerns with human factors involved in English language learning: students, teachers, and parents. A wide range of English proficiency within a class is noted as a problem in Korea and Taiwan, especially in primary classes, due to the impact of private education (Choi, 2008; Park, Park, Choi, & Lee, 2007), which is also observed in Hong Kong (Miller & Li, 2008). Lack of students' motivation is another concern in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, especially in secondary English education. Cultivating or securing qualified English teachers, and teacher training are key problems in the majority of the Asian countries including Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel, and the UAE, as noted in Koike (2007) for Japan and Le (2007) for Vietnam. Likewise, the need of trained English teachers is desperate in rural areas in Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as the lack of trained teachers is noted as a problem leading to a gap between the quality of English education in urban and rural schools (Data' Hjh Noor Rezan Bapoo Bt. Bapoo Hashim, 2008). Besides, teachers' excessive workload (Japan) and senior teachers' resistance to new teaching strategies or methods (Taiwan) are concerned issues. Miller and Li (2008) also note resistance from English teachers in Hong Kong against implementing top-down curriculum reforms due to their heavy teaching loads and large classes and also public examinations. Finally, the lack of parents' support for English education in rural areas is also noted as a problem in Malaysian primary English education.

## **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

The findings from the survey illustrate some key issues in English language education in Asia. One of the issues is the amount of officially

allotted time for English language education, especially in primary and secondary schools: its starting grade and class hours per week. This issue is related to the amount of exposure to English. As discussed above, English language education starts at first, third, fourth, sixth, or seventh grade in the Asian countries/regions surveyed. There is no one agreement on when to start second/foreign language learning. It is often stated, however, that “the longer the exposure to the L2, the more native-like L2 proficiency becomes” (Ellis, 1985, pp. 105-106) or “as far as success in pronunciation is concerned, younger learners do better” (Ellis, 1985, p. 106). These common beliefs are often substantiated (Krashen, Scarcella, & Long, 1982; Long, 1993). No one can deny age effects in second/foreign language learning (DeKeyser, 2000). In the nations/regions where English language education begins at sixth or seventh grade (e.g., Iran and Japan), thus, a second thought should be given on its starting grade for its effectiveness. Furthermore, class hours per week are not large enough, which leads to low efficiency in some Asian EFL countries (e.g., Korea (primary English), Vietnam, and Iran). The inefficiency issue caused by the lack of class hours (e.g., 1 hour for third or fourth grade in Korea) leads to a distrust in public English education so that the number of young children who study abroad has increased (Choi, 2007). As a minimum of about 2,200-2,400 hours is suggested to acquire a new language (Yonhap News, August 14, 2006), the significance of constant exposure to English and of the intensity of learning, especially in EFL context, cannot be neglected (Collins, Halter, Lightbown, & Spada, 1999; Lee, 2003). Thus, it would be desirable to take a serious consideration on class hours in Asian EFL countries with limited class hours to enhance the effectiveness of English language education as much as possible in Asian ESL countries.

The next issue is related to TETE or EMI: should English be taught in English or should English be used as the medium of instruction in non-English subjects to enhance the effectiveness of English language education? Expansion of the number of English-medium subjects in Asian countries such as Hong Kong (Miller & Li, 2008), Korea (Choi, 2007), and China (Wen & Hu, 2007) clearly manifests the essential role of English in a global



community. Furthermore, it is the impact of the promotion of the benefits of content-based instruction (CBI): “fostering academic growth while also developing language proficiency” (Pessoa, Hendry, Donato, Tucker, & Lee, 2007, p. 102). In CBI classes language is used as a means of instruction or communication so that language learning can be more meaningful since language is used for real interaction rather than studied as the target object (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Richards & Rogers, 2001). It is not simple to implement TETE or EMI because the former requires the teacher’s high proficiency in English and the latter requires the teacher’s dual ability in content and English or a team teaching of content and English teachers. No one can ensure that EMI actually enhances the effectiveness of English language education in Asian countries. However, it is a commonly shared belief that EMI or TETE can lead to the improvement of the student’s English ability, as shown in the survey of Korean undergraduates on this issue (Jung, 2007). Consequently, they can be suggested as a way to reform English language education in Asian countries.

The third issue is related with centralization or decentralization of English language education in terms of the national curriculum and English textbooks. The national English curriculum is often revised as an effort to enhance English language education or to reflect emerging needs of the society, as noted in Korea (KICE, 2004a, 2004b) and Indonesia (Suwarsih Madya, 2008). The finding that primary and secondary English education is framed by the national curriculum in the 18 nations/regions illustrates that in Asia education seems centrally controlled by the government. The curriculum seems basically developed by the means-ends model (a rational-planning model), which is a top-down product-oriented curriculum development (White, 1988) rather than a school-based curriculum development allowing school autonomy. Moreover, the findings from the survey reveal the lack of teachers’ adaptation or revision of the English textbook in Asian countries, as shown in the lack of teacher autonomy and the control of the centralized national curriculum on teaching methods in Jordan (Mustafa & Cullingford, 2008). This top-down approach is no longer an effective means in the period of

decentralization, as decentralization of education has been mandatory in Indonesia since 2003 (Suwarsih Madya, 2008). As suggested in Kang *et al.* (2006), the national curriculum should play a role of a basic guide rather than control details in English language education. School-based curriculum autonomy (the adaptation of the national curriculum) or diversification of the national curriculum should be promoted. English language education should also be adapted for regional needs, as shown in China, which allows economically developed areas, such as Shanghai, to construct their own English syllabi to encourage educational innovation and diversity of English provision in order to cater for varying local needs (Hu, 2005). This decentralization issue is also related to problems caused by discrepancy in students' English ability. Though a diversity in English abilities is noted between students of metropolitan areas and those in remote island areas because of their socio-economic context (e.g., private tutoring, contact with native speakers, or language training overseas) (Choi, 2007) as well as within a class (Park *et al.*, 2007), the students of diverse English abilities have to study English using the same textbook based on the same national curriculum. Regional development or adaptation of curricula or textbooks, or school discretionary activities should be thus ratified to meet such individual or regional needs, as planned in Korea (Choi, 2007). In addition, diverse supports for schools that are lagging behind in socio-economic aspects (e.g., financial support or ICT materials) should be provided, as the lack of proper resources and teaching materials is noted as a problem in primary and secondary English education in Asia such as China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

English teachers are another issue: who should teach across school levels or how qualified English teachers should be cultivated or secured. As the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of teachers, teachers are a key to educational reforms, as in Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) and Suwarsih Madya (2008). Who should teach English at primary school, generalists or English specialty teachers? The former is highly recommended by primary English education specialists due to the cognitive and affective development of primary students, while foreign language specialty teachers tend to be

suggested in American or British primary schools (Yoon *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, should NESTs replace NNESTs to enhance English language education? The answer may be 'no.' It is not a simple question to answer since each group of teachers has their own merits and demerits, as noted in Medgyes (2001). Hong Kong SAR Government adopted the employment of NESTs as an initiative to enhance English language education (Miller & Li, 2008); Korea maintains the One NEST per School Policy in primary and high schools and will place a NEST per middle school by 2010 (Kim, 2007). However, it may not be a key means for improving English language education, as Korean middle school students or parents illustrate the same criteria for qualified teachers regardless of NESTs or NNESTs (Chang, 2005; Kim, 2007). Medgyes (2001) states that "the "ideal teacher" is no longer a category reserved for NESTs" (p. 440), though the ideal NNEST is a teacher with a native-like proficiency in English. Only the NESTs with good pedagogical knowledge and skills, attitudes, and awareness, which are key components of teacher quality (Choi & Lee, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 1983), are regarded as good teachers. Consequently, a balance of NESTs and NNESTs complementing each other in their advantages and disadvantages may be ideal (Medgyes, 2001). If it is not plausible throughout the whole nation in Asia, one NEST per school may be a second choice, as in Korea. NESTs can play a meaningful role in fostering NNESTs' English proficiency and assisting them in the development of teaching materials and tests.

The contents and the testing method of the nation-wide university entrance examination is the final issue to be discussed. It is not an overstatement that testing determines learning or teaching in English language education, as noted in Korea (Son, Kim & Choi, 2006) and Japan (Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Koike & Tanaka, 1995). The findings from the survey have illustrated that MCQs are the most common technique, and reading, grammar, and vocabulary are the key contents in most of the Asian countries. If the aim of English language education is fostering all language skills, but the contents of the nation-wide or university-based college entrance examination do not contain direct testing of some skills, it would be needed to give a second thought on

them to enhance the validity of the examination and improve English language education in the country, as in Hong Kong. The public English examination was reformed in Hong Kong to give more weight on to its oral component (from 10 per cent until 1994 increased to 18 per cent in 1996) in order to enhance students' oral proficiency with an expectation of its positive washback effects on the teaching of oral English in schools (Miller & Li, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

English language education has been surveyed across 18 Asian nations/regions. Commonalities and variations among the Asian nations/regions have been revealed. English language education in each Asian nation/region seems an outcome of diverse factors including political environment, social and individual needs, and resources (e.g., teachers and computer).

The findings from the study have provided a general picture of English language education in Asia in the topics surveyed. Further investigations are needed to present a more penetrating depiction. In addition, a survey is needed on the topics not investigated such as teaching methods and techniques, and teacher-student interaction in order to shed light on what happens in real classrooms.

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