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Policies on teaching English in Southeast and East Asian countries

by *Elena Yakovleva* (Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan)

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Corresponding author: elena.yakovleva75@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

English is one of the keys to successful globalization; therefore, every country develops own English teaching policy. Teaching English in Asia is a very common issue ruled and supported by the government. This article is a contrastive study on different English policies in such Southeast and East Asian countries as China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The contrastive analysis focused on such aspects as school year of implementing English as required subject, teaching hours of English, teacher's training, use of local and foreign teachers, teaching methods and materials, funding, etc. The contrastive study among countries mentioned above evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of certain English teaching policies. The positive results of one country can be borrowed and adapted by another country considering its cultural, political, economic or social features. On the other hand, the failures of one country's English teaching policy can be considered and avoided by another country's planning on English teaching policy.

Keywords: *English teaching, foreign teachers (NESTs), local teachers (NNESTs), literacy, oracy*

1. Introduction

Every country wants to become globalized in political, economic, and societal areas through English as **lingua franca**, therefore many Asian countries started to foster the English education, especially the English oral communication skills, from primary

school. There are several aspects to consider in such English promoting policies, namely teacher's trainings, teaching methods and materials, amount of teaching hours, exam requirements, etc. Furthermore, some countries put emphasis on teaching English by native English speaking teachers (NESTs) or foreigners, who are near native speakers. As a result, several problematic issues arise here that need to be considered, namely the requirements and qualifications of foreign teachers, the advantages and disadvantages of employing NESTs and NNESTs (nonnative English speaking teachers) in terms of their linguistic and cultural knowledge and teaching approach. This topic has been researched for a while and will also be reexamined in this study.

2. Purpose

Firstly, the results of illuminating analysis received from the thorough literature search will provide a deep understanding on English policies with the aspects mentioned above, commonly applied teaching methods of English and their objectives in different Asian countries. The comparative table on English teaching policies in different Southeast and East Asian countries will be compiled and presented below. This contrastive data will be evaluated and could be appropriately applied in English class in a certain country considering the local peculiarities. As A.S. Canagarajah claimed truly, "methods are cultural and ideological constructs with politico-economic consequences"; therefore, there should not be any global teaching methods, but rather some approaches should be adopted to the thinking and learning strategies of the local community (Block & Cameron, 2002). In addition, the detailed analysis will also present the shortcomings of implementing such program and the solutions to overcome those challenges. Subsequently, the evaluation results can provide an impetus for the teachers from different countries to improve their instructional practices according to the country's policy, students' needs, interests, learning strategies etc.

3. Methodology

This study consists mostly of theoretical part with some elements of empirical analysis. The former will introduce the English teaching policies and the state of English spreading in Asian Pacific countries. For this purpose, different reliable literature sources such as academic research articles or institutional reports will be summarized and evaluated in form of a comparative table. This data will partially be supported with the first-hand interview results of some Wenzao foreign exchange students from Indonesia, Vietnam and Japan in terms of their English learning experiences in their home countries.

4. Review of the Literature

The term “foreign language” usually refers to English in Asian countries that is different e.g. from European countries where “foreign language” may refer to French, German, English or any other language (cf. Kubota, 2002; Pennycook, 1998). In Asian concept, this phenomenon often implies the superiority of English over other languages. Teaching English in Asia is very common and popular in many Asian non-English speaking countries such as China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The parents start to impose their children to this lingua franca since their early childhood following the principle “as early as better”. Therefore, there are many bilingual kindergartens in these countries which offer a fully or partially English based curriculum. Furthermore, these kindergartens employ both NNESTs and NESTs. The latter are in charge for developing mostly speaking and listening skills, as well as the pronunciation. The same trend of teaching continues later through the whole school education accompanied additionally by cram school English classes taught also by NNESTs and/or NESTs. Later at the university or college, some courses are taught in English either by NNESTs or NESTs. Therefore, the Asian students are used to the concept of teaching a foreign language not only by local but also by foreign teachers.

The review of existing literature on teaching English in Asia evaluated the sources summarizing the present state of this issue in some (Southeast)-Asian countries. Our literature search delivered a lot of data on English policy in some Asian countries providing also the historical background of language development, including local languages. These works provide an insight of the diversity and complexity of English teaching policies in the Asian region shaped by global and local socio-economic, political, historical and cultural features. Some of these studies on each country are summarized and evaluated below.

Overview on English teaching policies

Striving to be competitive in the global era, China, Taiwan, South Korea and other Asian countries have implemented English as a core subject since elementary school. An ‘English fever’ is mostly dictated by the global economic competition, however the mentioned countries remain mostly monolingual (Jeon in Vaish, 2010). It indicates some drawbacks in the English teaching policies that will be figured out in the study.

China

There are around 400 million English learners in China. Astonishingly, “the English-speaking population in China will outnumber the native speakers in the rest of the world in two decades” (Chew in Vaish, 2010). However, more than a half of them, ca. 69% seldom use it (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Through the history, China has changed its

attitude towards English several times from rejection (1949-1960 – low official status of English due to political events; during the Cultural Revolution 1966-1976 – English was abandoned in the educational curriculum) to acceptance (after the Second Opium War 1856-1860 – teaching of English in missionary schools and colleges; 1911-1923 – establishment of diplomatic ties with English speaking countries to explore Western philosophy; 1924-1949 – use of English as a medium with the West; 1976-1982 – new popularity of English for national modernization and development, 2001 – introduction of English in primary school from third grade) (Chang, 2011). Besides, two major influences that boosted the level of English in China were joining of WTO and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Besides, many Chinese students have gone for studying abroad (e.g. in 2020, ca.370.000 Chinese students in the U.S.). Furthermore, Chinese Universities have established dual educational programs with foreign universities awarding the graduates from Chinese universities with double degree from both universities (Nunan, 2003). It required knowledge of a foreign language, primarily English, from Chinese students. Furthermore, some schools in Beijing and Shanghai have started teaching math and science in English. Some leading universities in China started to teach even medicine in English, mostly for the South Asian students (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Some leading Chinese universities offer study programs completely in English mostly for foreign students. In fact, the geographical factor with the wealthier coastal regions and the poorer interior has an influence on the English level in these parts of China as well; it means a good command of English does not represent the majority of the country.

China has a long experience of more than 100 years on English planning and education (Pan, 2015). In 1993, the Ministry of Education issued the Teaching Syllabus for English Language in Full-time Senior Secondary Schools with emphasis on reading skills and communicative competence in oracy and literacy (Pan, 2015). English is considered as a tool for modern scientific and technological advances to promote commerce and understanding between the country and the world in the future. The latest syllabus for Chinese senior secondary schools from 2003 has focused besides on the four basic skills more on fluent communication in English, on ability to get useful information in English, and on the ability to think in English (Pan, 2015). The curriculum bears a flaw as it does not provide clear and detailed descriptions for improving communicative competence. In fact, the grammar is still often the focus of teaching, some textbooks are outdated, and the class is usually teacher-centered. Peng's study analyzed the willingness of Chinese students to communicate in the English classroom that is influenced by the individual context (e.g. communicative competence, language anxiety, risk-taking, learners' beliefs) and the social context (classroom climate, group cohesiveness, teacher support, classroom organization). It figured out

that Chinese university students are not very willing to communicate in English in the classroom due to the stage fright, a sense of competing against others, and a fear of losing face. However, my own long-term teaching experiences of Chinese exchange university students showed that they were very active in answering and asking questions in comparison to the Taiwanese students.

India

English came to India in the 17th century with the East India Company. English schools had been built by English Christian missionaries from 1813, and later the British rulers built their universities in India from 1857 (Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014). Indian education is basically divided into two main parts: the majority of the population undergo the Hindi medium education, whereas the wealthy part of the population (10-20%) attends private schools with English as a medium used for teaching all subjects and also as communication tool in the school. Such students often start to learn English since nursery school at the age of 5 years (when the primary school begins) or even 3 years continuing with the 12-year compulsory school education in English. However, the majority of the children attend public schools where they start to learn English from grade one as a required subject of 45 min each weekday along with the education in their mother tongue Hindi “and either a classical (e.g. Sanskrit) or another regional standard language which is not the mother tongue of the child” (Vaish, 2010). The English curriculum is determined by government and all English teachers need to undergo a special teaching training and have at least a bachelor degree of education. According to the interview results of my Indian students, English is very important in juridical, financial, educational and business areas of society. However, the problem is that English has the elitist status in India because many cannot afford to take supplementary English classes in private cram schools or attend expensive private English medium schools. According to Tully (1997), it creates a big social status gap in the society (cited in Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014). Clark (2003) hypothesized that education in India is based on four cultural postulates: holism, Karmic duty, hierarchy of relationships (teacher vs. students), and a view of knowledge (cited in Vaish, 2010,). “A holistic world view accepts regulation and rules of interdependence as the natural order of things. Karma [...] refers to a set of duties that every individual must follow in his/her capacity as parent, wife, student, etc. In this case it is the karma or duty of the teacher towards his/her students that is in focus.” Clark concluded that “holism and conceptions of Karmic duty are conducive to reform while the other two are resistant to change.” By thus, teachers are willing to change using supplementary materials to diversify the class and to create an atmosphere of joyful learning. According to my Indian students’ feedback, the English teaching materials used in two different educational systems, in Hindi medium and English medium, are quite diverse and

interesting. However, the hierarchical nature of social relations in India hinders to establish an equal footing between teacher and students. As a result, there is no discussion on different topics in English class. The teachers prepare the students mostly for the written exams. All that causes a poor English speaking ability of the Indian students and makes them low motivated to learn English. Some scholars in India advocate the Indian teachers' training with focus on local practices instead of being imported from English-speaking countries because by thus the teacher trainees could adapt to linguistic, age and income disparities in the classroom. In particular, Vaish (2010) described the English teaching in recent India indicating that the common approaches of English teaching in India are choral recitation, reading of literature works, translation, dictation, note taking, and writing composition guided primarily by teacher centeredness that do not develop the communicative competence in students (Vaish, 2010). Furthermore, the teachers' training does not equip them with the appropriate tools and techniques to develop the communicative competence in English that is also a big challenge for the Indian education system (Vaish, 2010). There are no NESTs in the school and NNESTs usually studied English in India, not abroad. So some Indian teachers agree that the school has not equipped students with communicative competence for their future jobs (Vaish, 2010). Therefore, some students, who can afford, take English courses after school to enhance their English proficiency. In general, the classrooms are not digitalized with PC, projector or internet access. In addition, English is taught only by local teachers in the school. The four constructs mentioned above echo with the pillars of Taiwan's education. And the necessity of supplementary English classes in both countries, India and Taiwan, is dictated by the desire of developing the English oracy of students, especially when from the year 2006-2007 the oral test has been introduced in the secondary and higher secondary schools in India (Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014). Interestingly, many learners want to learn only English language without its culture and religion (Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014). Firstly, it might indicate that English is considered only like a communication tool mostly for the work purpose fulfilling its role as lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Secondly, it might emphasize a strong desire to preserve the original national identity with less influence of Anglo-Saxon culture.

Indonesia

English language is common in Indonesian institutions. Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia has implemented the Strategic Plan 2005-2009 and the Strategic Plan 2010-2014 for students in school to develop a good command of English. In order to graduate from some universities, the Indonesian students need to reach a certain standard level of TOEFL. All four English skills have been developed that "school graduates are able to communicate and use the discourse at a certain level of

literacy. Literacy level is divided into four aspects: *performative, functional, informational, and epistemic*” (Hadisantosa, 2010). The first level of English competence is already implemented in the primary school with two English classes per week. The functional level, to be able to communicate in the oral and written form of daily routines, is reached by junior high school students through four English classes per week. The high school students, who also have four classes of English per week, are supposed to reach informative level to have a language competence to access knowledge for future study at university. The epistemic level, the ability to express the ideas and knowledge in English is often too high for the high school level. It is probably reached by university students who are often required to do some assignments in English.

Despite such advanced level of English program, there are still some drawbacks, namely 1) some teachers still teach in the traditional way with emphasis on the grammar; 2) the new communicative approach with emphasis on fluency is not always followed by accuracy, especially in the beginning; and “the change of approach is not followed by the application of suitable assessment” because of in the national examination, students are only tested on reading comprehension using multiple-choice types with emphasis on grammar. Therefore, the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment of English in Indonesia still has a long way to go (Hadisantosa, 2010). Furthermore, Mappiasse and Sihes pointed out the lack of resources and instructional materials, inadequate time for English lesson and other reasons (Chien- ChinWen, 2014).

There are basically four types of schools in Indonesia: 1. Public school 2. Private school (required from the age of 3 years) 3. National Plus school (many subjects taught in English) 4. International school (usually run by foreign institutions). For about one decade, the Indonesian government has followed the Malaysian example of teaching science and math in English in order to reach the international standard and building a globally competent workforce. Furthermore, some private schools teach even other subjects like sports or Chinese in English. However, Indonesia should learn from the mistakes that Malaysia did, e.g. Malaysia plans to abandon the use of English to teach mathematics and science and pay more attention to Malay language and its culture. Besides, such English-based programs in Indonesia have not been assessed since its implementation to evaluate their effectiveness. For teaching other subjects in English, the quite expensive textbooks in English are often imported from Singapore or Malaysia and the teachers just strictly follow the textbook creating boredom in the classroom. In addition, human resources in terms of competent local and foreign teachers who could teach different subjects with scientific terminology in English are the biggest problem. Some of them use English only in the opening and closing procedure of the lesson. To increase their professionalism, those teachers need to collaborate with the teachers of

English and other related institutions that could hold some workshops for them. On the other hand, the authorities worry about the adaptation of foreign curricula that might be not suitable for Indonesian students and about the disappearance of Indonesian language and culture due to the massive invasion of EBE (English bilingual education). Therefore, some public primary school teach the students the local dances and playing musical instruments (e.g. *angklung*) or sing national songs to raise the students' awareness as a citizen of Indonesia (Hadisantosa, 2010). The latter program is indeed effective because my university exchange students from Indonesia regularly perform on different events (e.g. Chinese New Year or Teacher's Day), while dancing, singing and playing traditional Indonesian dances and songs with Indonesian musical instruments.

To sum up, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education needs to review and evaluate the existing policy of English teaching and focus more on the quality of English-based schools rather than on their quantity.

Japan

Reviewing the history of English education in Japan, it is to notice that English education reached its peak in the early Meiji Era after 1868 where it was taught by native speakers of English and by Japanese teachers mostly through translation method (Hagerman, 2009). Before the Second World War, English popularity declined and gained it again after WWII in 1947 through the US occupation government in Japanese education. In 1989, English was a compulsory subject in secondary education. Recently the Japanese students start to learn English in elementary school only from grade 4 or 5 twice a week. With the 5-year Action Plan of 2003, the Japanese government tried to foster basic foreign language skills and communicative competence in English to fulfill the strong demand by industry (Butler, 2009; Iino in Vaish, 2010). However, this plan has been criticized due to its ineffective practices of bilingualism. Many students have a low motivation and a greater anxiety speaking English in the class even though they might understand some English. The English class is mostly teacher-centered and taught in Japanese. Despite the nationalism tendency in Japan, the majority of Japanese parents (92%) support the implementation of English as a required subject in elementary school. All public primary schools offer a course called General Studies taught three times a week from grade three, including English, global education, welfare, and the environment that is usually taught by homeroom teachers (Nunan, 2003). According to the Ministry of Education program, English is taught here for fun without any textbook. Referring to Aline and Hosoda's study (2006), in the co-teaching class with the English native speaker the homeroom teacher plays different roles, e.g. "bystander", "translator", "co-learner of English", and "co-teacher" (cited in Butler, 2009). According to the interview results of my Japanese students, NEST plays a role of TA in the class, where the local teacher, NNEST, actually conducts the English class. In the Butler's study,

85% of the Japanese teachers admitted their insufficient level to conduct English activities (cited in Butler, 2009). They indicated that their short-term goals are enhancement of cultural understanding and basic oral skills and their long-term goals are improvement of basic conversational skills and basic reading skills. For that purpose, some senior high schools will hold English winter and summer camps with NESTs giving the students a possibility to practice oral English skills. Since 2000s many universities use English as instructional language for the Japanese and foreign students of different majors; especially this program has been faster implemented by private universities rather than by public ones. Since 1987, JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) as a government-organized program has been implemented to hire native speakers of English. Japanese government spent a lot of money on approximately more than 5000 native speakers of English teaching in the elementary and secondary schools; however, the Japanese students' English abilities have not improved very much having low ranking in the TOEFL listening tests among Asian countries (Hagerman, 2009). It could be caused due to some reasons. Only 3%-10% of those teachers have a teaching certificate (cited in Butler, 2007). They often have no special training in language education and less understanding of Japanese culture (Hatori, 2005). Therefore, more rigid requirements for the qualification of being English teacher are needed, including proper training and enough experience (cf. Wong, 2009). In 2001, the Ministry of Education adopted a policy of teaching English through English; however, there are not enough proficient teachers to do it. Some elementary school teachers agreed that English is best taught by native speakers (Butler, 2009). It is to mention that not many Japanese students (only ca. 30-40%) go to cram schools to learn English or other subjects (according to the interview results of Japanese students). Therefore, the secondary school teachers have a lot of pressure to prepare the students for the university entrance written exam of English focusing mostly on grammar, translation, reading and listening (Hagerman, 2009). To sum up, Japan tries to emphasize nationalism and move towards globalization through teaching English nationwide and developing the national awareness. However, some scholars pointed out the lack of 'cultural literacy' (term coined by Hirsch 1987) of the target language of Japanese students as it may refer to other Asian students what is tried to be taught by foreign English teachers (cf. Lessard-Clouston 1997). In July 2008, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education has fostered the foreign language activities at the primary school level, especially in the grade 5 and 6 (Butler 2009; Kashihara, 2008). However, the purpose of English education has always been oriented for Japanese national economic goals rather than for developing linguistic skills, i.e. it is "a tension between the desire for useful foreign ideas, along with the desire to avoid foreign influence" (Hagerman 2009).

Malaysia

As for Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, Arabic and Malay (in the first two countries) remained dominant in the school, especially for religious education, for a long time. Since 1950s, English became significant in the school there using it as the medium of instruction even in the religious studies. Later in the 1990s and 2000s, English has become dominant even at many homes there among Muslim, Malay and Chinese communities (Buang in Vaish, 2010). In 2003, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has developed a national program on English teaching for science and math (EteMs) that was a challenge for many teachers of science and math because they lack knowledge of academic English language proficiency that assumes the mastery of using the specific terms etc. Therefore, the language barrier hindered the explanation process by the teacher and the input comprehension by the learners that possibly impeded their academic achievement. As Gill et al. (cited in Vaish, 2010) rightly pointed out that in order to avoid such failure, the government needs to provide the teachers with clear guidelines and structural support and resources offering training to develop the linguistic competency of the teachers, also in the rural areas. Understanding the challenges of the proposed program, the Malaysian government decided gradually since 2012 to convert the teaching of science and math in Chinese, Tamil, and Malay in the primary schools (Kirkpatrick, 2012). The Malay linguists supported this decision, but the parents strongly disagreed with this change and asked for their free choice of “affordable English medium education” because it could make their children more competitive in the future labor market (Gill et al. in Vaish, 2010). Therefore, these subjects are still continued to be teaching in English. However, Cummins (1981) “showed that a child typically needs at least five years’ of second language learning before it can be successfully used as a medium of instruction” (cited in Kirkpatrick, 2012). Thus, some children cannot follow the instructions of complex concepts of the subjects; therefore, it negatively affects their learning achievement. Some scholars (Martin, 2010; Coleman, 2013) believed that the early teaching of English is not helpful for children because they hardly use it outside school and there are no appropriate materials and qualified English teachers, and it is learned at the expense of native language (cited in Kirkpatrick, 2012). According to Nunan (2003), code switching from English into Malay is common while teaching such subjects like math, science, medicine. It indicates that English is now considered as a foreign language in Malaysia (Al Noori et al., 2015). Surprisingly, from International assessment evaluation result and ranking, Malaysia indicated a negative result only at 65th placing (Al Noori et al., 2015). The problems lie possibly in the teaching method and resources that should be revised.

South Korea

English education primarily for translation purposes goes back to Yi Dynasty Period

(1450-1750). During the Japanese Imperialism Period (1868-1900), English education declined and rose again in 1950s-1970s with the emphasis on grammar-translation and audio-lingual method. Later on, in 1997, English has been introduced as a subject into elementary school.

Due to the lack of natural resources, Korean people consider education as crucial and essential for their future. Therefore, many parents send their children to cram school for supplementary English class that creates a great financial burden to parents and a big educational gap between children from different social background. As a result, in early 2008 the Korean government announced Public School English Education Reinforcement Policy (PSEERP) to reinforce English education in state public schools (Lee, 2010). The Korean Ministry of Education has already before implemented several English programs where, starting from 1995, according to one of them, every public elementary and high school needs to hire at least one native speaker for English teaching (NSET) to achieve several goals, namely to decrease the economic loss by sending students abroad to study and primarily to create more authentic environment while teaching English through the use of English (Jeon, in Vaish, 2010). As a result, about 2000 NESTs have been hired in Korean public schools in 2006 (ref. Kasai, 2011). TEE (Teaching English through the medium of English) aims to provide KAL (Knowledge About Language), including an explicit knowledge of grammatical concepts in English (e.g. morphology, syntax, punctuation etc.). Such experimental schools reported satisfaction about ELT from the teachers, students and parents (Lee, 2010). However, some researchers suggested still using Korean partially as a transition to the foreign language and its better comprehension, etc. (Kang, 2007 cited in Lee, 2010). Besides, the topics in English textbooks should be based on “topics about daily life, familiar topics of general interest, considering students’ interests, in order to cultivate students’ English communicative capacity, intellectual curiosity and problem-solving capabilities” (Lee, 2010). Some emphasis lies on ‘cultural’ content introducing regional and local cultures across the world to cultivate the extensive cultural diversity of Korean students through English (Lee, 2010). However, the repetitive teaching method causes boredom among students whose language level is far lower than their cognitive level, causing them to lose interest. So, new interactive methods with creating meaning-focused authentic language-use situations are needed to motivate the students. Based on Butler’s statement, Korean students are more advanced in oral skills and reading, and are limited in writing and grammar.

The MEST (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) trains TEE teachers based on the results of the pre- and post-testing of trainees. All the teachers are required to complete teacher training programs. Due to an existing variety of the accredited customized or step-by-step teacher training programs, all English teachers can become

accredited after completing appropriate teacher training programs of their own choice. Later, the accredited English teachers with the highest level of skill might mentor other teachers. These mentors will receive a variety of incentives (e.g. overseas training or research funds) (Butler, 2009). In Korea, both homeroom teachers and local teachers of English give English classes.

Furthermore, the Korean government has established a half-dozen more ‘English villages’ as English immersion environment. Since 2006 Taiwan has also established three English villages where some shops and cafes are run usually by English native speakers fully in English (Wu, 2009). It is definitely a very useful practical experience for the foreign language learners. Besides, behind creating monolingual teaching by native speakers stands another practical philosophy of Korean government: investing in NSETs and teaching materials and technological resources can enhance the command of English of Korean and strengthen Korea’s competitiveness in the global market bringing later the money flow back to Korea that can be witnessed now through the recently popular Korean wave (music, fashion, etc.) and world famous Korean brands (Samsung, Hyundai, Lotte etc.).

Taiwan

Due to the entering of WTO, Taiwan tried to reinforce its citizens’ English proficiency. In 2019, Taiwan’s government announced to make English as an official language in Taiwan by 2030. In September 2001, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan implemented a plan called “Challenge 2008” that introduced English in grades five and six of elementary school. Similar to Japan and South Korea, 400 certified foreign English teachers have been hired in the public schools to co-teach with local English teachers, beginning in August 2003 (Chang et al., 2005; Chern, 2010). Since 2002, English class has been introduced since grade one in metropolitan elementary schools with the objective to instill a basic communicative ability (Butler, 2009; Liao and Yang, 2012; Nunan, 2003). This plan included some of the following aspects: 1) use curriculum guidelines and open market for textbooks; 2) provide multiple possibilities for teachers to become certified; 3) advocate the communicative approach in English (cf. Chern, 2010). In comparison to other countries (e.g. China and South Korea), the teachers in Taiwan have more autonomy in terms of curriculum. The elementary school curriculum primarily aims to instill an international perspective into students (Chern, 2010). English teachers use real-life topics in lessons, such as holidays, customs, and entertainment (Tsai, 2010). Listening and speaking are emphasized in the 3rd and 4th grade, whereas reading and writing are integrated in the 5th and 6th grades. However, pronunciation is one of the difficulties of Taiwanese students because there are no consistent guidelines for teachers. They do not teach the transcription by using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The Kenyon & Knott (KK) phonetic symbols are

commonly taught together with the phonics in elementary school English classes (cited in Chien, 2014). At this point, some scholars (Huang, 2002; Hung, 1998) support the effectiveness of phonics, while the others advocate the K.K. phonetic system (Chu, 2006; Hsieh, 2009; Liu, 2009), or both systems combined (Chung, 2011; Hsu, 2000; Lin, 2001) (cited in Chien, 2014). In fact, even the university English-majored students are often not able to transcribe the English words. Therefore, they found to study phonetics and phonology in the course “Introduction to Linguistics” quite helpful as my experience of teaching this course showed (also cf. Chien, 2014). However, as studies indicated (Tseng, 2011; Cenoz & Lecumberr, 1999; He & Miller, 2011) many English learners want to sound like a native speaker (cited in Chien, 2014). For now, the English communicative proficiency of university students is quite low and the future tendency is vague. The elementary schools face the shortage of qualified and enthusiastic English teachers. According to Chern (2010), there are two opposite tendencies in the teaching: some teachers, especially in grade 5 and 6, traditionally still focus on grammar and practice mechanical drills like rote memorization of vocabulary or translation, neglecting communicative approach and writing. It is probably due to the reason that the very common standardized tests focus on vocabulary, reading, and grammar. In contrast, the other teachers use such activities and games that the students’ focus is shifted more to fun rather than to learning. Furthermore, even though the classrooms are equipped with LCD projectors and internet, many teachers still employ only traditional teaching aids like textbooks, flash cards etc. As for the assessment test, it is teacher-based, i.e. the teacher sets the criteria for evaluating the students’ English performance that might create some difficulties in getting a real picture of English proficiency all around Taiwan.

It is important to understand the peculiarities of Taiwanese students based on my long-term teaching experience and observation. They prefer a lecture instead of discussion, so being silent in the class without asking or answering questions or having a discussion is normal for the Taiwanese students (Huang & Brown, 2009; Liao & Yang, 2012; Young, 2003). It could be explained due to their fear of failure giving the wrong answer and by thus “losing the face” in front of others, also due to their shyness and resistance towards communication, public speaking, etc. Besides, the role of the teacher is considered authoritative that requires the students’ respect and their total obedience. Such asymmetrical relationship produces a certain way of teaching that differs from the commonly adapted teaching way in western countries where critical thinking of the students is highly emphasized. The education in many Asian countries focuses mostly on the (written) examinations that serve to select students for further learning. Therefore, the students are examination oriented, i.e. they study mostly for the exam and the score, i.e. the input of knowledge does not retain for a longer period of time; it is often forgotten after the exam. By thus, the learning process often loses the continuity of the

knowledge for the interrelated disciplines. It means the students do not follow the interconnectedness between the subjects; so not using the previous knowledge might impede their learning.

Vietnam

The most popular second language in Vietnam is recently English with 90% of high school students, followed by Chinese, Japanese and Korean that also become now more popular. Besides, the high schools also offer French, Russian, and German. French was the most popular foreign language up to 1954 due to the French invasion. In the period of 1975-1986, Russian took dominance due to the political reasons. The popularity of English appeared in the late 1980s with the 'open door' policy and Economic Renovation (Vu, 1997 in Huong, 2010; Hoang, 2009). In big cities, English has been implemented from grade 1 with intensive program focusing on communicative skills (cf. Nunan, 2003). The open door policy in 1986 contributed to the appearance of many private educational institutions that offer EBE (English bilingual education) starting from pre-school to university level. At the university, "English major undergraduate students study approximately 1000 hours of English subjects, including integrated English language skills, literature, linguistics, interpreting/translation, and Western culture studies. English non-major undergraduate students study about 300 hours of English..." (Huong, 2010). There are also a lot of Foreign Language Centers which offer different level of English courses to governmental officials or other workers, most of whom need to use English in their work. However, one of the main problems in English education in Vietnam remains the lack of authentic interaction with native speakers of English. There are not enough competent native speakers and local teachers of English (Walkinshaw, 2012). And the native speakers hired for a short-term have usually limited familiarity with the local culture and educational norms that may create a tension and misunderstanding in the classroom (Walkinshaw, 2012). Writing new textbooks and teachers' retraining are one of the tasks that the government needs to accomplish. Hoang (2009) stated that even though the teachers are interested in new methodologies, but after the training, they continue to teach in the old methods with the same textbooks. It may be also caused due to excessive workload of the local teachers as it is common in many Asian countries (Walkinshaw, 2012). The common way of teaching is listening to the recorded conversations of native speakers of English and students' role-play in the English class. As a result, the ability of spoken English is still limited by many Vietnamese students and even teachers. Based on my teaching experience of Vietnamese exchange students, it can be observed that they are active learners who are willing and able to communicate in English; however, their main hindrance is the pronunciation in English that is heavily influenced by their mother tongue.

Next, Huong (2010) indicated the high collectivism and high power distance create teacher's authority causing the fact that "students should try to follow their teachers as closely as possible and try to achieve correctness in their work" (p.97). However, at the same time, the students need to develop critical thinking, conduct independent research and writing, etc. while teachers only act as advisors. Indeed, these qualities could be seen in Vietnamese students while teaching them.

Following the example of other Asian countries, Vietnamese authorities also tried to implement in big cities the program teaching math and science through English that was well received by parents. However, similarly, due to the lack of trained school teachers for EBE it is challenging to conduct this program. To improve the quality of English, the Ministry of Education has implemented the costly Training's Project entitled *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, Period 2008-2020* (Hoang, 2009; Huong, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2012). It introduces a new curriculum for teaching and learning foreign languages at all sectors and levels, including vocational schools, with the final objective to enable the majority of young Vietnamese to communicate in English confidently and be able to study and work in multi-cultural environment, "thus better enabling young Vietnamese people to contribute to the industrialization and modernization of the country" (Kirkpatrick, 2012). On the teachers' side, it aims to enrich and upgrade their language ability and capacity and diversify teaching methods to meet learners' needs. English language with the proof of IELTS (score of 5.0) or TOEFL is required for Master and Doctoral degree candidates by Vietnamese tertiary institutions (Huong, 2010). University students are more motivated to learn English because it is a requirement for obtaining a good job or for the work promotion, while high school students learn it mostly only for the exams. Nine Vietnamese universities received large grants to adopt the curriculum, teaching materials and styles from some American partner universities. Since late 2005, such disciplines as Science, Technology, Business, and Agriculture from high-ranking U.S. universities have been implemented at several Vietnamese universities with all instruction in English; later on in 2007 more similar cooperation has been established between more Vietnamese and U.S., U.K., Australian universities even in some advanced programs with the awarding the foreign degree to Vietnamese students (see above). Due to such cooperation, despite teaching General English, teaching of Academic English (AR-academic register) or ESP (English for specific purposes) is necessary to know the terminology, its pronunciation, and its appropriate use (Hoang, 2009). In fact, General English is still more demanded as its knowledge is required for the TOEFL and the IELTS. There is a consideration by scholars to decide what kind of English is necessary to teach at the university.

To sum up, there are three models of EBE in today's Vietnam: early partial immersion;

delayed partial immersion; and late partial immersion (Huong, 2010). There are several obstacles to implement EBE, namely lack of high professional human sources, equipment, and funding, insufficient learning time (only three 45-minute lessons per week), the serious attitude of most learners (just learn English to pass the exams), etc. (Nunan, 2003). All that impedes the communicative ability of the students. As Hoang (2009) pointed, despite teaching also communicative approach, testing focuses more on lexical grammatical knowledge. But the Vietnamese government is aware of these problems and tries to improve the situation in order to become more globalized through proper English. Besides, some critics concern about the overwhelming effect of English on the national identity.

5. Summary of the results

The information stated below can be summarized in the following table regarding several aspects

Qs	China	India	Indonesia	Japan	Malaysia	South Korea	Taiwan	Vietnam
1.English since elementary school, grade	3	1	1	4-5	1	3	1	6
2.Governmental policies on enhancing Engl.proficiency	Yes	Yes	Yes (new since 2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3.Teaching method	Teacher-centered	Teacher-centered	Student-centered	Teacher-centered	Student-centered	Teacher-centered	Teacher-centered	Teacher-centered
4.Commonly applied teaching methods & materials	Textbook Lecture Reading Writing Vocabulary	Textbook Lecture Reading Writing Vocabulary	Textbook PPTs Discussion Pair work	Textbook Lecture Reading Writing Vocabul.	Textbook PPTs Reading Discussion Pair work	One textbook for each grade	Multiple Textbooks Lecture Repetition Reading Translation Listening	Textbook Lecture Reading Listening Conversation
5. Teaching materials & methods are...	Some outdated	Interesting	Interesting	Not very interest.	Interesting	Interesting	Interesting	Boring
6.NEST in school	Yes (in big cities)	No	No	Yes (as TA)	No	Yes (in big cities)	Yes, partially	Yes (for 1hr)
7.Engl. proficiency of teachers	Low	Intermediate	Very good	Low	Intermed.	Intermed.	Good (high-intermediate)	Sufficient (intermediate)
8. Teachers' profes. growth through training	Seldom	Seldom	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Seldom	Provided
9.English proficiency of students	Diverse	Diverse	High-intermediate	Low (not Tokyo)	High-intermediate	Intermediate	Low-intermediate	Diverse
10.English taught through English								

medium	Mostly No	Partially	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Mostly No	No
11.Opportunity to use English outside	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)	Not many (in small towns)
12.Supplementary English class	Yes	Yes	Not common	No	No	Very Common	Very Common	Common
13.Other subjects taught in English	Mostly not	Mostly not	Partially	No	Yes	Mostly not	No	No

Many Asian countries strive to be competitive in the globalized world, preliminarily through English learning starting from the preschool education or at least from grade 1 of primary school, especially in big cities. The governments of all countries mentioned above elaborated the new own policy on English teaching. However, developing the fluent communicative competence in English is a challenge for many students due to several reasons, such as insufficient input of language (especially through native speakers and especially in remote areas), outdated teaching methods and resources, inadequate and insufficient English language skills of teachers, and reserved personality of students. Therefore, the local educational policies try to devise new methods with integration of innovative technology in order to improve learners’ English proficiency based on local specificity. It is advisable to invest in programs in order to enhance the proficiency of local teachers rather than to hire many native speakers of English (like in Hong Kong and Japan). Furthermore, the public schools (not the costly private cram schools) should be responsible for developing the English communicative competence of the learners that the disadvantaged children, especially from the rural areas, won’t be left behind in this global competitive world.

The Hong Kong’s educational concept of “Learning for Life, Learning through Life” could be a motive for many Asian countries where the students need to apply English outside classroom and learn English in a more flexible way. The teachers “should not focus too much on teaching the forms of English, but the functions of the language” (Pan, 2015). The students should use English properly rather than memorizing it only for the exam. Besides, the class should be student-centered considering the students’ different needs. It means the teachers should use different teaching methods to encourage every student in learning a foreign language (Pan, 2015). Many countries implement new teaching methods and materials; however, there is no adequate assessment test for the outcome. Therefore, it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of the new policies. In addition, the English proficiency of the students is unequable. To improve the English policy, the governments of the South-Asian countries should revise the following aspects of English teaching policy proposed by Kaplan and Baldauf (2005): 1) access policy; 2) personnel policy; 3) curriculum policy; 4) methodology and materials policy; 5) resourcing policy; 6) community policy; and 7) evaluation policy;

especially the main shortages come in the 2, 3, 4, and 5 policies. For example, in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, the assessment test is often created not by the local authority but by the teacher due to several reasons such as the lack of clear guidelines for evaluating the English proficiency and the significant educational gap of the students' English level. Butler (2009) claimed that clear guidelines and trainings for the teacher-based assessments are needed where the purpose, different tools and types of assessment will be explained.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, in all countries mentioned above, except Japan, English has been introduced as a compulsory subject into the primary curriculum and furthermore, it is used as a medium of instruction for other subjects as it is highly desired, especially by the parents in many Asian countries. However, many scholars mentioned above advocate to introduce English as required subject since secondary school as it is done in Japan. Many mentioned scholars agreed that the government of different Asian countries should offer an adequate program for enhancing the English communicative proficiency of the students. First of all, the pertinent training of local English teachers and the appropriate teaching methodology are required to improve the situation.

Teacher effectiveness does not depend on being a native English speaker. It depends primarily on the professionalism of the teacher such as pedagogical expertise, metalinguistic knowledge, and interpersonal skills. Intercultural learning and understanding of the local culture by native speakers is highly important in the successful learning. Besides, the collaboration via reflection, learning and team teaching between local teachers and native-speaker teachers is required for the total effective teaching process. It is advisable that foreign teachers will have a basic knowledge of language and culture in the country where they teach for a better understanding of the students' background.

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