

The Future of English

Curriculum Comparison Project

Part 1 Report

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Table of contents

Authors.....	01
Glossary of terms.....	02
1. Introduction.....	04
1.1 Future of English.....	04
1.2 Curriculum Comparison project.....	06
1.3 Part 1 report structure.....	06
2. Systematic literature review protocol.....	07
2.1 Identifying a research question.....	07
2.2 Developing a systematic review protocol.....	08
2.3 Initial screening of titles and abstracts.....	10
2.4 Critical appraisal and eligibility screening of texts.....	10
2.5 Study appraisal on full text.....	11
2.6 Coding of text.....	12
3. Systematic literature review.....	13
3.1 Overview of literature on English curriculum reform.....	13
3.2 English curriculum reform in wider Europe.....	19
3.3 English curriculum reform in East Asia.....	20
3.4 Summary of articles.....	28
4. The Curriculum Comparison project.....	29
4.1 Rationale of project.....	30
4.2 Research design.....	31
4.3 Collaborative approach.....	32
4.4 Initial Curriculum Comparison project meeting.....	38
4.5 Research questions for part 1.....	38
4.6 Planning workshop.....	39

The Future of English Curriculum Comparison Project – Part 1 Report

5. Executive summaries.....	40
5.1 China.....	41
5.2 Korea.....	43
5.3 Japan.....	46
6. Part 1 key takeaways.....	48
6.1.1 Rationale comparison.....	48
6.1.2 Standards.....	49
6.1.3 Implementation approach.....	49
6.1.4 Challenges reported.....	51
6.1.5 Factors for successful implementation.....	51
7. Next stages of the project.....	52
7.1 Part 2.....	52
7.2 Part 3.....	53
7.3 Part 4.....	53
8. Outputs.....	54
8.1 Country English curriculum fact sheets.....	54
8.2 Similarities and differences table.....	54
8.3 Comprehensive Learning System framework.....	55
References.....	56
Appendix A.....	60
Appendix B.....	61

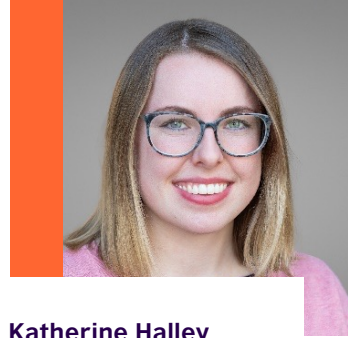
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Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Achievement standards	What learners are expected to achieve through levels of education in Korea (MoE, 2020).
ACTFL proficiency guidelines	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency guidelines.
Can do learning objectives	Clear objectives for learning English that are substantially guided by the CEFR in Japan.
Commentaries	Further material, published for elementary, junior high and senior high, providing more detailed explanations of subject content and goals in Japan.
Courses of Study	National curriculum standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan.
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; common standards to refer to when assessing language (2001, 2020).
Competency	The ability to do something successfully or efficiently.
Comprehensive Learning System Framework	Framework by O’Sullivan (2021) that aligns curriculum, delivery, assessment, standards and context of use in a learning system.
Curriculum	The subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college.
Differentiation	Teaching and learning based on student level.
Double reduction policy	Student-centred approach to reduce extracurricular activities such as homework and/or tutoring.
Empirical-rational	Evidence-based approach to curriculum which then informs teachers.
Executive summary	Summary of another report.
Formative assessment	Assessment that is often lower stakes and provides ongoing feedback.

Term	Definition
Globalisation	International influence or operation on a global scale.
Humanistic nature	Focuses on the positive image of what it means to be human.
Learner-centred approach	Teaching and learning based on the learner (rather than the teacher).
Learning system	All stakeholders, materials, etc involved in learning.
Ministry of Education	Government agency responsible for education.
National demonstration zones	Demonstrations to see teaching and research activities in action.
National professional committees	Committees set up in China for teaching guidance in elementary and secondary education.
Normative and re-educative	Bottom-up strategy to curriculum initiated by end-users of the curriculum.
Policy cycle	Stages and process of developing a policy.
Power-coercive	Top-down approach to curriculum driven by policy.
Productive language skills	Skills such as writing and speaking.
Receptive language skills	Skills such as reading and listening.
Special grade teachers' studios	Renowned teachers show good examples of practice.
Summative assessment	Assessment that is higher stakes and typically conducted at the end of a course/programme.
Systematic literature review	A comprehensive synthesis of literature following a protocol.
Washback	The impact of assessment on teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

1.1 Future of English

The Future of English is a research programme at the British Council investigating the trends, uses, and needs of English across the globe. Phase 1 of the programme evaluated the trajectories of English outlined by David Graddol in the book 'English Next' in 2006 (Graddol, 2006). Building on this, phase 2 included a series of regional policy roundtables conducted in forty-nine countries and territories with ninety-two policymakers and influencers to discuss and gather insights about the role of English in different regions, and also across the world. From these conversations, eight themes emerged:

1. Will English remain the world's most sought-after language?
2. What role will English play in our multilingual reality?
3. What is the future of English as a medium of education?
4. How will teachers remain relevant in future English language learning systems?
5. Public and private English language provision: who has the answers?
6. Can English assessment meet stakeholders' changing needs?
7. Can technology narrow the equity gap in English language education?
8. To what extent is employment driving the future of English?

The publication that emerged from this work, *The Future of English: Global Perspectives* (2023)¹, delineates the work and key findings in detail. The current phase, phase 3, is part of the research agenda, examining the themes above as well as other trends using evidence-based data, to explore: what is the future of English? Phase 3, additionally, aims to investigate the research areas identified in the publication (see following).

- I. Quantitative survey data
- II. Evaluating the effectiveness of educational interventions and methodologies
- III. Evaluating the effectiveness of language policies, including education policies

IV. Building profiles of English capability in countries and regions

V. Measuring the social and economic benefits of building English language capabilities

(ibid, pp. 291-292)

The Curriculum Comparison project addresses thematic question 4 (on teachers' relevance in future English language learning systems) and 6 (English assessment meeting stakeholders' changing needs) in parts 2 and 3 respectively. It also begins to tackle research categories II and III above, through all the parts of the project and particularly part 4, which includes monitoring and evaluation.

¹ Summary for Future of English Global Perspectives:
[FoE_Research_Summary_single_page_for_download_revisedV2.pdf](#)



1.2 Curriculum Comparison project

The Curriculum Comparison project is a multi-part project from 2023 to 2026 that explores basic education English curriculum reform in three countries in the East Asian region: China, Korea and Japan. Using the Comprehensive Learning System (O'Sullivan, 2021) as a methodological framework, the project examines:

- **Curriculum:** understanding the English curriculum in each of the country contexts examining guidance and standards
- **Delivery:** the practice of the curriculum by teachers and whether this aligns with curriculum standards
- **Assessment:** the assessment[s] of English in the reformed curriculum and how English progress and proficiency is measured
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** to see how different stakeholders within the learning system perceive and evaluate the English curriculum reform in each country.

These components are not treated separately, but build on prior parts of the project, to understand the alignment of delivery to curriculum, and assessment to delivery and curriculum etc. The project has been driven by several factors. One of these factors is that the countries in this project, centring in the East Asian region, are at different stages of their English curriculum reforms. This allows for effective comparison, and potentially mutual learning of the curriculum in each context. Previous studies have also focused on a specific curriculum, but not many compare curricula or use the Comprehensive Learning System in their methodology or explanation. The Curriculum Comparison project aims to address these methodological and conceptual gaps in research. See section 4.1 for a detailed introduction and rationale of the project.

1.3 Part 1 report structure

The report focuses on part 1, **curriculum**, pertaining to English curricula in each country context. The report is structured by a systematic literature review, exploring English curricula from a global perspective, inclusive of the methodology used and the analysed texts found with this process (organised regionally). Then the Curriculum Comparison project and the initial findings are presented.

Executive summaries from each of the internal part 1 country reports in China, Korea and Japan are reported, which highlight the rationale for the English curricula, purpose and revisions, challenges, factors for successful implementation, and a short summary. The report concludes with a synopsis of the work outlined, what to expect from the next stages of the project, and the iterative/progressive outputs (i.e., fact sheets and similarities and differences table).

2. Systematic literature review protocol

The purpose of the systematic literature review was to examine existing literature on English language curricula reform in basic education: primary and secondary schools from a global perspective. There were two researchers who conducted the systematic literature review (henceforth known as SLR). Before the SLR was conducted, it was important to establish the methodological procedure so that both researchers were clear and transparent about the protocol. The SLR was divided into the following steps.

1. Identifying a research question
2. Developing a systematic review protocol — search strategy and selection criteria
3. Initial screening of titles and abstracts
4. Critical appraisal and eligibility screening of texts
5. Study appraisal on full text
6. Coding of text
7. Reporting of findings (structured by the coding).

2.1 Identifying a research question

The first step of the systematic literature review was to identify a research question. For this study, it was decided to design a research question that explored English curriculum reform at primary and secondary school level to match the parameters of the Curriculum Comparison project. For this reason, higher education was excluded. English was also specified, as the focus of this review is on English language curriculum, not other languages or school subjects. Therefore, the following research question was developed:

- What existing literature targets English language curriculum reform in primary and secondary school?

2.2 Developing a systematic review protocol

The second step was to build a search strategy for finding relevant literature on English language curriculum for basic education. Search terms were defined using a search table (Table 1). The search table was inclusive of Boolean operators OR and AND, and defines each column as population, intervention, comparison, outcomes and design (influenced by the PICO model, Frandsen et al. (2020)). Although the terms are typically found in scientific fields, it is still a useful way to define the search strategy for this education-centred piece of research.

Table 1: Systematic literature review search table

Combined with	And	And	And	And	
	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Outcomes	Design
Or	Primary school	English language curriculum	Reform	Objectives	Study
Or	Elementary school		Change	Rationale	Studies
Or	Secondary school		Comparison	Framework	Trial
Or	Junior high school			Competency-based	Review
Or	Senior high school			Skill-based	
Or				Comprehensive Learning System	

As the Curriculum Comparison project's methodology follows the Comprehensive Learning System (O'Sullivan, 2021), and the impetus for this SLR is on curriculum design, the search terms were inclusive of curriculum rather than delivery or assessment. Separate SLRs will be conducted during parts 2 and 3 of the project that focus on these areas. The search criteria were also limited to studies from 2015–2025 and the studies peer reviewed. A ten-year scope from 2015–2025 was intentional for this research. As the Curriculum Comparison project includes reforms from 2017–2027, it was critical to include search parameters, and thus other studies, that centred around a similar timeframe for comparative purposes.

The search databases chosen for the research were Google Scholar, Summon through the University of Reading, and JSTOR, due to the access of literature platforms that the researchers had. The primary platform used for the SLR was Google Scholar. With Google Scholar, the search platform did not include Boolean operators (AND/OR), thus seven search phrases were developed. The first search phrase included all of the terms. For example: (primary OR elementary OR secondary OR junior high OR senior high) AND "English language curriculum" AND (reform OR change OR comparison) AND (objectives OR rationale OR framework OR competency-based OR skills-based OR Comprehensive Learning System) AND (study OR studies OR trial OR review). English language curriculum was put in quotation marks so the phrase had to occur in the title of articles.

The Boolean operators were entered into the search bar manually, and the brackets grouped the specific search terms, i.e., those per column in the search table, together. The other search phrases (2–8) were shorter combinations to explore whether any new records were produced on the database. Search phrase 2 included intervention terms and comparison. Search phrases 3–4 were exclusive to primary, and 5–6 to secondary level. The final search phrases included just the intervention, comparison and outcome terms, and intervention, comparison and design.

Furthermore, for Google Scholar, the search results were sorted by relevance and inclusive of any type of article. It was a conscious decision to include all types of results, as curriculum reform can be communicated in books, journal articles, executive summaries, government documents, theses etc. and it was crucial not to be prescriptive. The researchers also made a decision at the beginning of the process to only view the first five pages of the results on Google Scholar as results could be over 7000 hits and would be impossible for two people to review.

For Summon, a University of Reading library platform, there is an advanced search option including Boolean operators. JSTOR also allows for advanced searches to be conducted. For these additional databases, it was decided to review approximately 100 studies using the eight search phrases. In both cases, the records were filtered/ordered by relevance.

2.3 Initial screening of titles and abstracts

When the results for the search protocol emerged, each researcher scanned the title and abstract of the result against the predetermined criteria. This was whether the study was relevant to the research question and search terms, whether it was published between 2015–2025, and peer-reviewed (depending on text type). If the text was applicable to the search criteria it was inputted into the study selection matrix for further review (Figure 1).

The study selection matrix documented the search term number (for Google Scholar), the title of the study, authors, year of publication, abstract, hyperlink and rationale. Articles which were relevant to the Curriculum Comparison project but were more suitable for part 2 (with a delivery-focus) were saved in a separate document, ready for the next stage of research. In total, 58 articles and other written text types were identified.

Database: Google Scholar

	Search term (Number)	Title	Authors	Year	Abstract	Hyperlink	Rationale
1	1	Curriculum Change in English Language Curriculum Advocates Higher Order Thinking Skills and Standards-Based Assessments in Malaysian Primary Schools	Sulaiman	2015	Malaysia undertook a comprehensive reform of the primary education by introducing KSSR or the Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum in 2011. The purpose of this paper is to review curriculum change in the new English language curriculum in which higher order thinking skills and standards-based assessments are given due attention in Malaysian primary schools.	https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/00f5/01528b4dc688202eeac3fc109b12b8c4c0d5.pdf	Issue: Outside of our timeframe

Figure 1: Study selection matrix

2.4 Critical appraisal and eligibility screening of texts

Both researchers were involved in the critical appraisal and eligibility screening process and met on 19 December 2024 for this activity. Before this activity, duplicate articles in the study selection matrix between the researchers were removed (n=13), thus 45 were taken forward for the appraisal. Using the study selection matrix containing the articles and information, the researchers reviewed each article using the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria listed opposite:

- include text if content is to do with ► English language curriculum reform / primary / elementary / secondary / 2015 (ten-year scope)
- exclude text if content is to do with ► implementation / assessment / monitoring or evaluation / delivery / other language or subject reform / perceptions / challenges / tertiary level / higher education.

Importantly, the decision-making process was documented for each text and a rationale given. Out of the 45 articles screened, 19 were excluded. Reasons for exclusion were if the data was outside of the timeframe for the SLR. There were also some that looked at tertiary or higher education which again was outside of the parameters of the research. Furthermore, one article did not focus on English education so was removed.

2.5 Study appraisal on full text

The next part of the process was the full-text study appraisal, where 26 articles were included. One of the researchers checked the availability of the articles and saved PDF versions if accessible. The researchers designed a study appraisal matrix where the information documented about each article was inserted, along with new tabs including type of literature, source, accessibility of text, and region the data/curricula centred around. The appraisal evaluated whether the scope of data matched the timeframe of research, as some authors were not transparent about this in the title and abstract. Moreover, whether the source was peer-reviewed, reliable, had evidence of bias, direct evidence to support conclusions, precise results, consistent in reporting style, and magnitude of evidence for conclusions to be drawn, were all evaluated during the appraisal process (linking to the GRADE approach). There was also space for additional comments. The final columns outlined a tick box of whether to include the article, and whether the study appraisal was complete.

Out of the 26 articles, 13 were excluded. Reasons for exclusion were to do with the time/scope of research, one article looked at reform rather than curriculum reform, and others came from a political or corpora perspective that lacked relevance to the focus of the SLR.

The remaining 13 studies from our global search were:

- *Controversies Surrounding Revisions of the Course of Study for English Language 1989–2020* by Aspinall (2020)
- *English Curriculum Reform in the Philippines: Issues and Challenges from a 21st Century Learning Perspective* by Barrot (2019)
- *K to 12 Curriculum Reform in the Philippines: Towards Making Students Future Ready* by Barrot (2023)
- *A Curricular Perspective on the Implementation Gap: Analysis of the 2018 ELT Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Schools* by Bildik and Altun (2022)
- *A Critical Review of Research on Curriculum Development and Evaluation in ELT* by Dündar and Merç (2017)
- *Change of the National English Curricula in Korea and Considerations for the Next Curriculum* by Han (2023)
- *Analysis of Present English Language Curriculum of Upper-Secondary Education in Mongolia* by Nyamkhuu et al. et al. (2021)
- *Historical Overview of the English Language Curriculum and the Present English Language Curriculum of Upper-Secondary Education in Mongolia* by Nyamkhuu et al. (2024)
- *English Language Teaching Curriculum Reform Strategies: A Critical Review* by Orafi (2022)

- *Merdeka Curriculum for High School English Learning in the Digital Era* by Rohimajaya and Hamer (2023)
- *ELT Curriculum and Policy: A Systematic Review of the Recent Research Literature* by Shahi et al. (2023)
- *English Language Education Curriculum in Indonesia: A Historical Review within 77 years* by Sulistyanningrum and Sumarni (2023)
- *English Language Curriculum Reform at the National Level: A Case of Intentions and Realities in Viet Nam* by Vu (2020).

2.6 Coding of text

The coding of the included full-text articles (or other documents) is the final stage of the SLR before writing. The study appraisal and coding went hand in hand and was an iterative process. As the researchers appraised the article, they also coded it. The aim of the coding system was to provide support for pinpointing the important parts of the article that were pertinent to the research focus, and to also guide the writing process.

The coding system was colour coded and included:

1. curriculum reform country/year/level (i.e., context)
2. purpose/motivation of the reformation
3. method[s]
4. core finding[s] or takeaways of new curriculum reform
5. limitations and challenges of paper
6. other interesting comments.

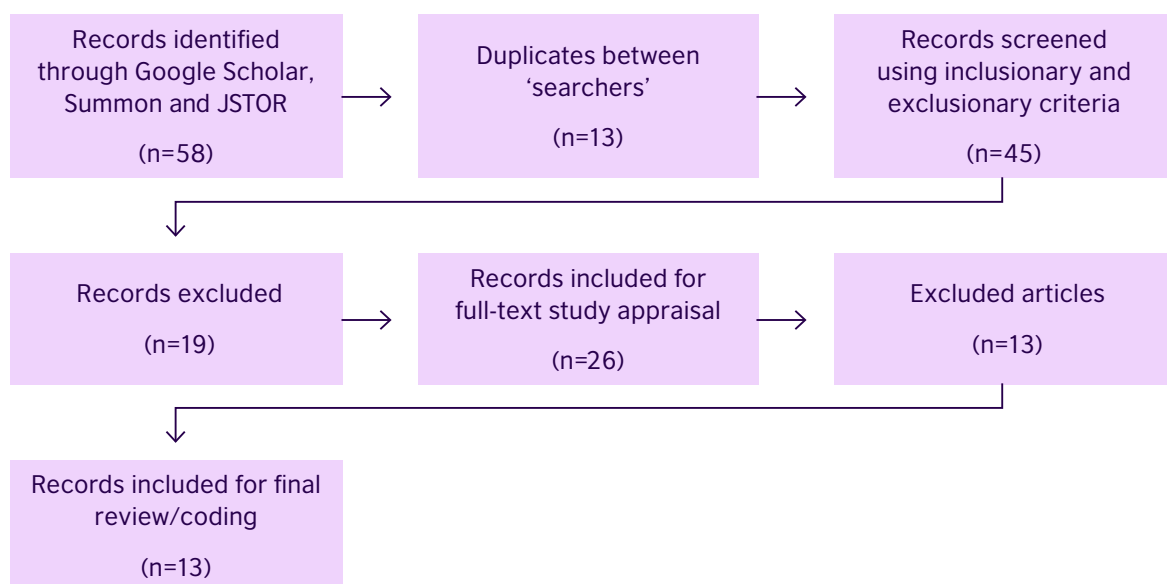


Figure 2: Systematic literature review process

3. Systematic literature review

Section 3 of the report presents on the included coded articles from the SLR. Firstly, an overview of literature is provided, and then the studies are organised by region and country. It is worth prefacing that the studies included in each of the country sections are not exclusively representative of each country but were the only work[s] that were elicited in the SLR search process.

3.1 Overview of literature on English curriculum reform

Before presenting articles elicited in the current SLR, it is important to highlight a previous systematic literature review conducted by Shahi et al. (2023). The SLR explores English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula and policy which is different from the current investigation, as the present SLR focuses exclusively on curriculum reform; however, this article is relevant for comparative purposes.

The purpose of the Shahi et al. (2023) SLR was to understand the landscape of ELT curriculum studies and consider the potential trends of ELT curricula research. The SLR followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). The authors created an exclusion and inclusion criteria and established key words for the search strategy. A limitation of Shahi et al.'s (2023) SLR was the exclusion of certain types of literature, such as book chapters, reports, dissertations etc.

Although journal articles are often the most up-to-date sources of information, dissertations etc. can offer depth of information. In the current review, all documentation types were considered.

The timeframe for the SLR was between 2010 and 2020, meaning there is a five-year overlap between their SLR and the current investigation. Considering when the paper was published, it is surprising that the scope of research did not include more recent papers, particularly to identify emerging trends. Shahi et al. (2023) established a coding system for the papers found, including participants, research design, focus, context and general paper information.

The findings of the SLR highlight the trajectory of ELT curricula research in 2023. Articles focused on English language policy, including planning and implementation, ELT curriculum planning and importantly, curriculum reform.

Most articles (and other texts) were found in the later part of the timeframe for the research (2015–2020), highlighting that the search parameters of the current SLR are targeting a fruitful search parameter. Furthermore, 54.8% of the studies found focused on the Asian context, emphasising that this region is particularly prominent for ELT and curricula research. This trend fits with the current project, exploring curricula reform in three East Asian contexts (i.e., China, Korea and Japan).

Other points to highlight are that the majority of Shahi et al.'s (2023) articles (46.6%) were teacher focused. For the current investigation, teacher perceptions were excluded, because this covers the next part of the Curriculum Comparison project. From the initial screening for the current SLR, many articles centred around teacher beliefs and implementation. These articles will be explored in conjunction with the next parts of the research project.

Another article which focuses on English curriculum reform across contexts is by Orafi (2022). Orafi (2022) provides an interesting overview of the rationale for curriculum reform and the strategies used in a global context. The author posits that most English language curriculum reform results from the wide-spread acceptance of English as the global lingua franca and the implications this has, for example, to access information, individual success, national growth and development in different contexts around the world.

The main drivers for English globally are education, employment and economics (Patel et al., 2023). The paper is motivated by studies and examples in curriculum reform that have not been successfully implemented. To frame the discussion, Orafi (2022) usefully explores the meaning of curriculum which differs depending on the perspective of the person defining it and also on how the curriculum is communicated to users and the wider community. As stated in Orafi (2022), curriculum can be anything from the materials used for teaching and learning, to a detailed plan consisting of objectives, learning outcomes, language context etc., to a guiding framework based on a specific methodological approach and underlying philosophy.

Orafi (2022) presents three reformation strategies: the power-coercive strategy, the empirical-rational strategy and the normative and re-educative strategy. The author discusses the key points of each strategy along with implications for implementation, which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Curriculum reform strategies (Orafi, 2022)

Strategy	Key points discussed	Implications for implementation
Power-coercive	<p>Top-down approach driven by policy.</p> <p>Lack of consultation with relevant stakeholders including teachers, school principals, and administrators.</p>	<p>Lack of consensus about rationale for reform or its implementation.</p> <p>Lack of support for implementation from public or educators.</p>
Empirical-rational	<p>The assumption that sound planning and communication of the benefits of the reform will lead to successful adoption.</p> <p>The approach is to brief and instruct teachers about the reform.</p> <p>This is typically a simplistic strategy that ignores the complexity of curriculum reform and change management.</p>	<p>Difficult to operationalise reform as practicalities have not been considered.</p> <p>Teachers seen as receivers of information, rather than agents of change.</p> <p>Implementation ineffective because teachers are not prepared for or invested in change.</p>
Normative and re-educative	<p>Bottom-up strategy initiated by end-users of curriculum.</p> <p>Changes co-constructed among users of the curriculum.</p>	<p>Acknowledgement that reformation may require change in beliefs and values.</p> <p>Ownership of proposed changes by end users and therefore more likelihood of successful implementation.</p>

The study concludes that policy or decision makers need to have a sound understanding of what curriculum reform means on the ground, i.e., in schools, classrooms, and different contexts, to use this information to develop effective and realistic change programmes. Planning and preparation need to be inclusive and collaborative. When curriculum reform is conceived, all stakeholders involved in English language education should be identified, and the impact of the reform on their roles should be taken into consideration during planning and preparation. Orafi (2022) concludes that teachers are critical and active agents in education systems and should be at the top of this list of stakeholders.

Furthermore, Dündar and Merç (2017) critically reviewed literature about curriculum development and evaluation to ascertain the characteristics of these studies and to attempt to generalise their findings. The rationale being that to conduct further research, one must have a comprehensive overview and understanding of previous research in the area.

The authors use a literature search process proposed by Card (2012). Their review focused on Turkey and any contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language. For studies about Turkey, the authors translated the search terms into Turkish to include studies written in Turkish. This may have been one of the reasons that most of the studies (46 out of 86/92) analysed were Turkish. To analyse the selected studies, Dündar and Merç (2017) adapted Tatar et al.'s (2014) coding protocol.

Findings revealed that regardless of the level or context, there were six shared themes across the studies analysed. The themes were teachers, parents, practical issues, assessment, content and material. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of key findings (Dündar & Merç, 2017)

Theme	Findings
Teachers	<p>Most teachers lacked the required proficiency level to teach English as a subject or use it as a medium of instruction.</p> <p>Teachers were not included in discussions about curriculum design.</p> <p>During the implementation of a new curriculum, teachers were given insufficient training or guidance.</p>
Parents	<p>Overall, most parents in the studies analysed had very little information and communication about the English curriculum with their child's English teacher.</p> <p>As a result, it was found that parents did not support their children's learning of English. It is not clear from the paper whether this meant that parents did not want to support or were not in a position to support their children learning English.</p>
Assessment	<p>Much English language teaching is focused on test preparation as many public examinations are high stakes.</p> <p>There is an overall lack of guidance for teachers about assessment and a need for example classroom assessment activities, particularly for assessing speaking and listening for teachers to use and adapt.</p>
Practical issues	<p>Across the studies, Dündar and Merç (2017) found that not enough time was given to English in the curriculum in relation to curriculum objectives.</p> <p>This was coupled with predominantly large classes; hence teachers focused more on grammar at the expense of the other skills and formative assessment.</p>
Content	<p>The findings about content were to do with the curriculum design.</p> <p>Regardless of curriculum intentions and objectives, most curricula tended to focus on grammar.</p> <p>The curriculum documents did not provide detailed or clear guidance about application in the classroom.</p> <p>The ambitions of most curricula are not consistent with the training for teachers or the resources to support delivery.</p>
Material	<p>Textbooks in some contexts did not reflect the curriculum.</p> <p>With lack of guidance about the curriculum, in some contexts, the textbook was seen as the curriculum.</p> <p>Materials were not developed with the students' interests or levels of proficiency in mind.</p>

Aside from content, more general findings from this study revealed that there were more studies about curriculum evaluation than curriculum development and these studies were usually conducted after curriculum reform. Evaluation studies were usually based on teachers and students' perceptions. The authors suggest that a wider range of stakeholders need to be included in studies to do with curriculum in general.

The study findings are useful for future research in the area of curriculum development and evaluation. One limitation is the focus on the Turkish context. Though the researchers did not limit the search to this context, the overwhelming emphasis was on Turkey. Perhaps steps could have been taken to offer a more balanced approach of contexts. Also, as the authors themselves acknowledge, their search did not include book chapters or conference papers, it was limited to articles freely available online. Therefore, the scope of research was constrained to these text types.



3.2 English curriculum reform in wider Europe



3.2.1 Turkey

Building on the focus of English curriculum in Turkey, there was one article in the SLR that centred on the context of wider Europe, specifically in Turkey. Bildik and Altun (2022) investigated the gap between the formal 2018 English language curriculum for primary and secondary in Turkey and its subsequent implementation. Several coinciding factors led to the revision of the two curricula. Firstly, in line with legislative changes in the country, it was thought that a new re-focused English language curriculum would improve English language communication and simultaneously support national economic ambitions of growth and development. Secondly, the Council of Europe (2018) stated that communication was a key competency for individuals seeking to achieve their life ambitions and therefore, the new curriculum was developed using Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) principles. These combined reasons meant that the role of English changed from being a subject of study to a tool for communication (Ministry of National Education, 2018). The new curricula were ambitious, focusing on both process and product with one of the aims being native-like competence for learners.

Bidik and Altun's (2022) research was motivated by the perceived and reported challenges of implementing the curriculum.

The purpose was to evidence the gaps between the stated curriculum and its operationalisation and the reasons for the misalignment. Using a solely qualitative approach, the researchers took the 2018 English language curriculum in Turkey through the four phases of Posner's (1995) framework. They analysed previous curricula and related documents using descriptive analysis to trace the origins of the curriculum and tracked the changes that resulted in the 2018 version. They explicate the individual components of the curriculum and assess their uses against the curriculum documents and then present the strengths and limitations of the 2018 curriculum, finishing with suggestions for future improvements.

Despite the good intentions of the new curriculum, the researchers found that implementation did not meet the ambitions of the 2018 curricula for several reasons. Firstly, the suitability and relevance of using the CEFR in the Turkish context was questioned. The eclectic nature of the 2018 curricula can be seen to be innovative but lacked contextualisation and the proper preparation needed to ensure effective fulfilment in practice. Teachers needed more training and guidance about the CEFR. It seemed they struggled to realise its potential in the classroom. The new curriculum had indicated the aim of native-like proficiency. The paper questions whether this level of proficiency was necessary or even realistic for Turkish learners.

The study provided interesting and useful insights into the design and implementation of the 2018 English language curriculum in Turkey. One limitation of the study was the purely document-based approach. It would have been interesting to see whether findings from stakeholder voices, e.g., those of teachers, administrators and students would have corroborated the findings of the document analysis.

3.3 English curriculum reform in East Asia

The majority of texts elicited from the SLR explore English curriculum reform in East Asia. There are nine texts presented in this section covering the contexts of the Philippines, Korea, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Mongolia and Japan.



3.3.1 Philippines

Barrot's (2019) journal article explores the Philippine K–12 basic English education curriculum reform, also identified as the Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC). K to 12 includes learners from primary through to the end of high school. The LAMC was introduced in 2013; however, the author analyses the 2016 LAMC data source, keeping with the timeline and search parameters for this SLR. Key changes noted by Barrot (2019) in the LAMC reform were that: the time allocated to English subjects decreased; instruction was spread across 12 years instead of 10; and mother-tongue-based multilingual education was implemented in grades 1 to 3. A new assessment format was also incorporated; rather than National Achievement Tests for elementary and high school, there were end-of-grade assessments (for grades, 6, 10 and 12).

The K–12 curriculum reform was initiated due to sub-standard test scores of English (and other subjects) performance on the National Achievement Test (NAT) which were low compared to the international average. The reform was also to address the concerning elevated number of out-of-school students, even with free education. The goal of the reformed curriculum was to create an environment in which students could function and communicate in a globalised and technology-advanced world. As Barrot (2019, p. 147) highlights, the Department of Education (2016) aims to have “communicatively competent multiliterate learners who are competitive in this global economy”. All of these critical factors motivated the K–12 curriculum reform.

Barrot (2019) used Vidovich's (2002) adaption of Ball's (1994) policy cycle to examine two data sources, the LAMC (2016), and Shubert's (2011) version of the P21 framework for 21st century learning. Barrot (2019) applies policy text analysis to the sources to explore coherence, 21st century teaching and learning, and the specificity of the reformed LAMC.

Some of the key findings of the policy text analysis show that the LAMC was defective in integrating 21st century skills. For instance, information and communication technology (ICT) integration was found to be non-existent in the data sources. The exploration also found ambiguity in how certain skills, such as grammatical skills, were scaled into levels. Barrot (2019, p. 154) notes a “disconnect between and among the learning competencies set for each of the macro skills in the LAMC”, linking to issues with internal coherence in the data source. The learning competencies for each macro skill varied, which makes comparing and integrating language skills more difficult. It was seen that language skills were mostly kept separate, which goes against the Department of Education’s aim of teaching language skills in an integrated way. Moving forward, it was suggested that efforts should be made to improve the clarity and coherence of the LAMC reform — as well as developments in 21st century aptitude, integrated language skills and competencies. Therefore, specificity in curriculum guidelines for the K–12 curriculum reform is imperative.

Barrot’s (2023) second journal article is an exploratory examination of the K–12 curriculum reform in the Philippines, building on his earlier work. The critical examination compared the Education 4.0 milieu, a notion that aligns with the fourth industrial revolution, and the K–12 curriculum guides in the Philippines. As stated in the 21st century learning perspective paper (Barrot, 2019), the motivations of the reform were to produce “future-ready learners” capable of navigating today’s technology-advanced world (Barrot, 2023, p. 1994).

Furthermore, it noted there were concerns that the skills and language learnt within the curriculum were not sufficient for employability. A survey by Roxas (2019) highlighted that only 25% of employers would hire K–12 graduates for the workforce. This example is a clear indication for the curriculum to align competencies to what employers’ need from graduates entering the workforce.

A later version of the same policy cycle framework was used for the critical evaluation (Vidovich, 2007) to understand if the K–12 curriculum prepares learners for Education 4.0 and for technological changes. For this exploration, the English curriculum guide, along with Science and Maths, were analysed. There were four data sources for this research: the *Enhanced Basic Education Act*, and curriculum guides for each of the three subjects. Barrot (2023) used a curriculum matrix (adapted from Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015), and data was annotated. Two coders were involved in this process for reliability purposes.

The overarching finding from this article is that the K–12 curriculum needs further refinement, particularly for constructive alignment, specificity, and technology incorporation. Although there were parallels between the 21st century perspective and Education 4.0 milieu, it seems that (again) ICT integration, which is essential to both, was non-existent in the policy texts. The author advocates for better attempts to coalesce ICT and the K–12 curriculum. A positive aspect of the K–12 English curriculum reform is that differentiation was considered for accessibility of learning.



3.3.2 Korea

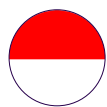
Han's (2023) paper is a commentary on the trajectory and current state of the English language curriculum in Korea based on historical influences. Han undertakes this exploration with a view to making recommendations for the next English language curriculum. The paper provides an overview of Korean language policies and English language curricula against the backdrop of three periods of change in the country's history. The first period was pre-modern society before liberation from Japan. In this period, there was strong Confucian influence from China. In the late 1800s, US missionaries first brought English education to Korea. Then in the 1900s, when Japan colonised Korea, Japanese became the official language and English language learning was reduced in the curriculum.

The second period was state formation and modernisation after liberation until the proclamation of a Globalisation policy. American influence during the Korean war elevated English to become a language of power. Since its inception in 1946, the national curriculum has undergone multiple revisions and has always reflected educational, national and social needs. The first English language curriculum was developed in 1954 and evolved with different movements in second language acquisition and learning (Han, 2023, pp. 126-127).

The third period is contemporary Korea since Globalisation. English language teaching and learning combines traditional teaching practices with a smattering of communicative language teaching. Educational policies are driven by the belief that English is essential for national economic growth and that high test scores guarantee success.

This has resulted in the term, 'education fever' (Han, 2023, p.127) which has been popularised in Korea suggesting a test-driven culture. English is seen as social capital even with the realisation that test scores are not necessarily representative of what an individual can do (ibid). In 1997, the 7th National English Curriculum was implemented for secondary schools. The new approach was communicative language teaching; however, there was a lack of guidance for teachers and the textbooks did not reflect the new approach (ibid).

Subsequent revisions were more ambitious and focused on the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and learner-centred pedagogies. Despite multiple reforms, Han reflects that the typical Korean classroom still remains teacher-led, and test-score focused. Nevertheless, they consider the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) as an opportunity for change for English language teaching and learning in Korea. "The Korean government introduced the I-Korea 4.0 policy as a plan for building a people-centred 4IR and enforcing the national capacity for technology" (Presidential committee on the fourth industrial revolution, 2017, as cited in Han, 2023, p. 129). Han suggests that AI and related technologies can help to reduce the language learning burden for learners, and in schools, teachers can focus on problem-solving learning to develop learning and life skills with learners. Han also suggests that teachers need more explicit guidance on approaches and methodology to fully exploit the technologies available in the 4IR to realise the potential of the new national English language curriculum.



3.3.3 Indonesia

English curriculum reform is also explored by Sulistyaningrum and Sumarni (2023). The authors wrote a historical review about English curriculum in Indonesia over the last 77 years, which was captured in the international conference proceedings of the education, teacher training and education faculty, Universitas Serambi Mekkah. The purpose of the proceedings was to give a summary of Indonesian English curriculum reform. The authors conducted a literature review on articles to provide this outline, and descriptive and content analyses were used to examine the literature.

There were three studies (Aziz, 2011; Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014; Pajarwati et al., 2021) which encapsulate English curriculum reform in Indonesia, two of which were outside of the timeframe allotted in this research. Pajarwati et al.'s (2021) research summarises the history of the Indonesian curriculum from the 1537 Portugal Colonial curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum in 2022. Several approaches have been implemented in previous Indonesian curriculum reforms, including the five-principle based curriculum (1947), management objective (1968), process approach (1984), competency-based curriculum (1999), school-based curriculum (2006), scientific approach (2013), and the latest student-centred learning approach (2022) with the Merdeka curriculum. The outline shows that from 1947 curriculum in Indonesia has typically been updated every decade.

To keep within the parameters of the SLR, only the Merdeka 2022 curriculum is presented. As highlighted by Rohimajaya and Hamer (2023), the goal of the 2022 Merdeka curriculum is to improve English education in Indonesia, so that students' English proficiency develops, and so that learners can be competent in a globalised and digital era. A key component of the Merdeka 2022 curriculum is the learner-centred approach, in which learning is orientated towards students' needs. This gives schools and teachers more agency in the ways that the curriculum is integrated in the classroom. Furthermore, a mixture of text types is integrated in the curriculum, including digital and multimodal texts, to develop students' digital literacy. The CEFR is central to the productive and receptive language skills developed in the curriculum.

Nevertheless, there was perhaps a missed opportunity with the slightly prescriptivist approach to the literature; the analysis could have expanded to policy-documents for a more complete picture of the curriculum reformations. The conference proceedings do provide an overview of the Indonesian English curriculum past and present, which is helpful in deducing the framework and motivations behind the current Merdeka curriculum.

Another piece of research which focused on Indonesian English curricula was Rohimajaya and Hamer's (2023) article, which compares the prior 2013 curriculum and the 2022 Merdeka curriculum, at senior high school level in Indonesia. The authors focus on English language learning. As highlighted above, the Merdeka curriculum is primarily founded on developing digital aptitude in today's globalised world. The curriculum was also established due to low levels of numeracy and literacy, and because of the impact of Covid-19 affecting learning in Indonesia. The reformed Merdeka curriculum was advanced because of these concerns, and because the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) wanted to have a more adaptive framework highlighting the importance of students' characters and competencies.

Rohimajaya and Hamer (2023) use content analysis on qualitative data (i.e., the materials developed for the curriculum) to showcase the key differences and similarities between the Merdeka 2022 curriculum with the prior 2013 curriculum. The comparison focused on the framework, competencies, structure, learning, assessment, teaching materials, and tools of the curriculum. A key difference between the curricula was that, with the Merdeka curriculum, English language skills align with the CEFR — focusing on speaking, presenting, reading, listening and writing. Furthermore, the foundational structure of the Merdeka curriculum encourages advancement of the Pancasila Student Profile, which highlights “six dimensions” relating to religion, “global diversity”, “cooperation”, independence, “critical reasoning” and creativity (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2023, p. 4).

In terms of structure, the Merdeka is subject-based and takes an integrated approach to learning. Teaching is conducted for individual subjects, and skills for learning are combined. The Merdeka also integrates differentiation into the curriculum, which adapts content according to student ability. Compared to the 2013 use of summative assessment, the Merdeka curriculum takes a formative approach to assessment which helps in assessment for learning and being able to differentiate content depending on skills and ability.

Although the article was beneficial in understanding the Merdeka curriculum and the changes made from the 2013 iteration, the article itself was short and lacked detail on how the content analysis was conducted.





3.3.4 Viet Nam

Vu's (2020) doctoral thesis captures the Vietnamese English curriculum reform, with the initiative Project 2020. Although the focus of the thesis centres on uncovering teacher perceptions and the actuality of the curriculum and this alignment, the thesis does detail information and intentions about the reform which is beneficial for the purpose of the current SLR. The reformed curriculum in Viet Nam took place over a 12-year period. In 2008, Project 2020 was announced so that language targets, such as being B1-level CEFR proficient by the end of year 12, could be met nationally by 2020. The aim was to have B1-level proficient students leaving basic education. From 2008 to 2020, the new curriculum content was designed alongside textbooks, piloted, and then implemented. Furthermore, like other English curricula reforms, Project 2020 was designed to meet the needs of today's globalised world — with an emphasis on English communication.

The focus of the curriculum reform is on communicative language teaching, to have more emphasis on the learner rather than being primarily teacher-led. The rationale behind the curriculum reform was to address the inadequate skills demonstrated by students for English communication. Vu (2020) attributes this limitation to the previous curriculum being led by traditional teaching approaches and textbooks with a focus on vocabulary and grammar. For this reason, there is more emphasis on communicative competence with Project 2020.



3.3.5 Mongolia

Building on this regional work, Nyamkhuu, Horvath and Pereira wrote two articles about the English curriculum for upper secondary education in Mongolia. The 2021 article incorporated document analysis, with content and thematic analysis integrated, to examine the learning objectives of the curriculum. Comparatively, the 2024 article used document analysis to study publicly accessible texts (i.e., curriculum materials, guidelines, articles, reports etc), using Creswell's (2009) steps of qualitative data analysis and the 'Asia as a Method' framework (Nyamkhuu et al., 2024).

Nyamkhuu et al. (2024) provide a historical overview of the English curriculum of Mongolian upper secondary. Due to the Mongolian democracy in 1990, there was a shift from the Russian language to English. The need for English has risen even further since 1990 because of the recognition of English being fundamental for overseas employment and so is now formally incorporated into Mongolian education. The focus included in this SLR is on the 2019 iteration of English curriculum, which matches the parameters of this research.

The Mongolian English education system was designed as a 12-year programme: five years in primary (age 6–11), four years in lower secondary (age 11–15) and three in upper secondary (age 15–18). The focus of the articles is on upper secondary. The revision for upper secondary education began in 2016 and was fully implemented by 2019 (Nyamkhuu et al., 2021). The primary aim of the English curriculum reform in 2019 was to develop communicative competence using a competency-based approach. For upper secondary, students need to “use foreign language knowledge creatively and communicate in accordance with needs and interests within the framework of society, culture, science and life” (Ministry of Education, 2019; Nyamkhuu et al., 2024, p. 78). In terms of standards, the outcome of the English curriculum revision for upper secondary is that students can develop their English from mid-A2, to leave with a low B1 CEFR level of proficiency. It is also for teachers to use formative assessment to review subject and skill level of students in the classroom (Nyamkhuu et al., 2021).

Nyamkhuu et al. (2021) specify that the curriculum was aligned to the CEFR. Five language skills were integrated in the curriculum, including speaking, listening, reading, writing and use of English (i.e., grammar and vocabulary). For each skill and grade, there were learning objectives linked to the communicative language activities outlined by the CEFR.

The biggest takeaway from Nyamkhuu et al. (2021, p. 46) was that the “learning objectives [were] imprecise” and general. To make them useable by teachers in the classroom, they would need to be refined. Interestingly, Nyamkhuu et al. (2024) highlight the negative comparison between students’ speaking and writing fluency in Mongolia compared to other countries with an English curriculum in Asia (i.e., China, Japan, Philippines). This may highlight that further revisions are necessary to improve the English curriculum.



3.3.6 Japan

Aspinall (2022) wrote a chapter in ‘Japan’s School Curriculum for the 2020s’ around the revisions made to the Courses of Study in Japan between 1989–2020. In particular, Aspinall (2022) writes from a critical perspective, reviewing the controversies of each implementation. To fit with the scope of the current SLR, the central focus is on the 2017 revision, which also pertains to the same research context focused on in this study. Information about this reform is covered in the executive summary in section 5.3.

The aim of the 2017 Courses of Study was to promote active learning, where students can engage in the learning process instead of being told the answers by teachers. Moreover, the latest revision of the Courses of Study for English was aligned to the CEFR’s (Council of Europe, 2001) international standards. In line with this, there was also an authorisation process for textbooks, where experts review textbook content for alignment with the Courses of Study, which happens with each curriculum revision every ten years. As Aspinall (2022) notes, these textbooks were primarily written in Japanese, which is different from the practices in other Asian countries where textbooks are mostly written in English.

Although this SLR focuses on curriculum, rather than monitoring and evaluation of curricula which comes in part 4 of this research project, Aspinall (2022) did highlight some concerns and considerations of the Courses of Study. One of concerns is the motivation of students to learn English. A survey conducted in 2011 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s Educational Policy Research in Japan reported that students understood the importance of English but did not hope to get a job requiring English in the future. Aspinall (2022, p. 100) notes that Japanese students were “encouraged to see English as the language of the foreign ‘other’” which may explain this finding.

3.4 Summary of articles

The articles that were obtained reviewed English curricula across contexts, and in some specific contexts such as the Philippines, Korea, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Mongolia and Japan, offering insightful reasons behind English curricula reform.

The key takeaways from the literature are outlined below.

- There are fewer studies that focus on curriculum development and more on curriculum delivery and evaluation (as shown in this SLR).
- English curricula are dependent on widespread acceptance of English as a global lingua franca (Orafi, 2022).
- English curricula has implications in regard to access to information, individual success, national growth and development in different contexts around the world (Orafi, 2022).
- There are three types of reform strategies; power-coercive; empirical rational; and normative and re-educative (Orafi, 2022).
- Curricula need to be aligned with delivery and assessment to be effective and should be evaluated by all stakeholders within a context of use (Dündar & Merç, 2017) — this also links to the Comprehensive Learning System framework (O’Sullivan, 2021).
- Most articles for this review centred in the East Asian region, matching the findings of Shahi et al. (2023) where 54.8% of the texts focused on Asian contexts.
- Different methods were used to explore English language curricula (i.e., Posner’s framework, policy text analysis, content and descriptive analysis, a curriculum matrix, Creswell’s (2009) steps of qualitative data analysis and ‘Asia as a Method’ framework); however, most focused on existing documents and/or literature data in each context.
- Most of the texts mentioned similar broad aims for the reformed curricula, the first being to improve English. Second, most texts cited globalisation, the fourth industrial revolution, and technological developments as factors that influenced the motivation behind the English curriculum. For example:
 - LAMC in the Philippines — aims to create future-ready learners in alignment to the fourth industrial revolution and 21st century skills (Barrot, 2019, 2023).
 - Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia — to develop learners’ digital aptitude for globalisation (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2023; Sulistyningrum & Sumarni, 2023).
 - Project 2020 in Viet Nam — designed to meet standards for today’s globalised world focusing on English communication (Vu, 2020).

With the global perspective explored above, the report now turns to the Curriculum Comparison project.

4. The Curriculum Comparison project

The Curriculum Comparison project explores basic education English curriculum reform in three countries in the East Asian region: China, Korea and Japan. The project utilises a multi-part design that aligns with the Comprehensive Learning System framework (O'Sullivan, 2021) to examine:

- **Curriculum:** understanding the English curriculum in each of the country contexts examining guidance and standards
- **Delivery:** the practice of the curriculum by teachers and whether this aligns with curriculum standards
- **Assessment:** the assessment[s] of English in the reformed curriculum and how English progress and proficiency is measured
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** to see how different stakeholders within the learning system perceive and evaluate the reform.

The report focuses on part 1 of the project which pertains to English curricula and how they are conceptualised in the guidance. To achieve this, expert input and literature are explored. For the remainder of the report, the rationale of the project, the global team, the preliminary meeting and workshop session, part 1 research questions, and executive summaries are outlined. Subsequently the outputs of the project and next stages are also presented.

4.1 Rationale of project

The research has been motivated by several factors. The first is that all the country contexts in this project are going through their English curriculum reforms at different stages. The 2017–2019 Courses of Study (the national curriculum) in Japan was fully implemented in senior high school in 2024 and is due for another revision in 2030. For the compulsory education English curriculum in China, the curriculum was implemented in 2022, but textbooks were only operational in 2024. In Korea, the 2022 revised national English curriculum for compulsory English started in 2025 and will be incrementally applied by grade until 2027. It is important to compare curricula (i.e., the rationale, standards, process, preparation time, etc.) at different stages because evaluation can be made on those which have ‘completed’ the reform process and can potentially offer insights to contexts at the beginning of the cycle.

Secondly, the countries are geographically close in East Asia and thus evaluating the similarities and differences between these contexts is prevalent because this can facilitate mutual learning of English curricula in this particular region. Insights, for example, may be quite different compared to other regions (i.e., Americas, Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa etc). It may also highlight similarities and/or differences in China, Korea and Japan. Discussion between stakeholders can potentially give a platform for feedback/improvements to be made or at least understanding if different approaches have been applied.

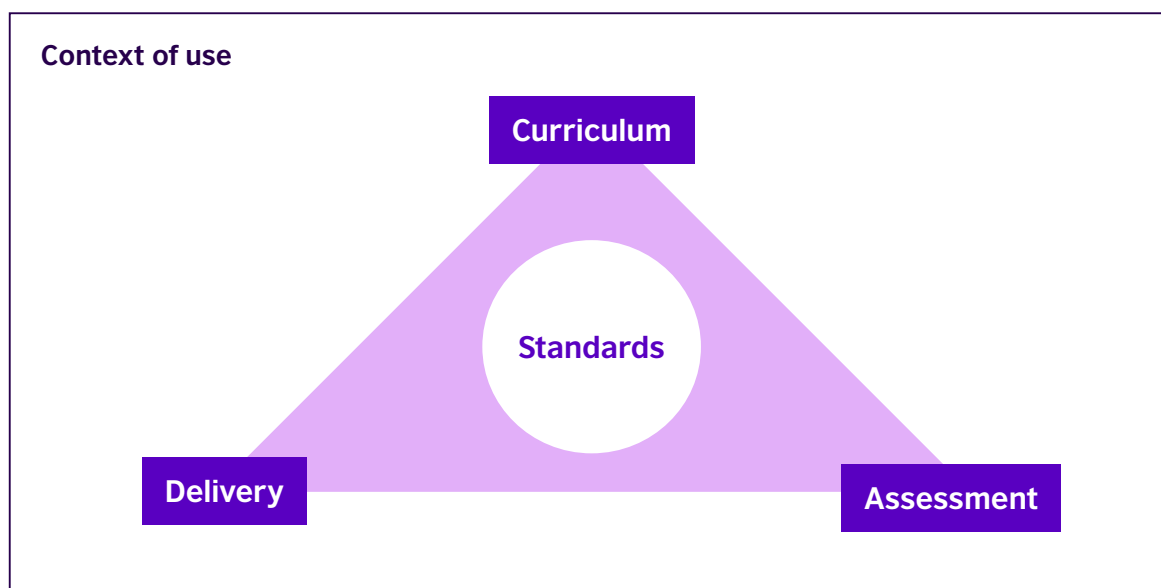
This type of research can also contribute to sharing good practice or areas for improvement in planning, preparation and implementation.

Furthermore, there is a salient gap in comparative English curricula research. Although there are previous studies that explore and review English curricula (as evidenced with the SLR), there are only a few which compare curricula across contexts (Caves et al., 2024; Creese et al., 2016; Greatorex et al., 2019). Just to note, the studies were not found in the part 1 report SLR because they had an implementation, evaluation or methodological perspective, and the focus was on curriculum. Furthermore, prior work to our knowledge has not incorporated the Comprehensive Learning System (henceforth known as CLS) in its explanation. One of the objectives of the research is to develop a framework — using the CLS — for comparison of reformed English curricula in any context. For any English curricula and policy to be effective, it is important to understand the alignment of curriculum, delivery, assessment and monitoring and evaluation, and whether the curriculum objectives outlined in standards for the curriculum are understood and implemented by teachers. Furthermore, the assessment and evaluation components examine how well the curriculum is working against the goals outlined in the standards.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 Comprehensive Learning System

The methodological framework incorporated for the Curriculum Comparison project centres around the CLS (O’Sullivan, 2021), as delineated in Figure 3.



Comprehensive learning system (O’Sullivan, 2020)
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/comprehensive-learning-system>

Figure 3: Comprehensive Learning System (O’Sullivan, 2021)

There are three tangents to the CLS — curriculum, delivery and assessment — and these components should be in alignment to work successfully. The curriculum is what drives people to learn, delivery is how the curriculum is implemented, and assessment is how progress is measured. Each learning system, and the three components, are typically driven by standards (such as the CEFR) and these are generally locally appropriate to the context of use. Context of use pertains to the environment and people using the learning system.

For the Curriculum Comparison project, each of the three components of the CLS makes up a part of research. Part 1 explores curriculum, using expert input and a systematic literature review. Part 2, which is in progress, centres around delivery of the curriculum, implementing teacher surveys, focus groups and classroom observations. The final stages explore assessment (part 3), using expert input, desk research, and prior findings in part 2, and monitoring and evaluation (part 4) with external interviews to evaluate English curricula and internal interviews to review the impact of this project. See Figure 4 for a visual representation of the project overview.

Curriculum Comparison project overview

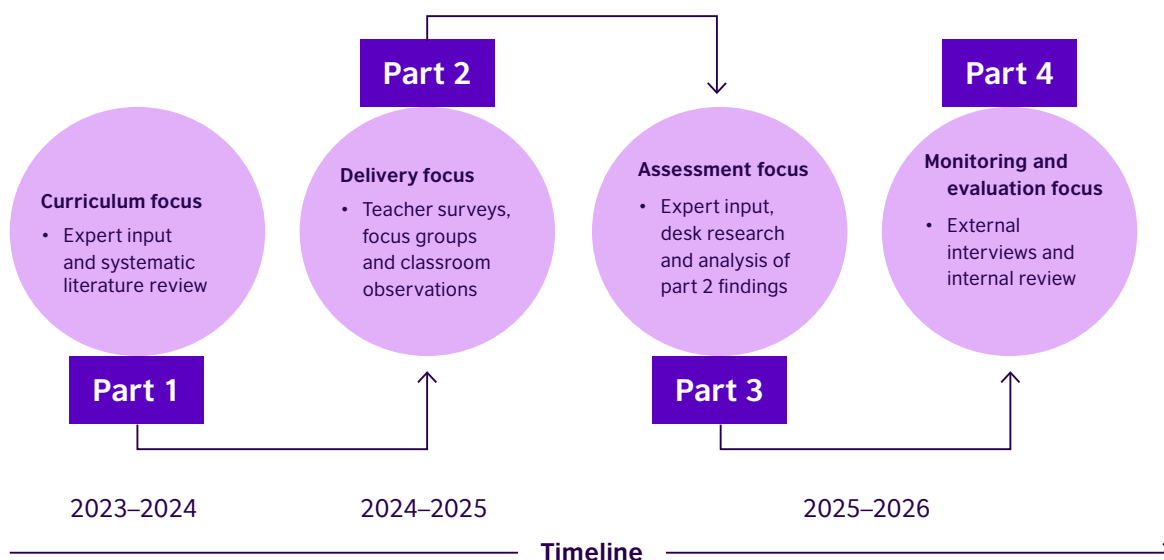


Figure 4: Curriculum Comparison project overview

4.3 Collaborative approach

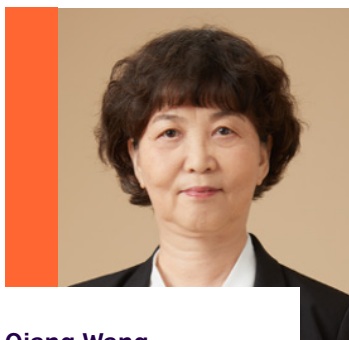
From the outset, the project was approached as a collaborative undertaking. The project team agreed that the Future of English global team would manage and lead the project, but that co-construction through collaboration was the cornerstone of the research planning, design, implementation and dissemination with the aim of leveraging diverse backgrounds, perspectives and expertise from different countries. All members of the project team were encouraged to share updates, ideas and insights throughout the process, fostering a co-constructed research process. With this in mind, it was agreed that the project team would meet face-to-face once a year, and this would be supported by regular online meetings.

4.3.1 Research team

The team for this project is global and consists of six researchers specialising in the three country contexts (China, Korea, and Japan), three regional British Council members from Japan and China, and three British Council global leads based in the UK and Colombia.

4.3.2 The researchers

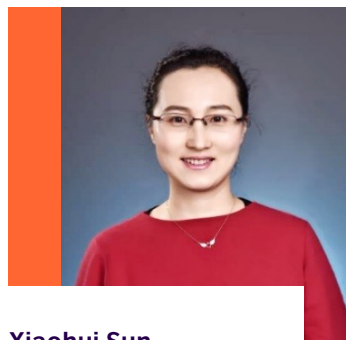
The researchers for the Curriculum Comparison project are all academics and specialists in their respective fields, bringing different strengths to the project. Their bios are presented below.



Qiang Wang

Director and Professor of the Institute of Foreign Language Education and Teacher Education, School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Normal University, China

Qiang Wang is the leader of the development group for compulsory education and ordinary high school English curriculum standards (2001) of the Ministry of Education, core member of the revision group for compulsory education English curriculum standards (2011 edition), leader of the revision group for compulsory education English curriculum standards (2022 edition) and ordinary high school English curriculum standards (2017 edition). She is mainly engaged in language learning theory, English teaching methods, English teacher education and development, action research, basic education curriculum reform and other aspects of teaching and research work.



Xiaohui Sun

Professor of English (Applied Linguistics), Beijing Normal University, China

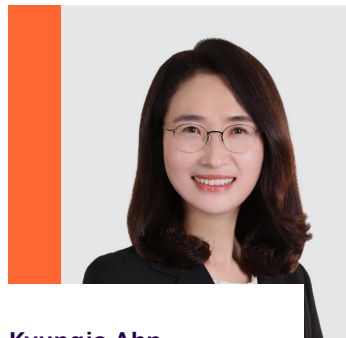
Sun Xiaohui has a PhD in Education and is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Applied Linguistics from Beijing Normal University. She is mainly engaged in teaching and research in foreign language education and teacher education, and second language acquisition. She has published several academic books and textbooks, presided over the Humanities and Social Sciences Program of the Ministry of Education, the Independent Research Program of Liberal Arts of Beijing Normal University, and the school-level Curriculum Reform Program of Beijing Normal University. She has published many academic papers.



Xiaofang Qian

Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Beijing Normal University, China

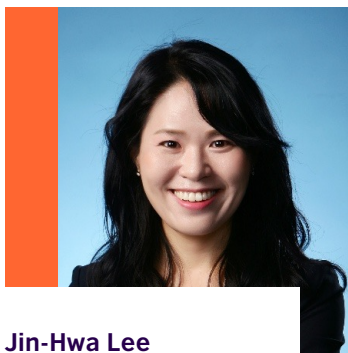
Xiaofang Qian is an Associate Professor at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature in Beijing Normal University. Her research interests cover ELT methodology, integrated teaching of reading and writing, English language teacher education, sociolinguistics, testing and assessment. She has been engaged in numerous studies, projects and workshops in English language teaching, reading instruction and testing in the past ten years, particularly in coaching pre- and in-service English teachers and improving their teaching practice for the curriculum reforms.



Kyungja Ahn

Professor, Department of English Education, Seoul National University of Education, Korea

Kyungja Ahn is a Professor in the Department of English Education at the Seoul National University of Education in Korea. Her research interests include second language teacher education, L2 curriculum and education policy, and technology mediated L2 learning and teaching. She has taught undergraduate and graduate courses and conducted workshops and seminars for pre- and in-service English teachers. She has participated in the development of the National English Curriculum and English language textbooks for primary and secondary school students in Korea. She has published numerous books and journal articles, presented at conferences, and carried out research projects on English education and teacher education.



Jin-Hwa Lee

**Professor, Department of English Education,
Chung-Ang University, Korea**

Jin-Hwa Lee is a Professor in the Department of English Education at Chung-Ang University in Seoul, Korea. She specializes in task-based language teaching and L2 program development. She has developed and implemented several task-based L2 programs in the U.S. and Korea, referring to ACTFL, ILR, and CEFR levels. She has actively participated in national-level projects, including the development of the National English Ability Test (NEAT) and the 2022 English National Curriculum. Her research interests include task-based language teaching, L2 curriculum development, teacher education, and AI-based English speaking assessment and learning.



Yukio Tono

**Professor, Tokyo University of Foreign
Studies, Japan**

Yukio Tono is a Professor in corpus linguistics at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS), Japan. He also serves as Director of the World Language Centre at TUFS. His research interests include the applications of corpus linguistics in language learning and Second Language Acquisition research, as well as the use of corpora and the CEFR in EFL learner profiling research. He is a Principal Investigator for the CEFR-J project, the localisation project of the CEFR for English language teaching in Japan.

4.3.3 British Council regional support

The British Council regional members supported the project and researchers by providing more localised provision and assisted the researchers operationally.



Kathleen Zhong

Head English and School Education China, British Council, China

Kathleen Zhong has dedicated over twenty years to the British Council in China, amassing extensive expertise in cultural relations and education. Since 2015, she has led China English programmes and she currently serves as Head of English Connects, East Asia. In this role, Kathleen oversees several regional and country-level research initiatives, driving innovation and impact in English language education.



Chen Li

Senior Academic Manager, English and School Education, British Council, China

Chen Li holds an MA in TEFL from Lancaster University and has published extensively on ELT pedagogy and English teachers' continuing professional development. In his current role, he leads initiatives promoting international collaboration among ELT professionals across East Asia, including the annual ASEAN/China Teaching English Online Conference, which is the region's premier online event for English teachers, educators and policy makers.



Robin Skipsey

Academic Manager English and School Education, British Council, Japan

Robin is currently Academic Manager of English Programmes at the British Council in Japan, where he has worked since 2005. After teaching in the Japanese public education system, he started his current role in 2013 and oversaw the design, development and delivery of the Leaders of English Education Project (LEEP), a five-year national teacher training initiative commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Education which trained over 80,000 elementary, junior and senior high school teachers across the country.

4.3.4 British Council global leads

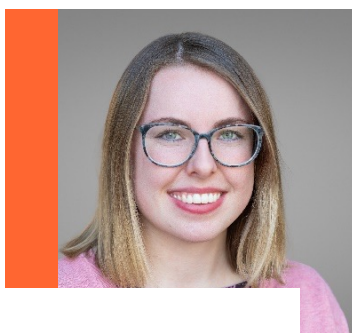
The British Council global leads — Mina Patel, Katherine Halley, and Jake Macmillan — manage and lead the research agenda for the Curriculum Comparison project.



Mina Patel

Head of Research: Future of English, British Council, UK

Mina Patel is Head of Research for British Council's Future of English programme. Her background is in English language teaching and training. She has worked in the UK, Greece, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia as a teacher, trainer, materials developer and ELT project manager and has extensive experience working with ministries of education in East Asia.



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Katie Halley is a researcher for the Future of English at the British Council, based in London. Her background is in English language, applied linguistics, and language testing. Katie's areas of interest are in English language teaching, speaking assessment/skills, multimodality, the digital medium, and visual behaviours.



Jake Macmillan

Future of English Programme Manager, British Council, Colombia

Jake Macmillan is the Future of English Programme Manager at the British Council based in Bogotá, Colombia. His professional career has taken him from the UK to Mexico to Colombia. Along the way, he has held various roles in the education sector including teacher, teacher trainer, exam centre manager, project manager, and business development director.

4.4 Initial Curriculum Comparison project meeting

4.4.1 Hanoi (6 October 2023)

The first meeting with the research team in Hanoi was exploratory to share perceptions of the project and its potential, to begin to understand the different contexts involved and, importantly, to begin to build professional relationships that would be the foundation of the entire project.

The meeting outcomes were:

- for research leads to recruit collaborators in their contexts to share the work
- for research leads and teams, once recruited, to write reports on the curriculum in their contexts — these reports were referred to as the ‘country reports’ as the project progressed
- to organise a planning workshop once the country reports were ready.

4.5 Research questions for part 1

The motivation of the research questions was to understand the English curriculum in each of the country contexts. As a result, there were eight research questions for part 1 that centred around the rationale, objectives, prior research and gaps, implementation plan and challenges for the English curriculum reform.

1. What is the rationale behind recent curriculum reform? How does the rationale differ from previous reforms?
2. How has the curriculum been received by different stakeholders?
3. What are the theoretical foundations of the curriculum?

4. What are the objectives of the current curriculum? What does it hope to achieve?
5. What has previous research reported about curriculum reform in your country?
6. What are the research gaps identified by your literature review?
7. What is the current curriculum implementation plan?
8. What challenges do you foresee for successful implementation?

These research questions formed the basis, guidelines, and structure for the part 1 country reports.

4.6 Planning workshop

4.6.1 Beijing (14–15 March 2024)

The project team met in Beijing in March 2024 for a workshop with the aim to review the country reports to understand national contexts and reform policies in China, Korea and Japan. The reports were shared with the project researchers and discussed during the meeting. The workshop was a beneficial opportunity to discuss the similarities and differences between the reports, along with the overall objectives and next steps of the project.

4.6.2 Outcomes of the Beijing workshop

The workshop was a mutually valuable experience, and as a result, several outcomes were elicited.

- It was agreed that the reports would not be published but used as a resource for publications about different aspects of the project and to help to shape the project as a whole.
- The whole team had an increased awareness of the three curricula and the different contexts of use.
- The country reports and discussion provided a useful information base for developing ideas for other parts of the project.
- The next parts of the project were outlined.
- The team agreed to present a symposium at New Directions East Asia in Bangkok (November 2024).

Additionally, because of the complexity of discussions realised during the workshop, two major outputs were planned:

- an easy-to-read similarities and differences table comparing curricula across contexts
- country English curriculum fact sheets to provide a concise yet informative summary of each country's curriculum.

Both outputs are presented in section 8.

5. Executive summaries

The executive summaries centre around the internal unpublished reports submitted to the Future of English programme in 2024 by each of the Curriculum Comparison project research teams, exploring the curricula reforms in China, Korea and Japan. The objective of the country reports was twofold: to shed light on the curriculum reform in each country context and share information amongst the team; and to help shape future parts of the research. There are three reports.

1. **China:** The 2022 revised compulsory English curriculum in China is explored by Wang et al. (2024).
2. **Korea:** The national English curriculum reform in Korea, recently implemented for compulsory English education from 2025 onwards, is the focus for Ahn and Lee (2024).
3. **Japan:** The Courses of Study reform in Japan 2017–2019 is reviewed by Tono (2024).

All of the researchers bring their expertise and draw on existing literature to provide scope of the curriculum reform in each country context which forms the basis of part 1 of the Curriculum Comparison project. As mentioned in section 4.5, the report structure was guided by the research questions for part 1 of the project; however, due to the countries going through different stages of the reform, the research questions were approached differently.





5.1 China

Wang, Q., Sun, X., & Qian, X. (2024). *East Asia Curriculum Study — The China Report* [Unpublished internal report]. Beijing Normal University.

5.1.1 Background

The report by Wang et al. (2024) explores the changes to the 2022 nine-year compulsory education English curriculum standards (CECS) in China from elementary grade 3 (age 8) to junior high grade 9 (age 15), replacing the 2011 curriculum design. The 2022 CECS implementation was integrated simultaneously across grades; however, textbooks and exams for the new curriculum were only unified with the curriculum change in September 2024. The report also discusses the modifications to the senior high school English curriculum standards (SECS) in 2017 (for ages 16–18). For the SECS, the English curriculum was employed incrementally and was completely operational in 2022.

5.1.2 Purpose and revisions of the English curriculum reform

The purpose of the reform was to shift the focus from comprehensive language ability, as seen in previous iterations of the curriculum in 2003 and 2011, to centring around subject core competences, for both the SECS and CECS curricula. The motivation was to develop learners' core competences through English as a subject, taking a learning-activity based approach. A learning-activity based approach adopts activities that bridge learners' understanding, application and practice, and transference of language learning to solve real-life problems within relevant contexts. Subject core competences include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. In particular, there is more prominence on the humanistic nature of communication and cultural awareness (both of Chinese culture and foreign cultures) in the English curriculum reform, as the interrelation between language and culture are seen as inseparable (Byram, 1997; Brown, 2002; Nunan, 2022; Wu et al. 2022). There is also an emphasis on language for knowledge and meaning, as well as cultural knowledge, to enhance cultural confidence and national identity. The authors highlight that the objective behind the curriculum is to develop well-rounded learners for the socialist cause in China.

5.1.3 Challenges of the English curriculum reform

The report draws on existing literature exploring objectives, teachers, teaching materials, textbook development, assessment and implementation. Even with this comprehensive exploration, the findings of the report show that the scope of literature is insufficient. While research has looked into the 2022 modified curriculum standards, Wang et al. (2024) stress the need for more examination of teachers' concerns and challenges. Some of these research gaps include:

- teachers' conceptualisations of the 2022 English curriculum from previous revisions
- knowing how to implement the new textbooks effectively
- teachers' understanding of the purpose and functions of formative assessment to put into practice in the classroom
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the English curriculum
- the refinement of the text analysis framework, which is a guide for teachers to study the texts that they teach, to include structure and content as well as language
- identifying strategies for employing learning activity-based approaches.

Other challenges of the CECS were teachers' external pressures of time and improving learners' exam scores. Internally, teachers' confidence could also be affected with adapting their skill sets for the new curriculum standards. In all, teacher beliefs need to be considered in regard to the new English curriculum standards for better, deeper integration and alignment of teaching, learning, and assessment.

5.1.4 Factors for successful implementation of the English curriculum reform

Wang et al. (2024) report on some of the measures taken so far to support implementation of the CECS and SECS. Some of the strategies to aid successful implementation include:

- training courses in various modes
- 33 national demonstration zones in 2020 that conducted/tested teaching and research activities for the curriculum
- Special grade teachers' studios where renowned teachers can show good examples, and other teachers can advance their skills and professional development
- national professional committees for teaching guidance in elementary and secondary education
- double reduction policy — a student-centred approach to reduce extracurricular activities such as homework and/or tutoring.

There were also monitoring and evaluation projects. One of these examples is the student academic quality monitoring project to examine student performance and progression of core competencies. There was also a national test-construction assessment research project (2019) where the Ministry of Education organised teams to evaluate test design in junior high to ensure alignment for the new curriculum. Finally, there were national textbook research bases organised by the Ministry of Education from 2019–2023; these were hosted by universities to evaluate national textbooks for the new curriculum standards.

5.1.5 Summary

Wang et al. (2024) report on the nine-year compulsory education English Curriculum standards (CECS) in China, as well as the SECS (2017), where changes have been made to improve learners' core competences through English as a subject. Although prior literature provides some research exploring teaching, materials, assessment and strategies of implementation, the research is inadequate in dealing with teacher concerns. The authors encourage further exploration of the curriculum from a range of perspectives.



5.2 Korea

Ahn, K., & Lee, J.-H., (2024). *The National English Curriculum in Korea* [Unpublished internal report]. Seoul National University of Education and Chung-Ang University.

5.2.1 Background

Ahn and Lee (2024) explore the 2022 revised national English curriculum in Korea. The authors outline the theoretical foundations and objectives underlying the English curriculum reform, and the reasons for this educational change. Although the reform was decided in 2022, implementation of the English curriculum for compulsory English began in 2025 and is to be completed in 2027. The English curriculum reform is phased in implementation; grades 3–4, 7 and 10 (ages 9–10, 13 and 16) were changed first in 2025, and grades 5–6, 8, and 11 (ages 11–12, 14 and 17) in 2026, with the remaining grades (9 and 12, ages 15 and 18) in 2027.

5.2.2 Purpose and revisions of the English curriculum reform

The authors highlight that the 2022 revised national English curriculum was designed to deal with issues of the previous curriculum by building on the competency-based approach initiated in 2015. The 2022 revised national English curriculum includes modification to target language skills, refining competencies, and accommodating the high school credit system. The first change pertains to the restructured language skills. Unlike in the 2015 edition of the curriculum where there was a focus on the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), the 2022 revision centres around reception (listening, reading and viewing) and production (speaking, writing, presenting) to imitate real language use.

The second change pertains to re-examining competencies. While the 2015 curriculum adopted a competency-based approach, it was limited in both the range of core competencies and their realisation. The purpose of the revised curriculum is to have a more inclusive and accurate representation of competency-based learning incorporated in the Korean English curriculum to improve English communication, specifically to develop six competencies which are seen as essential for functioning in a future society. The core competencies include:

- self-management
- knowledge-information processing
- creative thinking
- aesthetic-emotional
- collaborative communication
- civic competency.

Changes from the 2015 iteration include adapting English communication competency to collaborative communication competency. Creative thinking and aesthetic emotional competencies are new additions in 2022 for English as a subject. The last revision noted is to do with the high school credit system, where students can select classes based on their own aspirations.

The revisions for the curriculum resulted in amended achievement standards and appendices, referring to existing international frameworks i.e., the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) and the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (ACTFL., 2012), and corpora-based vocabulary selection, which guide the revised national English reform.

5.2.3 Challenges of the English curriculum reform

Ahn and Lee (2024) explore and review previous research and identify gaps. The literature on curriculum research in Korea has predominantly focused on the curriculum and application of the curriculum. Ahn and Lee (2024) also identify other gaps in the literature research, including how there have been issues with consistency with previous curriculum reforms in Korea. Prior revisions have been made through the partial introduction of new theories or methodologies, without well-established models for English learning and teaching in the Korean context, resulting in a lack of adequacy and consistency at the macro level. Furthermore, as teaching and learning English can be viewed differently than other subjects, the authors note that revisions of the curriculum have resulted in discord between English education theory and general education theory, which is broader in scope.

5.2.4 Factors for successful implementation of the English curriculum reform

Ahn and Lee (2024) highlight the three areas that are necessary for success in the new curriculum design, as communicated by the 2022 curriculum development team. These factors are:

1. establishing an assessment criteria and standards to give learners feedback and ascertain their level of English proficiency
2. a guidebook to state how textbooks should be developed for this curriculum reform
3. teacher training in how to successfully implement the content of the revised curriculum into the classroom.

Ahn and Lee (2024) also recommend the following actions for successful implementation:

- more consideration into defining communicative competency and what abilities are needed for Korean students to learn English
- more empirical grounding from the stakeholders involved in curriculum decision-making and development
- research that centres around real classroom environments which use the curriculum reform and how this compares/aligns to conceptualisations, aligns with textbooks, uses/interprets the achievement standards, integrates productive and receptive skills, and how this is assessed.
- understanding teachers' familiarity with the competency-based English curriculum, especially to adjust from prior teaching and learning approaches (i.e., which were four-skill and function-based)
- research on pre-service and in-service programmes are required, to recognise what (or how) content on the revised curriculum is being conveyed to teachers.

5.2.5 Summary

In all, Ahn and Lee (2024) outline the Korean 2022 revised national English curriculum, which was developed to improve on the prior competency-based approach initiative developed in 2015. Like Wang et al. (2024), Ahn and Lee (2024) recommend future research which is inclusive of a diverse range of perspectives. Moreover, they suggest comparative work across English language curricula should also be conducted, which is what the current investigation — the Curriculum Comparison project — is trying to accomplish.



5.3 Japan

Tono, Y. (2024). *Transforming English Language Education in Japan: Recent Reforms, Challenges and Future Directions* [Unpublished internal report]. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

5.3.1 Background

Tono's (2024) report provides an overview of the Courses of Study framework for the 2017–2019 reformed English curriculum which was fully implemented (in senior high schools) in Japan in 2024. The Courses of Study is a national curriculum standard set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) in Japan, and is typically updated every ten years. The 2017–2019 Courses of Study replaced the 2008–2009 edition.

The Courses of Study pertains to elementary, middle and high school levels of education where English is incorporated as a part of general study in grades 3–4 (ages 9–10) and is a compulsory subject from grades 5–9 (ages 11–15). For this revision, English is introduced in elementary as a subject rather than an activity, as was listed in the 2008–2009 iteration. The Courses of Study is also accompanied by further material called commentaries, published for elementary, junior high and senior high. Commentaries provide more detailed explanations of subject content and goals compared to information in the Courses of Study. Unlike the Courses of Study, which is legally binding, the commentaries are not obligatory to follow, but they are treated with parallel importance. Due to more specific detail and examples, commentaries (as well as the Courses of Study) are the foundation of authorised textbooks.

5.3.2 Purpose and revisions of the Courses of Study

The report outlines the Courses of Study revisions in English language teaching from 1951 (using direct method) to the 2017–2019 revision which is skills-based. The 2017–2019 Courses of Study was motivated by globalisation and the need to prepare students for today's world, as outlined by MEXT in 2013. The general message behind the reform centred around future development: *"We hope that what children learn at school will become their 'zest for life' and lead them to tomorrow and their lives beyond"*, as specified by the MEXT (2025a) guide to the new Courses of Study. Other motivations behind the Courses of Study were to improve English, as more than 50% of junior high and senior high students fall below the expected English proficiency thresholds (i.e., A1 CEFR level for junior high and A2 for senior high) as seen from 2011–2020 (Ministry of Education Culture Sports Science and Technology, 2025b).

There are three competency-based perspectives to the Courses of Study which function as general guidelines that work across subjects and grades.

1. knowledge and skills
2. the ability to think, judge and express
3. the ability to learn and human nature.

The first perspective links to knowledge and application, the second (think, judge and express) to cognitive ability, expression and various competencies, and the third (ability to learn and human nature) is attitudinal, i.e., willingness to learn.

The competency-based perspectives also align with 'can do' learning statements which are clear objectives for learning English and are substantially guided by international standards — in this case, the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). The Courses of Study takes a skills-based approach to learning English. Because of the CEFR influence, five skills are integrated in the 2017–2019 iteration, including listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, reading and writing. There are two to three learning objectives per skill.

5.3.3 Challenges of the English curriculum reform

Tono (2024) discusses theoretical, implementation and political/economic challenges with the 2017–2019 Courses of Study in Japan. Some of these challenges are:

- alignment between the CEFR and the Courses of Study for broader educational policies
- the latest version of the CEFR Companion Volume (2020) has not been applied, highlighting that the curriculum and targeted language skills are already outdated; the CEFR-J, which is tailored and operationalised based on Japanese learners, may be better adopted
- there is a shortage in understanding from teachers, teacher trainers, textbook publishers and learners on the CEFR and how to integrate theory into practice
- there are gaps between authorised textbooks and CEFR-based textbooks, such as in the editing policies. For example, learning objective descriptors can be exemplified differently (i.e., explicitly or subtly) between textbook type.

5.3.4 Factors for successful implementation of the English curriculum reform

For successful implementation, the challenges above need to be addressed. Furthermore, Tono (2024) used the Comprehensive Learning System to evaluate curriculum, delivery and assessment, to offer insightful observations for successful application of the Courses of Study in the future. Tono (2024) highlights that efforts need to be made in:

- bridging the gap of the CEFR and MEXT educational policies — for the Courses of Study, commentaries, and textbooks
- specialised training for teachers, teacher trainers, textbook publishers and learners on the CEFR framework, materials, tasks, and assessment
- re-evaluating assessment to align CEFR level, skills and materials, to create more meaningful feedback for learners.

5.3.5 Summary

The 2017–2019 Courses of Study aligns with perspectives and utilises 'can do' learning objectives for five English language skills. Tono (2024) delineates previous iterations and approaches of the Courses of Study, and some of the challenges of the 2017–2019 reform. It is recommended that stakeholders, such as teachers, need a better understanding of the CEFR framework, and that work should be dedicated to supporting this framework with the Courses of Study. These recommendations are timely with the upcoming 2030 curriculum reform in Japan.

6. Part 1 key takeaways

To bring together the findings of part 1, it was important to understand the parallels between English curricula in each of the country contexts. Below is a comparison of the rich information gained through this part of the research.

6.1.1 Rationale comparison

From a macro-level, the rationale behind the English curricula reforms were quite similar. All authors highlighted that the new curricula reforms were to improve on previous iterations and ultimately improve English proficiency and competency for national gain and global recognition. Both seem to be a worldwide aims of English curricula reform and are aligned to the findings in the SLR. Each context also highlighted an emphasis on preparing students for future society. In China, the English curriculum core competencies have been designed to enable students to adapt to be life-long learners and problem-solvers. Additionally, in Korea, English as a subject is used to develop core competencies which are seen as crucial for functioning in a future society. MEXT in Japan also stress the importance of the Courses of Study staging learners for future development.

From a micro-level, the rationale becomes more complex according to context and the previous English curriculum design. In China, the focus shifted from comprehensive language ability to developing four core competencies through English as a subject. For Korea, like China, there is a focus on cultivating six competencies through English. The curriculum builds on the previous iteration — fostering a competency-based approach. Both curricula in China and Korea focus on specific core competencies.

Comparatively in Japan, MEXT are taking a skills-based approach with the desire to improve the macro-goals mentioned above (English proficiency and preparation for a future society). This is, however, to develop three core-competency based perspectives which transcend subjects which also aligns with the other contexts.

6.1.2 Standards

All the researchers mentioned that the English curricula were driven by national standards and partially with international ones — as shown in the similarities and differences table (Appendix B). Curriculum in China follows the compulsory education English standards (CECS), Korea has achievement standards, and Japan has the Courses of Study and additional commentaries. Nevertheless, there is a place for international standards. For example, the Courses of Study is influenced by the CEFR (2001) and integrates five language skills which are aligned with 'can do' learning objectives. Ahn and Lee (2024) also mention that the achievement standards are made from international frameworks such as the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) and ACTFL (2012).

6.1.3 Implementation approach

Another key finding from part 1 is each country's implementation approach. All English curricula reported are at different stages of implementation. The Courses of Study in Japan was revised in 2017–2019, and implementation was gradually completed by grade in 2024. China follows a similar timeframe: the revision was integrated simultaneously across grades in 2022 (and textbooks in 2024). Korea is significantly later, with the national standards in place in 2022, and compulsory English education designed to be implemented from 2025 by grade until 2027.

6.1.3.1 Textbooks

With curricula integration, in East Asia, textbooks are important for guiding teaching and learning. However, textbooks are not always integrated in conjunction with curriculum application. For example, in China, the revised curriculum textbooks were implemented in 2024, after the CECS revision and after implementation had begun. Comparatively, in Korea, textbook development preceded the implementation of the new curriculum. Similarly, the government-authorized textbooks in Japan were made available before implementation.

6.1.3.2 Instruction

The country English curriculum fact sheets outline the years and age of compulsory English instruction (see Appendix A). All contexts begin English instruction from grade 3; this is age 8 to 9 in China, Korea and Japan. In Japan, English is introduced as a general subject in grades 3–4, whereas in Korea and China, English is compulsory. Compulsory English instruction stops after grade 9 for China, Japan and Korea (age 15). As noted, English is compulsory for only five years in Japan. A summary is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Year and age of instruction summary across contexts

Context	English is compulsory		
	Grade	Years of instruction	Age
China	3–9	7	8/9–15 years
Korea	3–9	7	8/9–15 years
Japan	3–4 (general study)	2	8/9–15 years
	5–9	5	

In terms of implementation, the hours of instruction also offered interesting insights. For all contexts, the hours of instruction increased between elementary and secondary levels. The hours of instruction are quite similar between contexts for elementary level (grade 3–6). However, there was more variation in the number of hours of instruction per week in early secondary education (grades 7–9). Japan has the most hours of instruction in secondary, followed by China and Korea. An outline of the hours of instruction per context are represented in Table 5.

Table 5: Hours of instruction per week across contexts

Context	Approximate hours of English instruction per week	
	Elementary (grade 3–6)	Secondary (grades 7–9)
China	1.33–2 hours	2.67–3 hours
Korea	1.33–2 hours	2.25–3 hours
Japan	0.67–1.33 hours	3–3.33 hours

Period of instruction

China: elementary (2/3 x 40 minutes), secondary (4 x 40–45 minutes),

Korea: elementary (2/3 x 40 minutes), secondary junior high (3/4 x 45 minutes)

Japan: elementary (1/2 x 40 minutes), secondary junior high (4 x 45–50 minutes)

6.1.4 Challenges reported

The main challenges reported by the researchers across contexts were teachers' conceptualisations of the new reform and the alignment of curriculum standards and policy with practice. Teachers' comprehension and familiarity of the curriculum revisions, purposes, learning approaches etc., inevitably has an effect on how policy translates to the classroom. It was noted that research should centre around real classroom environments, particularly to identify how policy is interpreted and implemented by teachers — and whether textbooks, targeted language skills and assessment align with the standards and policy. These challenges have shaped part 2 of the project.

6.1.5 Factors for successful implementation

The researchers of the country reports also noted that for English curricula to be successfully implemented, there needs to be research on, or training, for teachers, teacher trainers, textbook publishers, and potentially learners, to integrate policy into practice. It was also highlighted that it is crucial for English curricula to align curriculum, delivery and assessment — building on the components presented in the CLS. It was recommended that future development and research of English curricula should be inclusive of a diverse range of perspectives (Ahn & Lee, 2024; Wang et al., 2024), and more comparative work should be conducted (Ahn & Lee, 2024; Tono, 2024).

With the instrumental nature of teachers, and the importance of integrating policy and practice underscored in this section, part 2 aims to build on the foundational understanding provided in part 1, by examining the delivery of English curricula in China, Korea and Japan (see next section).



7. Next stages of the project

This report explored part 1 of the Curriculum Comparison project, using expert input and country reports written with comprehensive literature reviews of the curricula reforms.

7.1 Part 2

The next part of the project (part 2) which is in progress, investigates the delivery of the reformed English curricula, to find out how classroom practice reflects the aims of the new curriculum. The research questions for this part are listed below.

1. How are teachers prepared for the new curriculum?
2. How do English teachers interpret the new curriculum?
3. What are the factors that influence this interpretation?
4. How do new textbooks and teaching and learning materials reflect the aims and content of the new curriculum?
5. How do teachers use these materials in classroom practice?

To explore these research questions, a large-scale survey targeting approximately 175 in each context in which English is compulsory (i.e., elementary and secondary) will be conducted. The framework for the survey explores teachers' preparation, knowledge and interpretation, and implementation — aligning with the research questions above. The framework is embedded in other research methods for part 2. There will be 20 teacher focus groups per country (n=60 across contexts) conducted with five groups of four teachers and a moderator, to gain deeper insights into teacher practice.

The last method used for this part of research is classroom observations. There will be 10–20 classroom observations per country (n=30 overall) to study what teachers are doing in the classroom. The observations endeavour to understand how classroom practice reflects the aims of the new curriculum and how teachers use these materials in classroom practice. The research question on textbooks (How do new textbooks and teaching and learning materials reflect the aims and content of the new curriculum?) will be addressed by drawing on existing research that explores textbook design and use for the English curriculum reform.

7.2 Part 3

For part 3 on assessment, desk research, analysis of the part 2 findings, and expert input will be utilised to explore the following research questions.

1. What is the purpose of assessment in each context?
2. Is there alignment of assessment to curriculum standards and delivery?
3. What types of assessment (summative and formative) are incorporated?
4. What are the standards of assessment (grading/levels)?
5. What is the frequency of assessment (how much are students assessed)?
6. How are teachers prepared for assessments?
7. How do teachers perceive assessment?

7.3 Part 4

The last part of the project is to do with monitoring and evaluation. Part 4 addresses how English curriculum reforms are evaluated. This part is expected to be carried out at the same time as part 3 (2025–2026). There are two types of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for this project: external and internal. Both types of M&E will be integrated with each part of research so that progress can be monitored throughout the project.

7.3.1 External monitoring and evaluation

Tiered interviews with different levels of the system will be conducted to understand how different stakeholders such as policy makers, decision makers (i.e., school principals), teachers, etc., review whether English curricula reforms have been effective (or not) — and whether this evaluation changes according to different groups and/or contexts. It is crucial to understand what factors affect this evaluation within contexts of use, and whether this is due to assessment results, teacher feedback, or employment (to name a few).

7.3.2 Internal monitoring and evaluation

The purpose of the internal M&E is to see how members of the project, and British Council colleagues perceive the impact of the work. Interviews will be conducted with the expert researchers and British Council regional support members. This allows modifications to the research design and helpful feedback to be integrated concurrently. Internal milestone reviews are also planned with colleagues across the British Council network, so that the work can be showcased. This M&E step allows us and others to evaluate strengths and limitations, and potentially to collaborate and share useful resources with one another.

8. Outputs

8.1 Country English curriculum fact sheets

There are several outputs for the Curriculum Comparison project. The first is the country English curriculum fact sheets which provide a concise yet informative summary of each country's curriculum (Appendix A). The fact sheets show salient features of the curriculum reform at a glance. Often curriculum documents are lengthy, dense and sometimes complex. The project team decided at the workshop in Beijing that the country English curriculum fact sheets should be accessible to a range of stakeholders. It was important to create a document that was simple to view, and that any layperson could pick up and gain a general understanding of English curriculum reform in that particular country context. The conception of the fact sheets was aligned with the part 1 methodology: in creating the fact sheets, a better knowledge was gained by all of the project team about the curriculum in each context. The fact sheets outline the year of the English curriculum reform, the level of education and when English is compulsory, the core objectives, curriculum framework, overarching themes/skills, number of teachers, and entry requirements for teachers.

8.2 Similarities and differences table

The second output is the similarities and differences table which operates as a stand-alone document (Appendix B). The tables compare English curricula reform for elementary or secondary education. The purpose of the table is to provide a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences between the English curriculum in each context. The table is designed to be easily readable and provide visually succinct information of each country's English curriculum. The rows delineate components of the CLS, aligning with curriculum, delivery and assessment, and the columns include the information that is specific for each country context. For example, some of the table rows include reform information, curriculum alignment, framework, key topics/themes etc. The notion is that curriculum stakeholders can tick the boxes for all that apply to their context, and this can be compared with the other columns/contexts.

Both the similarities and differences table and country English curriculum fact sheets are iterative documents that will be added to throughout the research parts, as more information will be gained on curriculum delivery (part 2), assessment (part 3), and M&E (part 4).

8.3 Comprehensive Learning System framework

The final output of the project is a CLS framework for English curriculum in any country context. As the CLS has been incorporated as a methodological basis for this research, the idea is that other contexts undergoing English language curricula reforms can integrate this progress so that curriculum, delivery, and assessment are explored and also evaluated to see the alignment. If other research uses the CLS framework, this allows for better comparisons to be made to other contexts, and the reforms explored in this project (i.e., China, Korea and Japan).



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Appendix A

Country English curriculum fact sheets



China



Korea



Japan

Appendix B

Similarities and differences table

Table formed from:

1. Original template for the country English curriculum fact sheets
2. Internal country reports
3. Comprehensive Learning System report (O'Sullivan, 2021)

* Please note primary and secondary are separated.

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Reformation specific	Reform information	Reform year	2022	2025–2026	2017
		Incremental reform (i.e., implemented all at once or by year/level)	All at once	Implemented by year	Incremental
	Curriculum alignment	Curriculum aligns with national standards and competencies	✓	✓	✓
		Curriculum aligns with international standards and competencies	Partially	Partially	Partially
Content/skills of curriculum amended per	Schoolyear	✓	✓		
	Level	✓		✓	
	Proficiency				
Role of English	English is compulsory for primary education	✓	✓	✓	
	English is optional for primary education				
Curriculum	Cross-curricular links	English integration with other subjects (other than English)	Project-based learning is recommended to enable cross-curricular links	Recommended	
	Core objectives	Communicative competence	✓	✓	✓
		Language ability (inc. knowledge and skills)	✓	✓	✓
		Critical thinking	✓	✓	
		Learning ability	✓	✓	
Cultural awareness		✓	✓	✓	

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Curriculum	Core objectives	CAN-do learning statements	✓		✓
		Other (please specify):			
	Curriculum framework	Skills-based		✓	✓
		Competency-based	✓	✓	
		Functional based		✓	✓
		Theme-based	✓	✓	✓
		Task-based		✓	✓
		Text/discourse supported	✓		
		Learning-activity-based	✓		✓
	Other (please specify):				
Key topics and themes	Personal life	✓	✓	✓	
	Daily/everyday activities	✓	✓	✓	
	School life/learning	✓	✓	✓	
	Social life	✓	✓		
	Culture	✓	✓	✓	
	Citizenship		✓		
	Environment	✓	✓		
	Digital technology	✓	✓		
	Interpersonal communication	✓	✓	✓	
	Nonverbal communication		✓	✓	
Other (please specify):					
Overarching skills	Comprehension/ understanding/ knowledge	✓	✓	✓	
	Expression/production	✓	✓		
	Process and skills	✓	✓		
	Values and attitudes	✓	✓		
	Communicative functions	✓	✓		
Other (please specify):					

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan
Curriculum	Language-specific skills and knowledge			
	Phonemic awareness (Listening)	✓	✓	✓
	Comprehension (Listening)	✓	✓	✓
	Listening for specific purposes (Listening)	✓	✓	
	Pronunciation and articulation (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
	Basic conversation (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
	Fluency development (Speaking)	✓		
	Vocabulary building (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
	Phonics and word recognition (Reading)	✓	✓	✓
	Reading comprehension (Reading)	✓	✓	✓
	Vocabulary development (Reading)	✓	✓	✓
	Decoding and fluency (Reading)	✓	✓	
	Penmanship (Writing)	✓	✓	✓
	Spelling (Writing)	✓	✓	✓
	Sentence construction (Writing)	✓	✓	
	Creative writing (Writing)			
	Parts of speech (Grammar and language structure)		✓	
	Sentence structure (Grammar and language structure)		✓	
	Tense (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	
	Language functions (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	✓
Punctuation (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓		
Other (please specify):				

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Curriculum	Guidance on curriculum standards	Achievement standards	✓	✓	
		Government/Ministry of Education	✓	✓	✓
		Textbooks	✓	✓	✓
		Video tutorials	✓		
		Guidance documents (please give examples)	✓		
		Other (please specify):			
Curriculum reform for secondary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Reformation specific	Reform information	Reform year	Junior high 2022 Senior high 2017	2025–2027	2018
		Incremental reform (i.e., implemented all at once or by year/level)	Junior high all at once Senior high incremental	Implemented by year	Incremental
	Curriculum alignment	Curriculum aligns with national standards and competencies	✓	✓	✓
		Curriculum aligns with international standards and competencies		Partially	Partially
Content/skills of curriculum amended per	Schoolyear	✓	✓		
	Level	✓		✓	
	Proficiency				
Curriculum	Role of English	English is compulsory for secondary education	Only to junior high *English is compulsory for students who enter senior high by completing 6 credits in grade 10	Only to junior high	Only to junior high
		English is optional for secondary education	Grade 11 and 12		
Cross-curricular links	English integration with other subjects (other than English)	Project-based learning recommended to enable cross-curricular links	Not mandatory but recommended		

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Curriculum	Core objectives	Communicative competence		✓	✓
		Language ability (inc. knowledge and skills)	✓	✓	✓
		Critical thinking	✓	✓	✓
		Learning ability	✓	✓	
		Cultural awareness	✓	✓	✓
		CAN-do learning statements	Partially for language knowledge and skills standards		
		Other (please specify):			
	Curriculum framework	Skills-based		✓	✓
		Competency-based	✓	✓	
		Functional based		✓	✓
		Theme-based	✓	✓	✓
		Task-based		✓	✓
		Text/discourse supported	✓		✓
		Learning-activity-based	✓		✓
		Grammar-based			
		Other (please specify):			
	Key topics and themes	Personal life	✓	✓	✓
		Daily/everyday activities	✓	✓	✓
		School life/learning	✓	✓	✓
		Social life	✓	✓	✓
		Culture	✓	✓	✓
		Citizenship	✓	✓	
		Environment	✓	✓	✓
		Digital technology	✓	✓	✓
		Interpersonal communication	✓	✓	✓
		Nonverbal communication	✓	✓	
		Other (please specify):			
Overarching skills	Comprehension/ understanding/ knowledge	✓	✓	✓	
	Expression/production	✓	✓	✓	
	Process and skills	✓	✓	✓	
	Values and attitudes	✓	✓	✓	
	Communicative functions	✓	✓	✓	
	Other (please specify):				

Curriculum reform for primary education		China	Korea	Japan	
Curriculum	Language-specific skills and knowledge	Phonemic awareness (Listening)	✓	✓	
		Comprehension (Listening)	✓	✓	✓
		Listening for specific purposes (Listening)	✓	✓	
		Pronunciation and articulation (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
		Basic conversation (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
		Fluency development (Speaking)	✓		✓
		Vocabulary building (Speaking)	✓	✓	✓
		Phonics and word recognition (Reading)	✓		✓
		Reading comprehension (Reading)	✓	✓	✓
		Vocabulary development (Reading)	✓	✓	✓
		Decoding and fluency (Reading)	✓		✓
		Penmanship (Writing)			
		Spelling (Writing)	✓		
		Sentence construction (Writing)	✓	✓	✓
		Creative writing (Writing)			✓
		Parts of speech (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	✓
		Sentence structure (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	✓
		Tense (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	✓
		Language functions (Grammar and language structure)	✓	✓	✓
		Punctuation (Grammar and language structure)	✓		
Other (please specify):					
Guidance on curriculum standards	Achievement standards	✓	✓	✓	
	Government/Ministry of Education	✓	✓	✓	
	Textbooks	✓	✓		
	Video tutorials	✓			
	Guidance documents (please give examples)	✓			
	Other (please specify):				

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