

The Current Situation and Issues of the Teaching of English in China

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Ladies and gentlemen, 「皆さんこんにちは。」 I'm very glad to have this opportunity to come to Japan to say something about English teaching in China. As introduced, I'm working in *English Weekly*—a newspaper office. In China, there is a kind of newspaper for the English learners. I'd like to tell you about *English Weekly* here. This is a newspaper in China especially for the students who are learning English, from primary schools to the universities. In all over China, we have 16 million readers. It is a very large number. The readers range from primary school students to junior and senior high school students and also the university students. As for the newspaper itself, the form is a newspaper but the content is all about English learning. So it has little to do with the news in China. It's mainly for the learning of English. So now, let's come back to introducing the current situation of English teaching in China. And then I'll say something about the problems and issues of English teaching in China.

English teaching has achieved great success in the past 30 years. I said the past 30 years. That means starting from the time when the opening-up policy was adopted in China. As we know, China opened its doors to the world in 1978. So in 2008, it's 30 years. From 1978 on, English teaching has been stressed a lot because China has developed the race to communicate with the world. English tests are required in various fields, for example, college entrance exams, academic title exams and also further education exams. We know China has a large population. So one of the most important exams is the college entrance exam. When the students are taking a college entrance exam, they have to take the English exam. It's a very important factor for the students to give a lot of intention to English learning.

Now there are English education departments in most of the universities and colleges. In the past, maybe there were English education departments only in some universities. But now it's very common that most of the colleges or universities have English departments. They encourage students to learn English and then the students will all work in English or teaching English in some schools or universities. The government stressed that all the students from primary school to university are to learn English. We'll have to use a lot of energy for English learning.

Now I'd like to introduce to you the Objective Structure of English Curriculum. It's mainly for the students from primary schools to senior high schools. This is a new English curriculum standard. It is believed that English is taught to be used. So now, the Chinese government has organized a group of 9 experts to develop the English curriculum standard, which will be used to direct English teaching for the primary schools and for the middle schools in China. We can see in

the following figure (see Chart 1), in the middle is the Comprehensive Language Competence. This one is believed to be the most important factor of English learning and also the utmost objective of English learning. The experts believed English learning should be stressed to promote their students' language competence. Language competence is believed to be made up of five main factors. There is "language knowledge," which is one aspect, and then "language skill," "learning strategies," and the number four is "emotional attitudes," and the last factor is "cultural awareness." These five factors are composed together to form language competence. All the five factors are related to each other so the five factors are divided with five dotted lines. It means they are not clearly cut but integrated with one another. There's shift from one to another, and then to the next one.

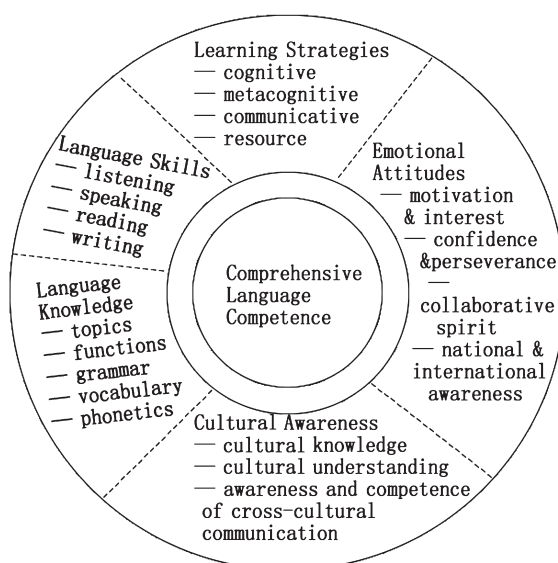


Chart 1. Objective Structure of English Curriculum

Language Knowledge includes the topics, the functions, the grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. These things are components of language knowledge. In the past, in China, when the teachers were teaching the students to learn English, these things were mainly stressed, especially grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. These things were stressed mainly too much. They were overstressed. But now, the experts added some other factors. So language knowledge is believed to be the face of actual learning. When the students are learning English, they have to know the topics, how to express themselves using specific topics. The functions mean that they can use the language to do something, and also they can learn grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. These are things taught from the past until now.

The second aspect is Language Skills. It is somewhat a new idea compared with Language Knowledge. In the past few years, the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing have been

stressed to train the students' skills. This means that English learners should not only pay their attention to language knowledge but also language skills.

Apart from the language skills and language knowledge, now experts have added some other things. One is Language Strategies. When we say language strategies, that means there are four language learning strategies. One is cognitive strategy, and there are meta-cognitive strategies, and the communicative language strategies and also resource strategies. Here, maybe cognitive and meta-cognitive are easier to understand. Communicative strategies mean that students should learn how to maintain their communication. They should have some skills or some strategies to keep the communication on. The resource strategy involves using their resources to help themselves to learn English.

The fourth factor is Emotional Attitudes. This includes motivation and interest. We know when the learners are motivated or interested in learning English and maybe they are learning it better than before. Confidence and perseverance are also important. The students should have confidence. To have confidence, they should believe that they can learn English well. Perseverance means that they should learn English no matter how hard it is. Collaborative spirit means when they learn English, they should learn to collaborate with other students. Then they can learn together with other students. Another factor is national and international awareness. In China, the students are encouraged to learn English with the materials integrated with national awareness and also international awareness. So they should know something about China and also they should learn something about the world.

The last of the five main factors is Cultural Awareness. It includes cultural knowledge and cultural understanding, and also awareness and competence in cross-cultural communication.

Together, these five factors comprise the five aspects of learning English. Now in China, the students are encouraged to pay attention to the five factors when learning English. This is English Curriculum Standard. This book is issued by the Chinese government to the primary schools and the high schools. It was issued in 2001 to direct English teaching in China. So now the teachers in China are all trained to learn the English Curriculum Standard and then they are trained to introduce the new ideas to teach English. The teachers are trained to understand the five aspects here and then they can use the textbooks and use some other materials to teach the students to learn English.

I'd like to introduce something about the English Curriculum Standard in some detailed ways. Here, there are nine levels on the list which is the designed curriculum standard. At the bottom is Level 1 and Level 2. Level 2 is believed to be the standard for the primary schools in the sixth grade. When the students graduate from primary schools, the English standard should be Level 2. And then Level 5 is the standard for the junior high school students in the ninth grade. When the students graduate from junior high schools, their English level should be Level 5. Level 6 and Level 7 are for the senior high schools. When the students graduate from senior high schools, they should be at Level 7. After graduation from senior high schools. There are two more levels—Level

8 and Level 9. They are for the students who will participate in NMET. NMET is the test called National Matriculation English Test, which is the English test of the college entrance exam. This one is the most important test in China. Now in China, there are about 10 million students taking the college entrance exam. So it is called "the Number 1 Test" in China.

I'd like to introduce to you the four levels, Level 2, Level 5, Level 7 and Level 8, which are separately related to the primary school students, the junior high, and the senior high, when they graduate from each grade and the NMET requirement. Level 2 students understand simple dialogues with the help of pictures. So it talks about the listening. When they listen to something, simple dialogues, they can understand them with the help of pictures. Also they should have the ability to read the simple stories. And then, they should be able to use capital letters and punctuation marks. This is something related to writing. Also they are required to sing 30-40 English songs because the little kids are interested in singing songs. That's why they put this in the standard. Also they should know some rules of pronunciation. They should be able to pronounce the words when they see them. The vocabulary requirement is about 600-700 words, and they should learn or memorize 50 phrases and idioms. That's for the language knowledge. They also learn about the different forms of verbs and nouns. They should know, how to use different forms of verbs to describe different tenses, and also the nouns' changes according to their specific use. For the functions of language, they should know about greetings, introductions, farewell, thanks, apologies and request. They should know how to greet people, how to introduce themselves, how to say good-bye and also how to express their thanks and apologies, or how to ask for something. Still for Level 2, they should know the names of the most important sports activities. They should know some words related to sports. Also they should know the capital cities and national flags of the English speaking countries. This is something related to the culture. Also they should know the important holidays in the English speaking countries. So that's something required for the primary school students. When they graduate from primary schools, they should know all the things above.

Let's see Level 5 next. It's the requirement for the junior high school students, for the ninth graders. When they are graduated from junior high schools, they should know where the speakers are from according to their intonations and stress. I think it's mainly about the speakers from Britain or the United States, from Australia or other countries, by their dialects or pronunciation. Also they should understand the conversation of familiar topics. It's also a requirement for listening. They can also understand the stories at close-to-normal speed. Close-to-normal speed is not the normal speed but slower than the normal speed. This is also a requirement for listening. In speaking, they express simple viewpoints and opinions in discussion. So they have discussions with their partners or their classmates and express themselves. When speaking, they should make self-correction. That means they can find their faults and then they can correct themselves in their conversation, and ask for help and information effectively. That's the language use. They can also perform short English plays. This is another aspect of language use or as a requirement for their oral English. In reading, they should have the ability to guess the meanings of some new words in

the context. Also they should be able to recognize the topic sentence in a text. That's also for reading. They can learn English with the help of dictionaries. That's something related to the learning strategies. Apart from the text, they are required to read the English material and the requirement is about 150,000 words. That means they should read the English materials out of the class. When they graduate from the junior high schools, they are required to read this amount of English material. Vocabulary requirement is about 1,600 words. Also they should master 200 phrases and idioms. Also they are required to master basic phonetics, including pronunciation, stress and rhythms. That's the requirements for the junior high school students.

Next, let's see Level 7, which is designed for the senior high school students. They should grasp the key information and make some predictions while listening to something. They should know how to select important factors, important information in dialogues, when they are listening to something. Also they should be able to listen to and understand the description of persons, plots and results at normal speed. In Level 5, it's required to learn the stories at the close-to-normal speed. Now, at Level 7, it's required to understand something which is at the normal speed. Also they should learn and understand simple broadcast programs by the native speakers. They should make short speeches after a short preparation. There are the requirements for speaking. They can discuss common topics and get key information from the written text. This is for reading. Also they should learn the author's purpose and the main idea of the text. So when they read something, they should understand why the author writes something or they should be able to grasp the main idea of some text. Also they are required to make inferences according to the clues of the text. The reading requirement for Level 7 is 230,000 words. Also they should write some practical articles, for example, letters and notices. They are required to rewrite the texts after they read them. The vocabulary requirement is 2,500 words and they should know about 300 phrases and idioms. That's the requirement for Level 7 students. In pronunciation, they should be able to use natural pronunciation and intonation when talking to other people. When speaking, they should be able to use proper language to express themselves in daily communication. They can express themselves by using the proper emotions and the attitudes. They should use the proper functional items and know common social topics about home and abroad. That's something related with the cultural awareness. They should know something about China and also they should know the common topics in the world.

Level 8 students take part in the National Matriculation English Test. They are required to recognize different emotions according to a speaker's tones. It's a requirement for listening. They can also understand the main ideas of the English news on TV programs. That means they should be able to understand English programs on TV by themselves without any difficulties. In speaking, they are expected to make a speech of three minutes after a short preparation. Also in speaking, they should use proper intonation and tones to express their emotions. There is another requirement for Level 8 students, which is that they should have the ability to interpret for daily life. They should be able to interpret from English to Chinese or from Chinese to English. Also in

grammar, they should understand and analyze complex sentences. There is one more requirement for the students, to appreciate simple literature articles. The reading task for them is to read about 300,000 words apart from the textbooks. For writing, they should have the ability to provide abstracts for the texts. Also they should be able to write articles to narrate something or express themselves. The vocabulary requirement is 3,300 words and they should know about 400-500 phrases and idioms. They should learn and master the organization and logic relationship of the common texts. That means, when they read some common text, they should know the organization and logic relationship. In speaking, they are required to know how to express themselves in daily life. They should know the topics concerned with families, societies, scientific culture and arts and they should know the topics of living habits of English speaking countries. It is something related to cultural awareness. Also they should know the culture origins and development of English speaking countries.

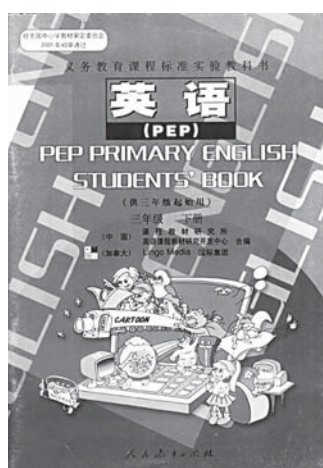
I'll just give a brief summary for Level 2, Level 5, Level 7 and Level 8 (see Chart 2). For Level 2, the students should learn 600-700 words and they should memorize 50 phrases. There is no reading requirement for Level 2. For Level 5, the vocabulary should be 1,500-1,600 words and the phrases, 200-300. The reading material should be 150,000 words. For Level 7, the vocabulary should be 2,400-2,500 words and the phrases should be 300-400. The reading requirement is 230,000 words. For Level 8, the vocabulary should be 3,300 words and the phrases should be 400-500, and the reading material should be 300,000 words. So it's just a brief summary for requirements of different levels. That's mainly the requirement by the government according to the English Curriculum Standard. Now in China, all English teaching at primary schools and junior and senior high schools are directed by this English Curriculum Standard. The Curriculum Standard was issued in 2001, and the new curriculum standard for senior high schools was issued in 2003. So now the English teaching is conducted by the curriculum standard to solve the problems of English teaching all over the country, but still there are some problems about the curriculum standard itself. So the government is trying to revise the standard. Maybe the revised version will be issued late this year. According to the new curriculum standard, maybe the requirements will be changed a little bit.

Levels	Vocabulary	Phrases	Reading
Level 2	600-700	50	
Level 5	1,500-1,600	200-300	150,000 words
Level 7	2,400-2,500	300-400	230,000 words
Level 8	3,300	400-500	300,000 words

Chart 2. Summary for Level 2, Level 5, Level 7 and Level 8

Now I'd like introduce to you the main textbooks in China. For the primary schools in China, there are many textbooks. I think there are more than 30 types of textbooks for the primary schools. So the schools can choose from more than 30 types of textbooks and use them to teach their students. Maybe here I can show you the cover of the textbook which is published by PEP, People's Education Press (see Picture 1). This is the most important and the biggest publishing house in China for textbooks. This one is the textbook which is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Maybe some people know this company. The name of the textbook is called *New Standard English* (see Picture 2). "New Standard" means the curriculum standard. This one is, somewhat popular, published by Hebei Education Press. "Hebei" is a province in China. This is called *Learning English* (see Picture 3). That's the most popular ones for primary schools.

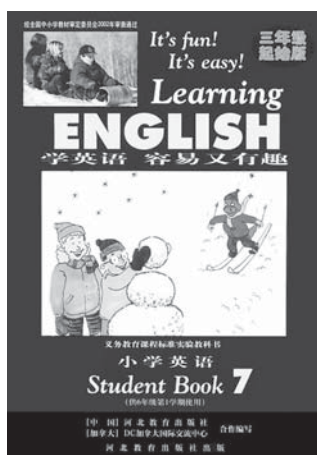
Main Textbooks for Primary Schools



Picture 1. PEP (People's Education Press)



Picture 2. New Standard English (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press).



Picture 3. Learning English (Hebei Education Press)

The next is the textbooks for the junior high school students. This one, *Go for it* (see Picture 4), also published by People's Education Press, is the most popular one in China for the junior high schools, because 60% of the students are using this textbook in China. The other 40% are using other textbooks, like this one. Also this is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (see Picture 5). Another one is called *Fun with English* (see Picture 6), which is published by Teaching and Research Division of Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education and Oxford University Press. So the textbook was introduced to China from Britain and some changes were made. This one is also another textbook for the junior high schools by Hebei Education Press (see Picture 7).

Main Textbooks for Junior High Schools



Picture 4. *Go for it* (People's Education Press and Thomson Learning)



Picture 5. *New Standard English* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press)



Picture 6. *Fun with English* (Teaching and Research Division of Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education and Oxford University Press).



Picture 7. *Learning English* (Hebei Education Press)

For senior high school students, there are seven types of textbooks in China authorized by the government. This one is published by People's Education Press, *English* (see Picture 8). This is the most popular one in China for the senior high schools. It is used in about 60% of the high schools in China. This one is by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (see Picture 9). This one is published by Beijing Normal University Press (see Picture 10), and Advance with English (see Picture 11) is published by Teaching and Research Division of Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education and Oxford University Press.

Main Textbooks For Senior High Schools



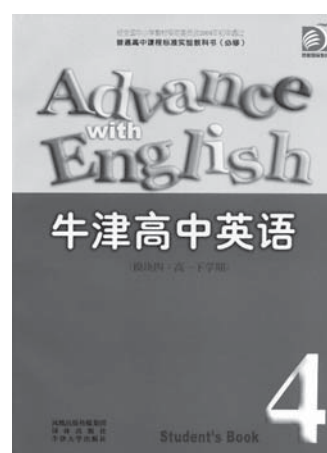
Picture 8. People's Education Press



Picture 9. (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press)



Picture 10. Beijing Normal University Press.



Picture 11. Teaching and Research Division of Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education and Oxford University Press.

As you know, for the primary schools, I told you there are more than 30 types of textbooks. For the junior and senior high schools, there are about seven textbooks. Before the reform in China, there was only one textbook used in all the country, which was published by People's Education Press, for junior high schools and senior high schools. But after the new curriculum standard was issued, the government encouraged all the research departments to compile textbooks, so now we have many kinds of textbooks, and schools and teachers can choose from them. These are the new textbooks and they replaced the older one published by People's Education Press. The new textbooks are compiled according to the English Curriculum Standard and also it will help the teachers to teach English to the students to form the comprehensive language competence as I showed to you in charts in the beginning. These are the main things about the current situation of English teaching in China.

Now, I'll show you the main contents in one textbook. This is the textbook, *Go for it*, for the junior high schools. I photocopied the contents for one unit, and the theme is included in one unit. For example, in this one, Unit One, the title is "How often do you exercise?" and the topic is "Free time activities." The function is "Talk about how often you do things." The structures mean the students should learn Wh-questions and the patterns like "What do...?", "How often..." and adverbs of frequency, for example, "all," "most," "some" and "none." The target language is "What do you usually do on weekends?" and the answer, "I sometimes go to the beach" and "How often do you eat vegetables?" and its answer, "Everyday" and "Most students do homework every day." So that's the target language in this unit. The vocabulary in this unit is this. They should learn the new vocabulary, all the words in this unit. The learning strategy is that they can use the context to learn something and also transform information by themselves. So that's the main thing in Unit 1.

Each unit is divided into section A, section B and Self Check. In section A, the students practice language by listening and speaking. Also they can do some activities. They will learn some grammar. Also there are some reading tasks for them to do. They can do, possibly in some activities, pair work or group work. Now in China, the students are encouraged to learn something by doing something. So they will learn and also do something. That means, the teaching is conducted by the task-based language learning. In section B, there are still some listening activities, reading and comprehending. After reading and comprehending, there are some activities. After section A and B, there are Self Check exercises.

That's one example to show junior high school textbooks. Also I'll give you some examples of English textbooks for the tenth graders, which is the level for the students to graduate from senior high schools. In unit 1, the title is "Festivals around the world." There are three topics: "Festivals," "How festivals begin" and "How to celebrate festivals." That means there are three articles in this unit, which are all about festivals. Before reading the articles, we can see the functional items, which are "Request and thanks." Students should know "how to request something and how to express thanks." For the structures, the students should learn modal verbs, for example, "may/might" and "can/could". The readings are "Festivals and Celebrations," "A Sad Story" and "Winter

Carnival in Quebec." That's the reading material. After reading, there is writing. The writing is "Narration." Also they will learn the story structure, how a person expresses himself with a story.

For the textbooks, we still have the workbook for students to do some exercises, including listening, talking, using words and expressions, using structure, listening tasks, reading tasks, speaking tasks, writing tasks and projects. We can see the students have a lot of tasks to fulfill. In each unit, we can see there are some parts which are warming up and reading for one minute, and then the proof-reading questions or activities, and then the reading itself. After the reading, there are some questions to check comprehension for the students and also learning about language, which is mainly about grammar.

Using the language includes four skills, from listening to reading, speaking and writing, involving the whole knowledge of language use. In the end, there is a summary for the unit and also some learning tips to help the students to learn English. So that is mainly about the current situation of English teaching in China.

Next are the main issues. The first one is the large number of students and the unbalanced education levels. China has the largest population in the world. There are about 200,000,000 students in primary and high schools all over China. That is a very big number. The unbalanced education level means, as we know, in China the economy is unbalanced. In the east and south-east provinces, the economy is much more advanced than the middle and western provinces. Teaching is closely related with the economy. The urban areas are much more advanced than the rural areas. In China, most parts are rural areas. That's one problem.

Another problem is that there are too many students in one class. There are 60 or even more students in one class in many senior high schools. In some primary schools in some rural areas or some small cities, there are about 100 students in one class. So it's very difficult to do some activities in class. Also the problem is the lack of qualified English teachers. As I told you, China is a large country and the government has required that English should be taught in primary schools, junior high and senior high schools. That means more qualified teachers are required. But it's difficult to train teachers in a short time.

From the autumn of 2001 on, all the students of Grade 3 in cities and counties are required to start English lessons. That's a requirement from the government. And from the autumn of 2002 on, all the students of Grade 3 in towns and the countryside are required to learn English. That's why I said it is very difficult for teachers to meet the requirements by the government. According to the government, teachers should be graduates from specified secondary schools or polytechnic schools. But most of the teachers are from training schools or transferred from other majors. Currently, about half of the high school teachers in underdeveloped areas are not graduates from universities.

Another problem is that teacher development is not updated. According to the new curriculum, teachers are required to teach their English class using advanced methods, but the training and development for the teachers has not been updated. Some teachers are still using the

old method to teach their students. I said the new curriculum and new textbooks are used but teachers' teaching methods remain almost unchanged. Another problem is that the teaching is not closely related to the exam. I told you the college entrance exam is the Number 1 Test in China. But it's not very closely related to the teaching, so there is some problem with that. The teachers are teaching the English courses, but they don't know how the students will be tested in the future. So that is all about the situation and main issues of English teaching in China.

That's the conclusion but here is still something to be stressed or emphasized. That is that English teaching in China has developed greatly since the opening-up and reform policy in 1978, especially in the past few years, after the new curriculum standard was issued. It is being influenced by the current English teaching trend in the world. Now English teaching is closely related to task-based language teaching in China. All the experts and the teachers are now trying to find some effective ways to promote English teaching in China.

That's my brief presentation. Thank you very much.

The Question-Answer Session:

Coordinator : Thank you very much, Liu sensei. I'd like to invite a couple of questions before we move on to the next section. If you wish to ask questions, please identify yourself before that.

Questioner 1 : Thank you. My name is William Baber and I'm a teacher at Ritsumeikan at the Biwako campus. In this chart of five factors, I find my students have language skills and language knowledge to some degree but are missing the learning strategies; the primary learning strategies are memorization. Also they lack the right attitude to know what to do as well. So I think this direction seems very useful. That's all for my comment.

Questioner 2 : Thank you very much. My name is Hitomi Yoshida, from the graduate school of University of Osaka. I have just one quick question about the last part of the lecture, about main issues of English teaching in China. The fifth issue was described as "the teaching is not closely related to the exam." Studying for exams is not closely related to its authentic language usage. I do not really understand this part. Would you explain it more again?

LIU Yongjun : OK. I just told you that NMET, the National Matriculation English Test, is the most important test in China. That's the only one way for the students to go to colleges or universities. And in China, the test itself is very influential to the students. They will teach their students according to the form of the test. That determines how the test will be conducted, and then they will think of some ways to teach the students to get a better grade. That means, if the students can know how the test will be conducted, they can learn English effectively and they can have high scores, and then they can go to the ideal university in the future. So now in the schools, all the

students or all the teachers will have a clear idea and prepare for the exam itself, and then they can learn or teach English according to the text itself. It's not normal, according to the science of learning and teaching. As you said, the teaching and testing should be divided or clearly cut. They should not be related to one another. But in China, there's a special situation. The competition of the test, the competition of going to the college is serious in China. So the students themselves know very clearly how they will be tested and then they can learn English by themselves with very obvious purpose. I don't know if I have expressed myself clearly or not. Thank you.

Coordinator : I hope we can save the rest of the questions or comments later for the second part of the conference. Thank you very much again, Liu sensei.