
*The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region**

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This article presents the results of an investigation into the place of English in the curriculum in several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The study indicates that the emergence of English as a global language is having considerable impact on policies and practices in all countries surveyed. However, it also reveals significant problems, including confusion and inconsistency, at the level of policy, particularly regarding the issue of age of initial instruction, inequity regarding access to effective language instruction, inadequately trained and skilled teachers, and a disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality.

Despite the apparent widespread perception that English is a global language, relatively little systematic information has been gathered on its impact on educational policies and practices in educational systems around the world. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of English on educational policies and practices in countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. These countries were chosen because they represent a range of contrasting characteristics and features, from developed to developing, ex-colonial to independent, large to small, and culturally diverse to culturally cohesive. The case study methodology revealed a variety of details about each county, which offer a glimpse at the educational policy realities of the pervasive role of English internationally.

*This study is based on a Spotlight Presentation given at the 36th Annual TESOL Convention, April 2002, in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States. It was stimulated by an invitational conference on research priorities in TESOL, sponsored by the TESOL International Research Foundation in February 2002. During the conference, the need for research into the impact of English as a global language emerged as a major theme. (For a detailed review of this and other issues covered at this conference, see Duff & Bailey, 2001.)

WHAT IS ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE?

In his book *English as a Global Language*, Crystal (1997) asserts, “A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (p. 2). The definition hinges on the special role, which Crystal describes as serving as the native language of the majority (such as English does in the United States or Australia), serving as the official language, or achieving the status of the priority foreign language (i.e., the foreign language of choice for children in schools). Crystal’s analysis offers some criteria by which TESOL professionals can begin to interpret the global status of the English language and English language education, observed through its use as the language of business, technology, science, the Internet, popular entertainment, and even sports.

Beyond the criteria of native language, official language, and priority foreign language, it is difficult to quantify the proportional use of English versus other languages in everyday life. Nevertheless, applied linguists have provided some data. In academic contexts, Swales (1987) estimated that more than 50% of the millions of academic papers published each year are written in English, and the percentage was growing year by year. English is currently the undisputed language of science and technology, and scientific journals in many countries are now switching from the vernacular to English. In specific disciplines, English appears to be the universal language of communication. For example, 98% of German physicists now claim English as their de facto working language. They are closely followed by chemists (83%), biologists (81%), and psychologists (81%) (Graddol, 1997; see also, Block & Cameron, 2002; Crystal, 1997).

The pervasive view of the globalization of English is tempered by a few observations. In a study commissioned by the British Council, Graddol (1997) speaks about the apparently “unstoppable” (p. 2) trend toward global English usage, but also points out that this could change suddenly and unexpectedly due to some relatively minor change in world events. Examining actual language use, Wallraff (2000) argues that, for example, the spread of Spanish in the United States indicates that English is not sweeping away all before it. These voices, however, are rare and faint in relation to the widespread perceptions and concerns about the unabated spread of English, and, as a consequence, TESOL professionals need a clearer understanding of educational policy implications of global English.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESPONSE

Few TESOL professionals can deny seeing the day-to-day results of the sociopolitical phenomenon of global English in the policies they encounter. Anecdotal evidence suggests that governments around the world are introducing English as a compulsory subject at younger and younger ages, often without adequate funding, teacher education for elementary school teachers, or the development of curricula and materials for younger learners. In business, industry, and government, workers are increasingly expected to develop proficiency in English. These demands for English offer opportunities to the TESOL profession, but at the same time they have created many challenges for TESOL educators internationally.

An initial challenge is simply to document the nature of the educational policy responses to the growing need for English in countries where English is not a native language for the majority. Such descriptive data are needed as a starting point to eventually address questions being raised by governments, bureaucracies, and industry about language policy and language education. Because TESOL professionals hold a central place in English language policy, they need to understand the impact of English as a global language on the educational practices and medium of instruction in educational systems around the world. Currently, governments and ministries of education are framing policies and implementing practices in the language area without adequately considering the implications of such policies and practices on the lives of the teachers and students they affect (Szulc-Kurpaska, 1996). It would therefore be imprudent for TESOL professionals to remain unaware of such policies.

This study begins to shed light on policy decisions about English by seeking descriptive and interpretive accounts of the place of English within the educational systems of the following countries in the Asia-Pacific region: Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Each country is treated as a case within this multiple-case study of these key Asian countries. Although similar questions could be raised concerning other sectors, such as university, workplace education, and adult vocational programs, the guiding questions for the study focused on the impact of English as a global language on policies and practices within school education.

1. Has the emergence of English as a global language influenced language planning and policy making? If so, in what ways has this influence manifested itself?
2. What are the principles underpinning the English language curriculum, and how are they manifested in practice?

3. What is the impact of English as a global language on educational practices and medium of instruction?
4. What are the costs and benefits, in terms of time, money, and effort, of teaching EFL?
5. Has the introduction of English had an impact, or is it likely to have an impact in the future, on L1 or indigenous language development?

METHOD

I investigated these questions through a case study in which I analyzed published governmental and quasi-governmental documentation and interviewed informants representing different stakeholders within the educational systems of the countries that took part in the study. I attempted to obtain perspectives from similar sources in the seven countries but was limited by those who chose to participate in the study. In some countries, for instance, I was able to gain access to relatively highly placed officials in ministries of education. In other countries, however, I was not able to do so.

Data Collection

I first collected and analyzed published policy statements, documents, and programs drawn from a number of sources, including recent books, articles, government reports, syllabuses, and curriculum documents. I obtained these materials in several different ways. Some were publicly available; others were provided by informants. These documents provided a backdrop for more detailed data collection through guided interviews with informants.

The second source of data was guided interviews with 68 informants, the majority of whom I had met in the course of teaching and researching in the region over many years. In other instances, regional officials from the British Council and the United States Information Service provided me with contacts. The informants represented different positions, interests, and perspectives within the educational sectors of their respective countries, including academics/teacher trainers, ministry officials, publishers, and teachers (see Table 1).

Prior to their interviews, informants received background information on the study along with the general questions set out above. In addition, I sought responses to the following more specific questions:

1. At what age and grade level is English introduced as a compulsory subject?

TABLE 1
Informants by Position and Country (N = 68)

Position	Country						
	China	Hong Kong	Japan	Korea	Malaysia	Taiwan	Vietnam
Academic/ teacher trainer	4	4	2	3	2	2	2
Ministry official	2	6	0	0	0	0	1
Publisher	2	3	1	1	0	2	0
Teacher	5	6	5	3	4	7	1

2. How many hours per week and weeks per year is English taught at each grade level?
3. What plans, if any, are there to lower the age at which English is introduced as a compulsory subject?
4. To what extent is English used as a medium of instruction for other subjects?

I conducted the interviews through a range of media: face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, and, in one instance, an Internet chat line. Choice of medium was left to the informants and did not appear to affect the nature of the information provided.

Data Analysis

Once I had obtained all the data for each country, I analyzed it by identifying responses to the guiding questions and the more specific information I sought, looking particularly for points of agreement. I wrote a first draft of the present article and circulated it to the informants so they could verify the data and the interpretations derived from them.

FINDINGS

Despite some generalizations that can be made about English language teaching (ELT) policies across the countries, each country has a distinct profile and is therefore presented individually. In this section, I present the data yielded by documentary analysis and informant interviews (see Table 2 for a summary).

TABLE 2
Summary of Findings

Country	Grade level and age at which English is introduced as a compulsory subject	Frequency of instruction	Impact of English as a global language
China	Grade 3, Age 9	Primary school: 2–3 40-minute lessons/week; secondary school: 5–6 45-minute lessons/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age for compulsory English lowered from 11 to 9 in September 2001 • English teaching emerging as private business • English becoming increasingly significant as university entry requirement • English enhancing promotional prospects in the workplace
Hong Kong	Year 1, Age 6	Primary school: 4–6 hours/week; secondary school: 7–9 hours/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overwhelming concern in government and business sectors that Hong Kong will lose economic advantage if English language skills are not enhanced
Japan	First year, Age 12	Junior high school: 3 50-minute lessons/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from 2002, primary students increasingly exposed to English, especially listening and speaking
Korea	Grade 3, Age 9	Grades 3–6: 1–2 hours/week; Grades 7–9: 2–4 hours/week; Grades 10–12: 4 hours/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compulsory English lowered from age 13 to 9 • huge financial investment in teaching English • concern with negative effects on national identity due to early introduction of English
Malaysia	Age 7	Primary school: 90 minutes/week; secondary school: 4 hours/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern with decline in educational standards and competitive economic advantage • fear of impact on national language
Taiwan	Grade 1, Ages 6–7	1–2 hours/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compulsory English lowered from Grade 5 to Grade 1
Vietnam	Grade 6, Ages 11–12	Grades 6–9: 4 45-minute lessons/week; Grades 10–12: 3 45-minute lessons/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English compulsory from junior high school (ages 11–12) • English plays central role in education and employment • English proficiency now required for most professional employment

China

I collected data for China through face-to-face interviews and documentary analysis. Informants included a managing director for China of a multinational publishing company; the director of the Foreign Languages Department of the People's Education Press (a company controlling approximately 70% of the school textbook market in China); the dean of the Institute of Education at Beijing Foreign Studies University; the general-secretary of the National Foreign Language Teaching Association, Education Society of China. I consulted documents, including the syllabuses for the middle school and high school system.

Despite China's centralized approach to education, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of what is happening there because of the sheer size and diversity of the country. There seems to be a general divide between the wealthier coastal regions and the interior. Another divide is that between urban and nonurban areas. (For current reviews of education reform in China, see Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Lam & Chow, 2001; Liu, 1996; see also Bolton & Tong, 2002, which is devoted to an examination of English in China.)

In September 2001, English was introduced as a compulsory subject in Grade 3 in all elementary schools that have suitably qualified teachers. ("Suitably qualified" was not defined by the informant who provided this information.) This represents a lowering of the age of compulsory instruction from 11 to 9. In primary school, there are generally two or three 40-minute lessons a week. In secondary school, there are either five or six 45-minute lessons.

According to the informants, the impact of English as a global language has been considerable. Entry requirements to university, promotional prospects in the workplace, curricula, and published materials have all been affected. Teaching English is emerging as a private business outside regular schools and universities, particularly in big cities, such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing. (One publishing industry informant told me her company estimated that there were 600,000 new enrolments in private-conversation schools every 4 to 6 months.)

Two major influences that informants frequently mentioned included China's joining of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the awarding of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing. The Degree Committee of the State Council has approved 45 Sino-foreign joint programs, which can grant degrees from foreign universities in China. All programs are taught bilingually (English and Chinese).

Also in September 2001, all colleges and universities under the control of the Ministry of Education were instructed to use English as the main teaching language in the following courses: information technology, biotechnology, new-material technology, finance, foreign trade,

economics, and law. Other courses would be added as resources became available. Criteria for selecting courses were that they facilitate entry to the WTO, and that they not be “politically sensitive.” (Politically sensitive courses have to be taught using textbooks written in China. Courses that are not politically sensitive can use foreign textbooks.) The main obstacle to implementing this policy was obtaining suitably qualified teachers (Chan, 2001).

The latest syllabi across the board are based on a functional/notional view of English and refer frequently to concepts such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and learner-centeredness. The latest university syllabi also refer to interdisciplinary support between English and other areas, such as law and commerce.

Because of factors mentioned above, such as size, it is difficult to determine the extent to which classroom realities reflect official rhetoric. Coastal areas and big cities have an advantage over inland and rural areas in terms of resources, with inevitable implications for what happens at the level of the classroom.

English appears to have little impact on Chinese language itself, despite the eagerness of young people to practice their English. According to recent studies, there is little code mixing between English and Chinese (Bolton & Tong, 2002).

In general, content-based instruction is not a feature of the Chinese educational system. However, some of the top schools in large cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, have started teaching math and science in English. More universities are starting to teach courses in English, and this is becoming a requirement in certain subject areas. This move to content-based instruction at the tertiary level will increasingly affect English language instruction at the secondary level.

Hong Kong

I collected data for the Hong Kong survey from face-to-face interviews and government documents. Interviewees included the chief executive of the Curriculum Development Institute and the president of the North Asia subsidiary of an international publishing company that controls most of the ELT publishing market in the Special Administrative Region (SAR). I also carried out two focus group interviews with a group of six primary and secondary school teachers. I consulted a range of government documents, including the latest government reviews and consultation documents as well as the English language syllabi for primary and secondary schools.

As a former colony of Great Britain where English remains an official language alongside Cantonese and, increasingly, Putonghua, Hong

Kong has a special place in this survey. Schools are classified into five (soon to be reduced to three) *bands*, which are meant to reflect students' ability, but which, not surprisingly, also reflect the socioeconomic status of the students and their parents. Schools are classified as either Chinese medium of instruction (CMI) or English medium of instruction (EMI) schools, the latter embracing a range of immersion-type curriculum models (Marsh, Hau, & Kong, 2000). Until the late 1990s, the EMI schools outnumbered the CMI schools by a ratio of 9:1, even though many students and some teachers were not proficient in the English language. (A government report in 1990 stated that 70% of schoolchildren were unable to cope with English as a medium of instruction.) Although the textbooks, written work, and examinations were in English in many EMI schools, oral and aural communication was conducted in Cantonese, and students only encountered English in its written form. This resulted in students who were functionally illiterate in Chinese on the one hand and unable to communicate effectively in spoken English on the other.

In all schools, English is introduced at the primary level in Year 1, when children are 6 years old. In EMI schools, it is also used as the teaching medium across the curriculum. In primary school, English is taught 4–6 hours a week. In secondary school, it is taught 7–9 hours a week. (The school year is 35–37 weeks long.)

There is no official plan to lower the age at which English is offered as a compulsory subject, which would entail it being offered in kindergarten. However, some English is introduced in almost all kindergartens in the form of the alphabet and key words.

English symbolizes wealth and power in Hong Kong, and this has not changed since 1997, when the new government of the Hong Kong SAR took power from Great Britain. For more than a century, English has been the prevalent language in the government, legislature, and judiciary. Hong Kong is a major international trading, business, banking, and communications center, and English is seen as a key to maintaining its position in these areas (Forey & Nunan, 2002).

The prevailing rhetoric is that as a global language, English is a crucial tool for economic, social, and technological advancement. This is made explicit in government policy documents. For example, the syllabus for English language at the secondary (1–5) level (Curriculum Development Council, 1999), states that:

As a result of the number, size and influence of the English-speaking countries in the world and their scientific, technological, economic, commercial and cultural influences, English has become a truly international language. English is the language of international communication, commerce, education and entertainment. The mastery of English therefore opens up

new possibilities for our students in career advancement, educational attainment and personal fulfillment. (p. 1)

The influence of English as a global language on policy and practice is also evident in another key government document (Curriculum Development Council, 2000), which states that

English Language Education seeks to provide a curriculum framework that contributes to enhancing the language proficiency of young people for the following reasons:

- To enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong so that it will be able to maintain its position as an international business centre and a knowledge-based economy, capable of rising to the challenges of global competition;
- To help our young people to develop a worldwide outlook through broadening their knowledge and experience;
- To enable our young people to use English proficiently for study, work, leisure and effective interaction in different cultural environments; and
- To help our young people succeed in life and find greater personal fulfillment. (p. 2)

From the rhetoric of recently published government documents as well as government-funded initiatives, such as the Target-Oriented Curriculum, CLT is the current philosophical orthodoxy in Hong Kong (Education Commission, 1990). At the classroom level, this philosophy is reflected in task-based language teaching (TBLT) and a learner-centered approach to instruction. Learner-centeredness is reflected in the strong links that are drawn between language instruction and a focus on the development of thinking and learning-how-to-learn skills. The development of information technology skills, another key aspect of government policy, is also reflected in curriculum documents on language teaching. The rhetoric has been reinforced through teacher training courses, workshops, and seminars. However, the extent to which these are implemented depends very much on individual schools and teachers.

English still plays a more prominent role as a medium of instruction in Hong Kong than in most other countries surveyed in this study. At the primary level, English is taught as a subject in most schools, except for a very small number of elite schools, which introduce English as a medium of instruction in Year 3 or 4 in certain subjects. At the secondary level, English is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects except Chinese-related subjects in all EMI schools from Forms 1–3. In CMI schools, English is taught only as a subject, with extra resources to support the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language. However, from Form 4 onwards, schools are free to decide their own medium of instruction. Many CMI schools switch back to using

English as a medium of instruction to help students prepare for the public examinations in Forms 5 and 7 and to prepare them for tertiary studies. (English is mandated as the language of tertiary education in Hong Kong.)

Despite the obsession with English and the huge amounts of money poured into English language education at every level, government and business remain (and have become increasingly) dissatisfied with the English language proficiency of students graduating from secondary school and university. The skills and proficiency of teachers have been called into question recently, and the government has introduced an extremely controversial measure—a system of benchmarking English teachers' proficiency in the language. Another, somewhat less controversial measure has been the introduction of a Native English Teacher (NET) scheme under which native-speaking teachers of English are recruited to provide appropriate models of English that the Education Department seems to think Cantonese-speaking teachers of English lack.

A major problem throughout the region is a lack of trained teachers. Despite its relative wealth, Hong Kong is no exception. When it took power from Great Britain in 1997, the new government of the Hong Kong SAR announced that all teachers would be required to have a degree and a professional teaching qualification. At that time, 70.6% of secondary school teachers and 37.2% of primary school teachers had such qualifications. By 2002, the figures had dropped to 57% for secondary school teachers and 27.8% for primary school teachers. The Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau attributes the decline to a shortage of resources: "There is a mismatch between the supply and demand for teachers, with a long term shortage of teachers in certain subjects, especially English language" (Chan, 2001, p. 4).

Japan

Japan requires 9 years of compulsory education, 6 at the primary and 3 at the junior high level. English is introduced as a compulsory subject in the first year of junior high, when learners are 12. Students receive three 50-minute lessons a week in each of the 3 years of junior high.

Although there are no plans to lower the age at which English is taught as a compulsory subject, as of 2002, all public primary schools offered a course called General Studies. This course is taught three times a week to all third through sixth graders and is supposed to cover foreign languages, including English, global education, welfare, and the environment. According to one informant, many primary schools are planning to introduce English, focusing on listening and speaking, within the General Studies program. Because the Ministry of Education has stipulated

that the purpose is not to “teach” English in primary school, but to provide “fun” time in English, there will be no textbooks. The amount of English taught and the actual content will vary from school to school.

Official government rhetoric is evident in the *Course of Study for Lower Secondary Schools* (Ministry of Education, 1999), which sets out the following objectives.

- To deepen students’ understanding of language and culture through learning a foreign language and to foster a positive attitude toward communicating in it by developing their basic ability for practical communication such as listening or speaking skills.
- To implement real communicative activities for students to communicate their feelings or thoughts.
- To help students find proper expressions for each concrete case or situations in such communicative activities. (p. 2)

According to another informant, although the government rhetoric stresses the development of practical communication skills, this is rarely reflected at the classroom level, where the emphasis is on the development of reading and writing skills for the purposes of passing entrance examinations into senior high school and college.

Japan has operated the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme (similar to the NET scheme in Hong Kong) for about 15 years. Under this scheme, approximately 5,000 native speakers of English provide support instruction in the schools. The salary for each JET teacher is roughly 300,000 yen a month, making the scheme a costly one. As in Hong Kong, the scheme is controversial and has been criticized by Japanese and JET teachers alike, although some aspects of the scheme have met with qualified success (Sturman, 1992).

Korea

In Korea, English is introduced in the third grade, when children are 9. The school year consists of 30 weeks per year. Students receive 1–2 hours of instruction a week in Grades 3–6, 2–4 hours a week in Grades 7–9, and 4 hours a week in Grades 10–12. The age for compulsory English was lowered from 13 to 9 in 1997. There are no plans to lower it further (Kwon, 2000; Park, 2000).

English is a major concern in all areas of government, business, and education. All colleges and universities require 3–12 credit hours of English, and many universities and employers require minimum Test of English for International Communication and Test of English as a Foreign Language scores from those seeking either education or employment.

In 1995, the Sixth National Curriculum adopted a communicative, grammatical-functional syllabus. In 2001, the Ministry of Education adopted a policy of teaching English through English, which encourages the use of English in English classes. However, as with other countries in the region, a major problem is that many English teachers simply do not have the proficiency, and therefore the confidence, to teach in English. Park (2000) asserts that this is a major problem that can only be addressed through teacher education.

Although the policy and textbooks changed to a communicative orientation in 1995, most teachers do not have the English language proficiency or methodological skills to implement the policy, and there has not been a great deal of change from the grammar-translation approach. Some universities offer pay incentives to encourage teachers to teach in English.

A tremendous amount of money has been spent on teaching and learning English. On average, Korean families spend one third of their income on private lessons for their children in English, art, and music. Increasing numbers of English-medium schools are also beginning to appear, and the largest of these have student enrolments running into the hundreds of thousands.

Some concern has been expressed about the negative effects that early introduction of English is having on national identity (see, e.g., Crystal, 2000). However, this concern seems to be somewhat muted and does not seem to have had much impact on the explosive demand for English language. Several informants were more concerned that introducing English language literacy to students before they had attained literacy in Korean would have a negative impact on their L1 literacy.

According to informants, other subjects are not generally taught in English at the elementary and secondary school levels. However, there is some content-based instruction at the university level.

Malaysia

As a former colony of Great Britain, Malaysia also represents a special case within this survey. In national (Malay) schools, English is introduced at the age of 7. Vernacular (Mandarin and Tamil) schools introduce it 2 years later. In general, students receive 90 minutes of instruction a week in primary school, and 4 hours a week in secondary school. There are no plans to introduce English as a compulsory subject any earlier.

The emergence of English as a global language and a perception that English language skills are in decline have caused concern at the national government level. The government has commissioned the University of Malaya to investigate and identify causes of deterioration in English among university students.

The rhetoric in Malaysia is that of the communicative movement. It was one of the first countries in the world to embrace a task-based approach to instruction. According to one informant, "Implementation (of task-based learning) is constrained by formal top-down traditional methods. It is difficult to assess whether the tasks meet any of the students' own purposes." Another informant stated:

Anecdotal evidence supported by reactions from the Ministry of Education suggests that practice is far removed from the curriculum "rhetoric." At a more fundamental level, a significant proportion of teachers, especially in the rural areas, do not have sufficient command of the English language to conduct their classes with confidence.

There is considerable consternation in Malaysia at the emergence of English as a global language because of its potential impact on the national language, which is heavily promoted for political reasons. In the 1960s and 1970s, English was abandoned as a medium of instruction, and it was only during the 1990s that the government realized that the loss of English would adversely affect economic development. Deterioration in the standards of English is seen as a major obstacle to the aspiration that Malaysia be declared a developed nation by 2020. (As one informant said, "Global English has caught them [the government] cold.")

The financial commitment to teaching English is considerable. Prior to independence, standards of English were high. However, success of the national language policy has had an adverse impact on English. English is now considered a foreign rather than an additional language. This is especially so in rural areas. Parents who can afford the tuition are arranging for private English classes for their children.

In national schools, the language is exclusively Malay. In the vernacular schools, the languages are Mandarin and Tamil. The Ministry of Education is working on the reintroduction of English as a medium of instruction in science and technical subjects at school and university. (The use of English for teaching math and science was implemented in January 2003.) All university lecturers in public universities who speak Tamil are obliged to use English. In practice, code switching is common, particularly in specialist subject areas such as medicine, architecture, and engineering.

Taiwan

In Taiwan, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the managing director of an international publishing company (currently developing

core English texts for the Taiwanese public school system), the president of the English Teachers Association of Taiwan, and English teachers from a number of schools and colleges, including Fu Jen High School, National Tainan First Junior High School, the Chinese Culture University, Providence University, and National Kaohsiung University of Applied Sciences. Ministry of Education position papers and syllabuses were also consulted.

The emergence of English as a global language has had a major influence on the government's thinking. Taiwan aims to be a major economic global player and sees the economic imperative as a major impetus for promoting the learning of English. Thus, in September 2001, English was introduced in Grade 5 (in which learners are 10–11 years of age), but this was then lowered to Grade 1 in 2002. Classes are taught 1–2 hours per week during the two 20-week semesters in each school year.

A recently published document on the English curriculum sets out the official government line on principles underpinning the curriculum (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2000).

The objective of the elementary/junior high school curriculum should be to instill a basic communicative ability, to prepare students to take a global perspective, and to give individuals confidence in communicating in the global area (“thus improving the nation’s competitiveness”). Elementary and middle schools should provide a natural and enjoyable language learning environment. (p. 2)

All informants agree that Ministry expectations are far above what most schools and teachers can deliver. A major issue is the training of teachers, and teacher training programs are very limited. Even teachers who have completed training programs have difficulty with their English skills as well as their teaching pedagogy, particularly with regard to teaching younger learners. This is because most teacher educators have no experience themselves in teaching younger learners.

The entire public school system in Taiwan is undergoing tremendous change with the introduction of a new initiative entitled “the Nine Year Program,” which aims to integrate Chinese, English, information technology and computing skills, math, science, and social studies in elementary and junior high school curricula.

Governmental investment is large, but the hope is that this initiative will have a beneficial effect later on, resulting in higher levels of proficiency in English at the university level. (Informants generally agreed that the level of English proficiency among university students is still quite low when it comes to communicative use.)

According to the informants, content-based instruction is a foreign

concept in Taiwan. Whether this changes in the future, as appears to be the case in some contexts in Mainland China, is difficult to say, and informants were unable to offer a perspective on this point.

Vietnam

Economically, Vietnam was the poorest of the countries surveyed, with extremely limited resources available for all forms of education. Policy and practice issues relating to English were of particular interest.

The school year in Vietnam runs for 30 weeks, from September through May. Children begin elementary school at the age of 6 and spend 5 years at that level before graduating to junior high school at the age of 11 or 12. It is here that they begin studying English as a compulsory subject for four 45-minute periods a week. In senior high school (Years 10, 11, and 12), English is also compulsory, although the number of periods per week drops from four to three.

The above data represent the number of lessons prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Training. In practice, however, considerable variation exists. For example, in Ho Chi Minh City, schools may teach up to 6 periods a week of English. In addition, there are schools that specialize in English, where students may study the subject for as many as 14 periods a week.

Some thought has been given to lowering the age at which English is introduced as a compulsory subject. A limited number of elementary schools in Ho Chi Minh City have begun experimenting with classes in English. In addition to government-run schools, some private language schools throughout the country offer English to children as young as 5 or 6.

The prevailing rhetoric in Vietnam appears to be “communicative,” with an integrated four-skills focus in the early years. In high school, however, the focus is exclusively on reading. Thus, the Year 7 textbook covers the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as the basis for developing students’ reading skills in subsequent years. In the Year 12 textbook, students review the materials they have studied in previous years and continue to practice their four language skills, but the emphasis is mostly on developing their reading skills.

Despite the lip service paid to CLT, there appears to be a large gap between the rhetoric and the reality. When reflecting on her own experience as an English teacher in Vietnam, one informant stated:

All the books present a lot of exercises on grammar and reading comprehension. I used to teach high school and left after eighteen years. From my experience, the students cannot use the language in communicating. There

used to be no tapes for listening, and there are no listening exercises. They have made the tapes for listening now, but the books are just the same.

The globalization of English has had a considerable impact on policy and practice in Vietnam. In the words of one informant:

It can be said that the English has become a must for success in both studying and working. One of the most common requirements in job advertisements is proficiency in English (another is computer skills). Since 1986, the year the government began to apply its open door policy, language centers have mushroomed all over Ho Chi Minh City and other big cities and towns. English is also compulsory at university level and it helps both students and workers to gain scholarships to go abroad.

GENERALIZATIONS

The case study data led to generalizations across the countries in the Asian Pacific in the areas of impact on policy, differential access to English within each country, teacher education, principles of language education, and effects on the home language.

Policy Impact of English as a Global Language

This investigation has shown that English has had a significant impact on policy. For example, despite considerable country-by-country variation (see Table 2), the age at which English is a compulsory subject in most of the countries has shifted down in recent years, a shift that is predicated on the importance of English as a global language. Underlying the shift is an assumption on the part of the governments and ministries of education that when it comes to learning a foreign language, younger is better. This view seems to be firmly entrenched in popular opinion, which influences policy decisions, despite its controversial nature in the professional literature (see, e.g., Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2001; Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000, 2001).

Access to English

In most of the Asian Pacific countries surveyed, considerable inequity exists in terms of access to effective English language instruction. In China, for instance, the *haves* versus the *have-nots* and city versus rural divides and the inequities flowing from these divides have been exacerbated by the growing importance of English and the inequitable access

to quality instruction in English. In a number of the countries, informants spoke frankly of the fact that the quality of English language education in the public sector was so poor that “no one learns English in school.” These informants reported that the only children who stood a chance of learning English were those whose parents could afford to send them to private, after-school language classes. The data from this study strongly support the following assertion by Bruthiaux (2002):

In most markets, the consumers of English language education are the relatively well-off, already far beyond the stage of mere survival. To the extent that the severely poor are aware of it at all, the global spread of English is a sideshow compared with the issue of basic economic development and poverty reduction. (p. 290)

Teacher Education

Teacher education and the English language skills of teachers in public-sector institutions are inadequate, according to the informants in all the countries included in this study. Although this may not be surprising in developing countries, such as China and Vietnam, it must be of major concern in more developed countries, such as Malaysia and Hong Kong, where millions of dollars have been poured into teacher education in recent years. Of even greater concern has to be the widespread use of nonqualified teachers throughout the region and a decline in the percentage of qualified English teachers in public schools in places such as Hong Kong.

Principles of Language Education

All of the countries surveyed subscribe to principles of CLT, and in a number of them, TBLT (the latest methodological realization of CLT) is the central pillar of government rhetoric. However, in all the countries surveyed, it would seem that rhetoric rather than reality is the order of the day. Poor English skills on the part of teachers as well as inadequate teacher preparation make it very difficult, if not impossible, for many teachers to implement CLT in their classrooms. In places such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, where principles of TBLT are beginning to appear in commercial textbooks aimed at the public school sector, most teachers have a poor understanding of the ideas, and it remains to be seen whether they will be able to use these materials effectively.

Effect on Learners' Home Language

There is growing concern in the literature about the impact of English on first and vernacular languages (Crystal, 2000; Phillipson, 1992; Shorris, 2000; Philippine Commission on Educational Reform [PCER], 2000). I asked informants their views on this issue, but none expressed a major concern, perhaps because the impact on smaller vernacular languages is not considered to be too serious in the countries I surveyed. I thought it might be a potential concern in the Philippines, where it is referred to in the PCER report; however, even the Minister of Education did not mention it.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study point to a number of concerns about current ELT practices that require at least some comment, even though solutions may not be immediately apparent.

Language Proficiency of Teachers

In the countries surveyed, the English language proficiency of many teachers is not sufficient to provide learners with the rich input needed for successful foreign language acquisition. This finding is alarming in view of the popular and some professional views about the conditions required for successful foreign language instruction in the early years. According to Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000),

Investment in elementary foreign language education may well be worth it, but only if the teachers are native or native-like speakers and well trained in the needs of younger learners; if the early learning opportunities are built upon with consistent, well-planned, ongoing instruction in the higher grades; and if the learners are given some opportunities for authentic communicative experiences in the target language. Decisions to introduce foreign language instruction in the elementary grades should be weighed against the costs to other components of the school curriculum; as far as we know, there are no good studies showing that foreign language instruction is worth more than additional time invested in math, science, music, art, or even basic L1 literacy instruction. (pp. 28–29)

If this strong position were justified, the findings of this research, which suggest that teachers in the public schools are anything but native or native-like in English language proficiency, would be cause for

concern. Although I would argue that a high level of proficiency in the language is desirable, I believe the authors go too far in asserting that elementary education will only be effective if teachers are native or native-like speakers. Technology and rich, input-based programs can do a great deal to support teachers who do not have high levels of fluency in the target language (Anderson & Nunan, 2003) if they have access to appropriate materials and education about how to use them.

Access to rich input, either from native speakers, highly competent speakers of the language, or appropriate technology, is fundamental to the development of high-level skills in the target language (Ellis, 1994). Recognizing that such input does not need to come from the local teacher, the solution on the part of Hong Kong and Japan is to recruit large numbers of native-English-speaking teachers through the NET and JET Programmes. These schemes have been extremely expensive and have had mixed success, although, in the case of Hong Kong, at least, it is too early to provide a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the NET scheme. My own view is that, in the long term, this investment would be better spent on programs to enhance the proficiency and professional skills of local teachers.

Extended Exposure to and Interaction in English

To achieve consistent and measurable improvements in the target language, learners need adequate exposure to it. In actuality, in most of the countries surveyed, the luckier students, particularly those in the early years, will receive only an average of 50–60 hours of English language instruction a year, which is probably less than what is needed for significant progress in a foreign language.

The fortunate students whose parents can afford it will receive supplementary instruction in private, after-school classes. If they are lucky enough to find themselves in schools run by qualified teachers, they may reach the critical mass of hours required to register genuine and long-lasting progress toward high levels of proficiency. If they do, indications are that they will reap significant economic rewards and, thus, perpetuate or exacerbate the economic divide that exists in most countries, certainly in most of the countries that were surveyed. It must be a major concern to all those involved in English language education that the efforts currently underway do not appear to be reflected in significantly enhanced English language skills. Even in Hong Kong, where, on paper at least, there is considerably more English than in most other countries in the region, many students leave high school with only the most limited ability to communicate in the language.

Another important, and related, feature of successful foreign lan-

guage education is the opportunity for learners to take part in authentic communicative interaction. It is true that lip service is paid to CLT, and that the principles of CLT are enshrined in all of the documents examined for this research. However, all informants, in all the countries surveyed, reported a huge gap between ministerial rhetoric and classroom reality.

Teacher Education

With the introduction of English at the primary school level, teachers need special training in the needs of younger learners. Curricula, teaching methods, and materials should meet the needs of the learners of different ages and at different stages. In reality, adequate and appropriate training is a major problem in all countries surveyed. In Hong Kong, the government has made serious efforts to enhance the professional skills of English teachers and has mandated the benchmarking of English teachers. However, all of the countries (as is the case in most other parts of the world) lack a pedagogy that is appropriate for young learners. In addition, there is little evidence that differentiated curricula to meet the needs of learners at different chronological ages and stages have been developed or are being developed, although this is changing in some of the countries (the change being driven as much by forward-looking commercial publishers as by ministries of education).

Policy Questions of Age and Intensity

Apart from questions about the optimal age at which English should be introduced as a foreign language and with what intensity is a more fundamental question: Is English, in fact, a necessity in the countries in question? The single most pervasive outcome of this study is that English language policies and practices have been implemented, often at significant cost to other aspects of the curriculum, without a clearly articulated rationale and without a detailed consideration of the costs and benefits of such policies and practices on the countries in question. Furthermore, there is a widely articulated belief that, in public schools at least, these policies and practices are failing.

In countries where a considered response to the question posed in the preceding paragraph is “yes,” the following actions are recommended:

1. a review of the starting age and intensity of foreign language instruction, along with the articulation of a rationale for both
2. an audit of the human and material resources allocated to English language instruction and an assessment of the adequacy of these in

relation to the needs of the learners, along with a cost-benefit analysis of English language education within the educational system as a whole

3. an investigation into the extent to which principles enshrined in official curriculum documentation are effectively realized at the level of classroom practice
4. an analysis of pre- and postexperience teacher education provisions and an assessment of the appropriateness of these
5. a critical review of the principles underlying the curriculum, and an assessment of the appropriateness of the principles to the context in which the curriculum is used
6. in cases where English is introduced before L1 literacy is fully established, an investigation into the effect of the introduction of an L2 on L1 literacy and oracy development

CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation have identified some of the effects of English as a global language on policies and practices in a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These countries are investing considerable resources in providing English, often at the expense of other aspects of the curriculum, but the evidence suggests that these resources are not achieving the instructional goals desired. It would seem advisable, then, for governments and educational bureaucracies to review their policies on ELT. If English is a necessity, steps should be taken to ensure that teachers are adequately trained in language teaching methodology appropriate to a range of learner ages and stages, that teachers' own language skills are significantly enhanced, that classroom realities meet curricular rhetoric, and that students have sufficient exposure to English in instructional contexts.

In view of the central role that ELT is playing in educational decision making in these, and presumably other, countries, the TESOL profession also needs to increase knowledge about the actual uses of English and its effects. Research is needed on the English language requirements of workers in workplaces and occupations, from multinational corporations to government and quasi-government institutions, such as hospitals and other public institutions. Although industry-specific needs analyses are common, there are few empirical investigations into the specific nature of the demand for English in the everyday working lives of individuals outside of fields such as tourism. One of the few empirical studies in the literature (Forey & Nunan, 2002) established that there was an urgent

need for professional English of a particular kind. However, the study only looked at a single profession (accountancy) within a single geographical region (Hong Kong).

Assuming the need for English is reality rather than myth, data are needed on the most effective and cost-effective means of meeting this need and on the curriculum modes that are most effective (e.g., traditional classroom-based, self-access, independent learning, distance learning, technology, Web-based). Related to these imperatives is the need for data on the implications of the changing workplace and economy globally for the teaching, learning, and use of English, often with speakers of other nonstandard varieties of English. The pressure being imposed by globalization is illustrated by a multinational corporation in Latin America that recently made English the official language of the corporation. Middle managers within the corporation are required to reach salary-dependent English language benchmarks by the end of 2003.

Finally, at a sociocultural level, the effect of the emergence of English as a global language on first and indigenous language development needs to be studied, and, in developing countries, a key question is the extent to which access to English is a mechanism for determining who has access to economic advancement and who does not. (For a discussion on this issue, see Bruthiaux, 2002; Kachru, 1992; and Phillipson, 1992.) The Philippine government has become so concerned about the effect of English as a medium of instruction on school children that it is proposing that schools switch from using English and Filipino to using the vernacular from Grade 1 (Philippine Commission on Educational Reform, 2000), based on the assumption that “this change will make students stay in, rather than drop out of, school, learn better, quicker and more permanently” (p. xviii). However, in other areas, the spread of English may threaten the right of children to be educated in their own language (Crystal, 2000; Nunan, 2001).

In short, the educational policy decisions that were the focus of this research are interconnected in complex ways with a matrix of other issues about which TESOL professionals need to develop an understanding. This research was intended to offer a first step in what needs to be a continued effort for the profession to document, conceptualize, and respond to the fact that English is a global language.

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