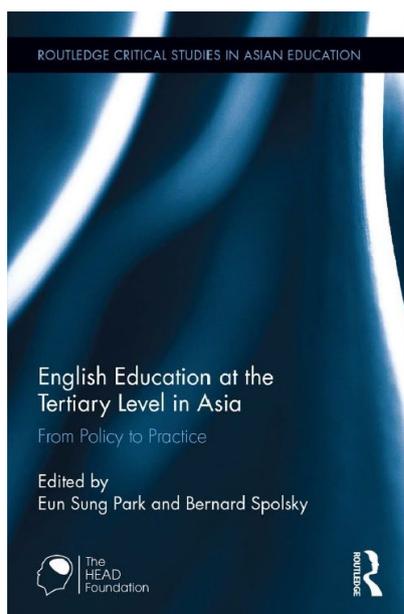




## Book Review



**English Education at the Tertiary Level in Asia: From Policy to Practice**, by Eun Sung Park and Bernard Spolsky (Eds.), Abingdon, UK, Routledge, 2017, 208 pp., \$160.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-1-13836-580-3

*English Education at the Tertiary Level in Asia: From Policy to Practice* is a comprehensive collection of well-grounded reports on the policies and practices centered around English language teaching (ELT) at the tertiary level in 10 Asian countries or regions: mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. As the co-editor, Eun Sung Park states in the Introduction, a volume about ELT in higher education institutions (HEIs) in such populous and historically and culturally diverse contexts as these 10 Asian regions was “both timely and important,” especially after the publication of two other volumes focusing on ELT in primary and secondary schools respectively (p. 1).

Chapter 1, written by Xiaoxiang Li, takes a developmental perspective to review the policies and practices of teaching English as a foreign language, a compulsory subject, and the only college course requiring a nationally uniform assessment (i.e., the College English Test) in mainland Chinese HEIs. This chapter covers the entire history of Chinese college English education starting in 1980 shortly after China ended the devastating Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and continuing through the late 2010s when tertiary ELT was undergoing “a transitional period” in need of refined teaching philosophies, enhanced integration with ELT in secondary schools, and curricular reforms in skill areas such as cross-cultural competence (p. 22). Chapter 1 also includes a detailed analysis of the latest policy document, the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, which has provided general guidelines for college English teaching since the document was finalized in 2007 and yet still allows HEIs a certain degree of autonomy in defining teaching objectives and designing graded curricula. Despite the historical developments, Chinese tertiary ELT has faced a multitude of challenges, such as the disparity in human and financial resources across HEIs and between the eastern and western provinces, concerns about college graduates’ productive English skills and cross-cultural competence, and the lack of congruence between testing and assessment on the one hand and curriculum and instruction on the other.

In Hong Kong, however, English is the language of its former colonizer and has held the status of the official medium of instruction in HEIs. Chapter 2, by Ken Hyland, begins with a historical review of the tertiary education system in Hong Kong in general and the “root and branch reform” in 2012 that transformed the British-based three-year university curriculum to four-year undergraduate programs, in particular (p. 29). The chapter then spotlights the Center for Applied English Studies (CAES) at Hong Kong University—the premier university in Hong Kong with the highest likelihood of attracting the best students—while admitting that there was not a one-size-fits-all approach to reforming English course



provisions across all the English language centers affiliated with universities in Hong Kong. Despite the logistical and pedagogic challenges caused by the university curriculum reform in 2012, the CAES critically evaluated its English offerings and decided to double the required credits, half of which was to be devoted to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focused courses that integrate ELT in disciplinary culture and contexts to ensure students develop a better control of the “discourses that disciplinary insiders are likely to find effective” (p. 43).

Chapter 3, by Ravinder Gargesh and Anjana Neira Dev, focuses on the status of English in tertiary education in India, another former colony of the UK and another outer circle country in Kachru’s (1985) model of World Englishes. The authors argue that English is not just a “prestige language” conducive to economic and technological advancement as well as prevention of tension and division among indigenous language groups in this multilingual and multiethnic country, but English is also the medium of instruction and examination as well as the “tongue of first choice” (p. 62). That said, the authors, however, also admit that the use of Indian languages helps maintain the country’s identity. Then, the authors detail the situation at the University of Delhi to illustrate that the role of English in Indian HEIs has “expanded in scope and outreach over the years” (p. 62). They also point out that most English language teachers in HEIs were trained in literature and teach English as a Second Language (ESL) based on instinct, research, trial and error—a teaching model needing to be replaced with learner-centered curricula and pedagogy.

Chapter 4, written by Hajime Terauchi, features Japan, an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) country in East Asia, just like mainland China. In contrast to the situation in mainland China, there is little centralized guideline for ELT at the tertiary level in Japan, nor is there a national English proficiency test as a graduation requirement. It is worth noting that the focus of ELT in Japanese HEIs is often still on reading via translation, and translation has become a well-respected Japanese sociocultural tradition resistant to change. Nevertheless, improving Japanese college students’ communication skills has been recognized as a priority that the Ministry of Education and ELT professional organizations need to collaborate to address continually.

Chapter 5, by Hee-Kyung Lee, describes the status quo of ELT in HEIs in South Korea before concluding a list of issues that have impacted college English programs, including the lack of consistency in ELT between secondary and tertiary levels, the negative impact that a proficiency certification requirement has on self-directed learning of English communication, and limitations in budgetary and human resources. The chapter then showcases the college English program at a private university, focusing on the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into their curricula as well as the development and validation of their placement test. Based on this example, Lee suggests that policymakers should “take more universal and international standard into consideration in setting up goals of English curriculum” (p. 105).

Chapter 6, by Wei Keong Too, presents a case study centering on the ELT practices in three unnamed HEIs (a public university, a private university, and a foreign university campus) in Malaysia, another former colony of the UK and a country where English switched from being the medium of instruction to a subject in 1970 and was not reinstated as the medium of instruction until 1996 in private universities and until 2005 in public universities. Responses from a survey and an interview with English language instructors from the three universities indicate that ELT at the tertiary level in Malaysia aligns with higher education policies that aim to promote internationalization and the development of human capital equipped with advanced soft skills. For all three groups of instructors, the major deterrents to ELT at their HEI are students’ “lack of motivation and low proficiency levels,” even though language instructors generally feel a sense of achievement and autonomy when designing course curricula and teaching English proficiency, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), or ESP (p. 124).

Chapter 7, by Maria Canilao, Jhoanna Paterno, and Marianne Perfecto, is another case study, focusing on the views and teaching practices of two second language (L2) academic writing teachers at a Catholic institution in the Philippines where English has been considered a language of opportunity. Through interviews, classroom observation, and stimulated recall, this study reveals that both instructors prioritize content, take a cyclical approach rather than a product-focused linear approach to teaching L2 writing,

and in general, still adopt an English monolingual orientation with occasional translanguaging adjustments. Regarding the instructors' stance on translanguaging, the authors contend, "in reality they [both teachers] are only truly impressed if ideas are expressed in language that adheres to NS norms" (p. 146).

Chapter 8, by Linda Hanington and Willy Renandya, begins with a brief presentation of the Bilingual Policy adopted in 1966 in Singapore, an island city-state in Southeast Asia that has become a "Global Schoolhouse" driven by the needs of the country for economic development including training "industry-relevant manpower resources" and attracting "foreign talent" (p. 153). After reporting on the English language entry requirements and ELT support provision by government-funded HEIs in Singapore generally, this chapter particularly examines one English language program that trains pre-service teachers for state schools and concludes that "selection and support provision complements the broader language policy in helping ensure that new teachers can be models of the target standard language variety" (p. 165). The authors also advocate providing tailored support to students of heterogeneous linguistic needs and backgrounds.

Chapter 9, by Ubon Sanpatchayapong, provides an overview of the development of ELT policies in Thai HEIs since the late 1980s, as a result of globalization, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community. The most recent ELT policy published in 2016 mandates that HEIs should create English standards to help college students learn appropriate English to compete in the real world, make plans to achieve their teaching goals, provide extra-curricular activities to enhance learner motivation and learning autonomy, and require students to take an English proficiency test as a requisite for college graduation. In compliance with this policy, many international programs and bilingual education courses in Thai HEIs such as Mahidol University have integrated career training into ELT.

The final chapter, written by Le Van Canh, uses survey results to explain how the innovation to standardize teachers' and students' English proficiency levels by adopting the CEFR has influenced the teaching and assessment practices in Vietnamese HEIs. Canh argues that the difficulty in adopting the CEFR proficiency levels includes "learners' limited proficiency at the entry level, lack of institutional support for teacher professional development and teachers' negative attitudes towards the new innovation" (p. 196). In the end, Canh recommends that an efficacious ELT policy should be based on a "systematic empirical situation analysis" instead of "policymakers' imagination and political will" (p. 200). Canh's other constructive suggestions include using technology-assisted instruction such as blended learning (e.g., in-class and out-of-class; online and face-to-face) to improve the quality of tertiary ELT in Vietnam.

This book represents a complex, massive endeavor and a much called-for initiative to collectively present ELT policies and practices in tertiary settings to help local learners and educators better fit into their ELT policy and help policymakers better understand and recognize the challenges that tertiary ELT has dealt with. Rich and authentic information has been provided about ELT policies and practices in a large part of Asia, a continent characterized by enormous numbers of English language learners, great diversity in learners' educational and linguistic backgrounds within and across regions, and vast differences in the political-historical underpinning for each country's ELT policy.

This book has distinguished itself as a valuable resource for ELT educators, program administrators, policy makers, and researchers, also because of the following reasons.

First, all the 10 Asian regions covered in this book share the same instrumental purpose for promoting the mastery of English communicative skills, which is to advance the economic and technological development of the country.

Second, the 10 Asian regions, nonetheless, have faced some of the same challenges when promoting ELT in their HEIs: for example, limitations in budgetary and human resources, lack of consistency between tertiary ELT and ELT in secondary schools, limited and unsatisfactory work in integrating ELT pedagogy with assessment, and previous issuance of an ELT policy made out of a political will when the policy should have been thoroughly grounded in analyses of the situation and learners' needs.

Finally, it is necessary to critically review the "status quo of ELT" in these Asian regions that have

either retained English as a colonial legacy or adopted it as a foreign language for the purposes of economic and academic internationalization (p. 1). The historical status of English in each country accounts for the general proficiency levels of their domestic college students and some of the ELT course offerings in HEIs.

### **References**

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