ENGLISH SUBJECT CORE COMPETENCE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHINA AND WHAT CAN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS DO?

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ABSTRACT

ENGLISH SUBJECT CORE COMPETENCE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHINA & WHAT CAN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS DO?

Simin Zhang

Under the Supervision of Kory Wein, PhD

In recent years, the government in China has strongly advocated the cultivation of students’ core competence. Teachers are required to use the English curriculum standards for senior high schools (2017) as a necessary reference for their teaching, whether in primary schools, middle schools or high schools. English subject core competence (ESCC) covers four dimensions, linguistic competencies, learning ability, thinking quality and cultural disposition.

Core competence mainly refers to the necessary qualities and important skills that students should have to adapt to social development and needs. In the education concept of the new era, it is required to cultivate students’ good concept of the overall situation of social development, pay attention to the cultivation of students’ skills and the study of general education courses, make clear the key combination and important skills that students must possess, and change the traditional teaching mode based on the theory of fractions.

Under the requirements of the new curriculum standards, the traditional education and the teaching mode should be reformed and innovated accordingly, so that students can accept and be interested in English. This study also attempts to explore some suggestions for primary school English teaching and help teachers improve teaching efficiency.

At present, the research on the core competence of English subject and English teaching mode is still in the development stage. The traditional English teaching model is usually teacher-centered. Under the requirements of the new curriculum standards, the traditional education and
the teaching mode should be reformed and innovated accordingly, so that students can accept and be interested in English. This study also attempts to explore some suggestions for primary school English teaching model to help teachers improve teaching efficiency.
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Chapter I: Introduction

The English language has attained a pivotal role in the daily lives for the People’s Republic of China, whether it’s day-to-day social activities or as a major position in the school’s curriculum. Since the mid 1990s, in fact, English has become a core element, along with Mathematics and Chinese. Furthermore, it has become a main, required subject in the entire Chinese education system, from primary to postgraduate schooling and also a fundamental element in all China’s entrance examinations (Cheng, 2002).

Ford (2010) estimated that there were at least 250 million Chinese students studying the English language, as compared to the American students who took up the subject. This number seems to increase everyday as per the new Chinese policy to introduce English as standard compulsory subject for all the participants in the education (Ministry of education, 2001). According to Hu (2002), English was taught as a primary one subject, being studied for at least two to three hours a week in about eight million primary schools. This effort is done to achieve the ultimate goal, which is to make English courses available for seven to nine in the compulsory education stage and a further three to five years for those who go to university (Cheng 2002). According to Chinese officials, it is a challenge to provide this subject to an estimated 121.57 million Chinese primary school students nationwide.

The term core competency in education refers to the necessary skills and qualities that should be possessed by students to adapt successfully with the developmental needs and requirements at the social level. In the modern educational era, there is a need for students to be cultivated with the overall needs of social development, and attention should be given to the aspect that they comprehend equally both general and special education courses. To successfully achieve
that it is important that the teaching methods be developed based on the key combination of

teaching strategies that help students in possessing such skills. The traditional teaching methods
must be changed to incorporate core competencies that are based on the theory of fractions.

**Statement of the Problem**

There has been a significant change in the educational policies of the People’s Republic of
China during the last few decades. Teaching English subjects at schools has been given significant
importance now. English is now considered a core competency for primary school students.
Scholars believe that there are two main reasons behind this new acceptance for English subject.
First, the leadership of China has now believed in the fact that learning the English language plays
an important role in national modernization. Considering primary school students are the future of
the country, making them proficient in English will help in better presenting the country on
national and international platforms. Secondly, a generation proficient in the English language will
be able to avail better educational, social and economic opportunities. It is advocated that having
proficiency in the English language allows people to access both material resources and symbolic
capital that facilitates the betterment of one’s well-being. English is also considered as the key
subject for students when they have to apply to higher education institutes either in or outside
China.

**Purpose of the Study**

Despite the fact that English plays a critical role in self-development and avails social and
economic opportunities, the time allocated for English subjects as instructed by the National
curriculum is quite less as compared to the other core subjects like Chinese and mathematics. Also,
there is a limited number of English books in the curricula to choose from. Currently, the primary
school English curriculum in China is designed fundamentally to develop self-confidence, a positive attitude, and an interest towards learning English. The teachers of primary school are instructed and trained to cultivate the sense of language in young learners and work to improve their pronunciation and intonation. Hence the main aim of this training is to develop the preliminary ability in students to speak and use English in their daily exchange of words and use it as a foundation for their future study ventures.

The reforms in the educational system for improving the core competency of English in students is in the developmental stage. Traditionally, the teaching methods in China are “teacher-centered,” which is constantly being advocated to be reformed, but there is a lot to be done in this regard. The shortcomings are the reason behind students’ limited English competency at the primary level.

The requirements for the new curriculum standard in China necessitate that the traditional education system and mode of teaching should be innovative in a way that students will become interested and accept learning in English. The current study attempts to analyze the core competence of English subjects and the teaching model that has been used to study this subject. The study will focus on analyzing the current situation of teaching English subject in China and how primary school teachers can increase their capabilities and skills to make English learning more meaningful and interesting to students.

**Research Objectives**

Based on the facts presented above, the following objectives are developed for the current study:

- To critically analyze the situation of English core competency of primary students in the People’s Republic of China.
• To discuss and analyze China’s “The English curriculum standards for senior high schools” (2017) and discuss how it can be applied at primary level teaching.

• To discuss what methods can be adopted by primary teachers to increase the English Core Competency in primary students.

**Research Question**

The research questions for the current study are

• What is the current situation of the English core competency of primary students in the People’s Republic of China?

• How can “The English Curriculum standards for senior high schools (2017)” be applied at primary level education to achieve English core competency in students?

• What are the methods that can be adopted by the primary teachers to increase the English Core Competency in primary students?

**Significance of the Study**

Developing English competency in people requires long-term planning and must be acquired at the primary and secondary levels to develop acceptance and create readiness. The inadequacy of primary teachers is thought to be the main reason behind the lack of core competencies in students, which in turn creates issues for them at the secondary and higher education level. To develop effective competencies, it is necessary to address any inadequacies in the education and teaching system. Training teachers and providing them with challenging English curriculum could greatly impact their skills and abilities that will ultimately foster the development of English capabilities in China.
The current study will present the relevant literature in a meaningful way that will increase the comprehension of the issue under study as well as provide insight on how teachers can enhance their personal capabilities to further enhance the students’ English core competency. The study will also be beneficial for educational policymakers as it will highlight the methods, policies, and criteria through which an integrated and encouraging environment can be established for both teachers and students in which they both can work on increasing their English comprehension and communication skills.

Methodology

The study design for the current study is qualitative. The researcher conducted a desk-based and research-focused study that aims to collect the relevant data to answer several research questions. The deductive approach is applied where a conclusion is drawn from the data collected.

Data Collection Source

Secondary data collection sources are utilized by the researchers to collect data. These resources include journal articles, books, websites, annual reports, public publications, etc. Only reliable sources were used in order to produce authentic data.

Data Analysis

The nature of the study is qualitative; therefore, qualitative data analysis was used. Content analysis was applied through which relevant information has been extracted and presented in a way that made it understand that whether the research questions have been addressed properly or not.
Results and Discussion

This section will present the study results along with the discussion. The discussion will allow comprehending whether the study results affirm or contradict with the results researchers who conducted similar studies in this area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This section will conclude the study results and findings. Further recommendations are made in the light of current research on further suggesting that how teachers can incorporate different strategies to increase the English core competencies of students at the primary level.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Over the years, the Chinese government has begun to emphasize the significance of implementing the English language into the curriculum of primary students. The initial model was introduced in the 1950s during the Chinese Soviet reign where they issued a seven-year guideline for the language. Furthermore, English was officially renowned as the first foreign language (Fu, 1986). However, as the Cultural Revolution was inaugurated by Mao Ze-dong, the use of the English language became almost obsolete. Foreign literature, books, broadcasts, even newspapers were banned. It was years before the Chinese population could get past their faux pas of using English in their day-to-day lives. People began to accept this language in the late 1970s. This was an action taken by the communist party to portray their sense of modernization and acceptance of international culture and society (Yin & Li, 2011). The acceptance of this foreign language was regarded as the Republic of China being more progressive, socializing, creative, and modern.

The Chinese had finally opened their doors for international interactions. As a result, English gradually became an important part of the population. By the 1990s, ninety-seven percent of China’s secondary schools taught English as a foreign language (Ross, 1992). Primary schools and universities soon adopted this language and made it a crucial part of their curriculum. With the acceptance of the language, conventional Chinese teaching and learning methods were highly criticized. English textbooks, newspapers, audios, and videos became highly famous (Yang, 2000). According to Yang, the Republic of China takes pride in the amount of time and energy that is, executed into learning the English language. 45.5 million students are studying English, whereas 350,000 learned Russian and only 150,000 took Japanese (LIU, 1995).

Both the private and public primary schools have taken English as the number one foreign language into their school curriculum. Initially, the acceptance of the language was only restricted
to private schools. Foreign teachers were specially brought into school so that the subject was studied and taught in depth. Later, the ministry of education (MOE) created a law in all states and provinces where English was to be taught in the nine-year compulsory education system, having at least four English lessons per week (Cheng, 2002). Although English is not the native language, the Chinese ministry of education has issued guidelines for other foreign languages, including Russian and Japanese in primary and secondary schools and all national examinations held throughout the country. Nonetheless, due to its worldwide recognition and social acceptance, English is still regarded as the preferred subject. To further promote the language, the ministry of education has introduced a new project titled “The flowing dragon of University,” where it has promoted textbooks and literature to coordinate English education, starting from grade one in primary schools to tertiary levels (Zhao et al., 2010).

Over the years, China has made the necessary amendments to its educational reforms to meet the demands of the revolutionary world. To keep up with the international standards of education, the ministry of education in China has introduced new standards and curriculum strategies in order to improve student learning. “The senior high school curricular plans and standards” was introduced in 2017 for 20 different subjects for senior high school. These changes were considered crucial for further student development, effective teaching and sufficient retention of knowledge that could be applied in everyday lives (Education, 2017).

To meet up with the advancing technologies and standards of the international communities, it has become a necessity to modify the education system. This is especially true in the years of senior high education, where social interaction has reached its peak point; the students must be educated about the latest news and advancements so that they may, in no aspects, fall behind from other students learning around the world. Therefore, no compromises are to be made
on the quality of education. Moreover, the curriculum should be such that the students present themselves as keen and enthusiastic learners. They must be able to differentiate between what subjects are productive for them when it comes to application in their practical lives. In comparison to the old curriculum, the new curriculum focuses on the miscellany of the subjects further categorizing into three different entities: compulsory subjects, selective subjects, and elective subjects. This provides a wide variety of topics covered and instills amongst the students a sense of enthusiasm and motivation to learn. The examination criteria have also been reevaluated to meet the international criteria.

Along with the modernizing changes made to the curriculum, the government of China requires the country’s rich legacy be included in the syllabus. History dating from the infamous Qing dynasty to the soviet and republic rule is included. China has a highly rich culture, and the government has made great efforts in making sure that The Chinese rule is known to all students. Despite providing the trending modern knowledge to its students, the ministry of education has its ways of arousing the love for ones country in all times (Zhou & Sun, 2004).

In the previous curriculum, a total of three foreign languages were offered as subjects. These included Japanese and Russian along with English. But now, three new different languages have been introduced, making a total of six foreign languages. The new subjects are French, German and Spanish. The amendments made in 2003 were made in order to broaden international communication and transactions. These languages will increase the scope of students in the global market.

The English language has widespread use around the globe and is used as a universal means of communicating and interacting, including in the People’s Republic of China. However, the native tongue is Chinese and, needless to say, the frequency of English usage is still low, especially
in the rural parts of the country (Adamson, 2004). But the government of China realizes the need for introducing English into students’ practical lives and for modernization so they may stand shoulder to shoulder with competitors around the world.

With the widespread use of English language globally, China too did not lag behind. It introduced the first national English syllabus in 1978 known as “English syllabus for ten year full time primary and secondary schools.” This was the first complete, detail-oriented syllabus circulated in the school curriculum in the history of English language teaching in China (G, 2005).

To make the 1978 syllabus effective, several methods were to be adopted by the teachers to reach a productive outcome. Firstly, they must revise their reading and independent communicating skills. In order to do so, emphasis must be made on reading and understanding English literature. This was followed by enhancing phonics, proper pronunciation, identifying Basic English vocabulary and rephrasing, and translating the literature from Chinese to English and vice versa. Moreover, priority was also given to attaining a firm grip on grammar and punctuation. Unfortunately, implementing this syllabus became highly challenging. One reason was due to the lack of resources for the teachers and students to establish an understanding of the language. But mainly, however, English language teaching was considered to be inappropriate when Deng Xiaoping took leadership in China. He highly criticized the language and the trend towards modernization (A.S.L., 2005).

The ministry of education not only aims to provide Basic English education, but it also guides its teachers to achieve other objectives. This includes learning to work in cooperation with peers, adjoined tasks and group assignments are appointed, continuous discussion with the teachers in order to revise the previously discussed syllabus, performing extracurricular activities that encourage the use of English language and also the development of basic skills (Wong & Dubey-
Jhaveri, 2015). Primary teachers must make their students aware of the importance of education and the beneficiary results that come along with it if this language is studied thoroughly.
Chapter III: Case Studies Analysis

As mentioned above, this research will be based on secondary data using books, published journals and articles. For this research, various articles have been reviewed to provide insight on the topic. This study aims to explore some suggestions for primary school teachers, as it will help them in teaching English and improve their teaching efficiency. According to the requirements of the new curriculum, the traditional education mode should be reformed and innovated accordingly.

The following are some of the studies which will provide insight into the selected topic of research.

*Case Study 1:*

*Promoting a Special Learning Environment for Second Language,* by Qiaoyan Hea, Martin Valcke, and Chang Zhu

This study studied the development of special environment that are conducive to English language learning. The authors developed and monitored a special environment in which a particular learning structure was implemented and four stages of student development was discovered. The four identified stages were independent operation, elaborative design, gradual maturity, development and reinforcement. The observations attained by the authors from this special environment proved to be helpful in imparting them English language competence, especially among primary students. The study further revealed that it is better to perform instructional duties and that primary teachers must have all these goals stated before them if they are looking for a sound learning environment. Furthermore, they argue that primary students should be engaged in self-directed and interactive learning activities and further identify the individual requirements of the students. The authors are of the view that primary school teachers
in China are currently in better position for imparting core competence to their students who are learning English.

*Case Study 2:*

*Perceptions of ELT among English Language Teachers in China, by Jackie Fung-King*

This research examines the perceptions of English teachers in China. This new approach towards curriculum development in China has focused their attention from vocabulary development and grammar towards English communication skills. This research was performed by the author using a questionnaire that was distributed among primary English language teachers belonging to Guangdong. The research findings revealed that primary school teachers were aware of the requirement of using a learner-centered approach that eventually assists in increasing the communicative proficiency of the students. The study further revealed that teachers seldom use their authentic learning materials provided and instead rely mostly on the available textbooks in the market on a particular subject. The author is of the view that primary teachers must undergo a change in their role from merely being a teacher to an adviser, an organizer and a facilitator of learning. In this way the change of their role will assist the students in developing core competence in English.

*Case Study 3:*

*The Impact of the Advent of English in Primary Schools on the Development of College English in China, by Jun Liu and Zhongxin Dai*

This study is based on identifying the advent of primary schools in China. The authors are of the opinion that developing competency in English requires incorporating national standards at primary and secondary levels. The authors of this study hold the view that developing competency
in English requires availability of primary schools teachers because it creates problems at the secondary and higher levels. The underlying reason is that the base of the students are not built properly; hence, it is required to properly invest in the development of teachers training at primary level, as it will foster in the development of English education in China from an early stage. The study also proposed that primary school teachers should also self-examine their competencies and talk about the necessary improvements in the curriculum.

Case Study 4:

*English Language Education In China: Policies, Progress, and Problems, by Guangwei Hu*

This research study is based on studying the policies, problems and progress made so far in primary and secondary schools. The main focus was addressing the concerns of English language education in China. The author argues that there is an insufficient number of teachers who are teaching English at the primary levels. This study also concluded that there is a dire need to train primary school teachers in English language subjects, as doing so will help them to better educate students. The author of this study is also of the view that teachers must be self-motivated for imparting such competencies in their students. All these can further be augmented by introducing the classroom engagement activities to enhance the learning process of students.

Case Study 5:

*Integrated English in China – An Effective CLIL Model of Foreign Languages and Cultures Learning, by Jianfang Xiao*

The author recommends strategies that can help increase competencies among students. The study recommends seven teaching principles to achieve the desired level of competency in English. These include activity or theme-based listening, speaking and listening first, writing and
reading, direct learning that is supported with active participation and practical use of English. The author of this study researched various cases belonging to different regions of mainland China for validating the efficiency of strategies and principles. The adoption of such strategies and principles will allow primary school English teachers to enhance their respective proficiencies.

Case Study 6:

*Preparing Elementary English Teachers: Innovations at Pre-Service Level, by Mochamad Subhan Zein*

The author of this research suggests the efficacy of primary English teachers resides in their development of core competencies. The author is of the view that pre-service system must be applied to help them acquire subject-level expertise. Such a pre-service system will provide a general framework for providing necessary knowledge and skills that can fulfill the occupational requirements. The study further proved that there is a severe need for redesigning the education and primary English teachers’ learning mechanisms as it will also fulfill the core competence requirement of students. The training schemes thus developed through this mechanism will provide teachers the necessary skills to increase teaching requirements both at primary and elementary level.

Case Study 7:

*Exploring Chinese EFL Teachers’ Knowledge and Beliefs Relating to the Teaching of English Reading in Public Primary Schools in China, by Meina Luo, Susan Main, Graeme Lock, R. Malatesha Joshi, and Chenyin Zhong*

The authors have identified various perceptions and beliefs of primary teachers that affect the instructional practices of teachers. The research further revealed that there exist differences
between the instructional practices and teachers’ beliefs that are present among primary school teachers. The research revealed that it also helps in developing English language competencies of their students. The authors assert that instructional and institutional practices need to be aligned and new teaching mechanisms must be included. The research also confirmed that prevailing examination mechanism also needs to be modified and updated with new learning models.

The teacher should focus more on developing skills of the students and on achieving the objectives of the revised policy related to curriculum as designed by the Chinese ministry of education. Further it is also significant to mention that the study has identified school context as principal factor between the beliefs of teachers and perceptions and their teaching practices. All these contextual factors should be implemented in schools by evaluating the location of the school, status of the school parents, socio-economic status of the school community, the level of students’ English, along with the competitive teaching pressure of new learning models, etc. In all it can be asserted that all these contextual elements, along with teacher education, must be prepared for through pre-service teacher training, in which specific courses are designed to enhance a teacher’s ability to impart English competency to their students.

Overall, by evaluating all these case studies and performing in-depth analysis it can be concluded from the discussion that the role of primary teachers can play a significant role in making their student adept in English core competencies. It can also be concluded that skill development of teachers must be combined with revised curriculum policy, as it will help teachers in developing them.

It is important that the teachers of the China adopt a proactive role. They must change their role from merely being an instructor to that of being organizer, an adviser, and a facilitator of
learning. It is also critical that they consider various principles and strategies identified and recommended by the researchers to enhance their teaching effectiveness. It is equally important that the relevant authorities must play their role to provide training facilities and opportunities to these teachers. With their combined efforts, the standard of core English competency among the Chinese primary students can be elevated. This, in turn, would create a positive effect on the education standards of the country.
Chapter IV: Discussion and Results

Objective 1: To Critically Analyze the Situation of English Core Competency of Primary Students in People’s Republic of China

The ministry of education has taken upon themselves the responsibility to provide appropriate and sufficient English text so that it may be efficiently used by the locals and in the school curriculum. The courses and outlines for the schools are intricately designed by the ministry of Chinese education to meet the demands and trends arising in the social market and nationally. However, educational systems in Shanghai and Zhejiang constitute their own syllabus and courses. But these courses also need to be reviewed by a separate department in the ministry of education known as the “National evaluation committee of primary and secondary school textbooks” (Admason, 2001).

China is continuously working towards reforming its educational system. As trades and fairs have markedly increased with the international community, China is making sure to keep up with them at all forums. The country has received help from several international organizations, including UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, etc. so that it can reconstitute its literary system. This aid for educational reform is as high as $100 million (Ministry of Education, 2001). The World Bank itself has loaned China $14.7 billion for this purpose.

The primary objective of these educational reforms is to instill a sense of moral and intellectual understanding. Students are encouraged to develop an enthusiasm for keen and active learning. According to people’s Education press, one of the main reasons for introducing English the main foreign language in the primary school curriculum is so that students are well taught and knowledgeable with the language that is globally spoken and accepted (Curdt-Christiansen &
Hancock, 2014). The Education press focuses to attain China’s concept of four modernizations. Emphasis is placed on that because there is a noticeable shift that has occurred where foreign languages are applied more in the practical field rather than studying the language.

Secondly, there is more economic significance than the political value of studying and accepting English into Chinese culture. A sense of modernization is inculcated in the population. Whereas in the primary schools, the main objective is so that the students can communicate efficiently in English and develop a thorough understanding of the subject, starting at an early age, where schooling was initiated. However, English was not readily taught nor used in the primary schools as it was being applied in secondary schools and universities. But this change was crucial to meet the economic and social demands of the changing society (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2019). According to the ministry of education in 2001, acceptance of foreign languages was regarded as the sign of mere respect for our international friends and was seen as an opportunity to learn and broaden our horizons to appreciate the cultural shifts. Admiration for the language was further noticed when English gradually replaced the native tongue, Chinese, as a mode of communication in the classroom. The use of mother language was to be restricted, whereas English was highly promoted in day-to-day lives and school activities and lessons (Ministry of Examination, 2001). These actions allow the students to be prepared and compete globally.

Keeping up with the current trend and increasing globalization in China, the students of primary school are not only given the basic knowledge about the language but also taught how to apply and therefore practice English use in their everyday lives. The teaching styles have taken a shift to promote further popularity amongst students. Written work, texts, reading, and working independently have now been replaced by new trends. Group work, oral presentations,
performance-based thinking and increased praise for students is now common. In fact, the quality of work is appreciated more than the quantity of work.

Since the Soviet time, the Chinese central government has appointed different authorities to provide textbooks and literature that is relevant to the demand of that time. Institutes such as South China Normal, Beijing Normal and Sichuan Educational Science Institute have also produced outcomes for this cause. The first primary English book was published by People’s Education Press in 1985. With 13 lessons in the entire book, only 3 out of 87 pages were colored. The message given by this book was purely devoted to the love of the nation’s country. But in 1992 Pan Pacific Publishing Company and People’s Education Press published primary English China book 1. Although it contained only 8 lessons, 103 out of 107 pages were colored. The lessons were directed towards unity and environmental protection. However, the lessons were still insufficient to keep up with the latest socializing trends of the community. Finally, in 2001, Longman Limited and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press introduced primary English book 2. With only 7 units, dialogues practice and pronunciation were focused along with language development activities. In the latest book, English western characters are introduced, thereby giving an explicit picture of the western culture and English heritage. No political views are discussed. In fact, understanding and appreciating different international policies are promoted and as up to date with the latest trends (Yang, 2002).

However, the use of the English language in primary schools as a communicative approach is still limited. Although textbooks support language use, teachers are not fully trained to teach a foreign language. After all, Chinese is still their native tongue. The students feel they are not able to perform well in their English examinations because Chinese is still the main mode for communication. Students study English only one to three hours per week; therefore, exposure to
the language is limited (Luo et al., 2019). They may be taught the subject, but they do not get to practice the language in their daily lives. Moreover, due to the vast landscape of the country, many teachers that keep a profound grasp on English are brought into the business community. A serious challenge is faced by the students and teachers alike so that English may be implemented successfully.

To overcome this issue, the government should invest more funds to conduct workshops and train their teachers so that they may successfully teach their students the English language. This awareness is further rising as it is evident that English is the mode of communication medium in all business transactions. China aims to attain full modernization of the foreign language by the mid twenty-first century (Liu, 2003). Its mission is to make the students fully fluent in the English language. This is the reason, great emphasis is paid on the subject as soon as they start primary schooling.

**Objective 2: The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School and How It Can Be Applied at Primary Level Education to Achieve English Core Competency**

Keeping in view with the changing learning trends globally, the new educational reforms aim to strengthen the students individual “core qualities.” This idea completely changes the concept of teaching. More attention is paid on concept-based learning from simple learning through problem solving. The needs of the students have also evolved to strengthen their inquiry-based learning concepts. The idea is to provide knowledge that can sustain with them throughout their day to day activities, thereby providing lifelong learning. The new curriculum focuses on imparting sustainable knowledge and skills and development of emotions and social values. The emphasis is given on a variety of subjects as to raise the self-confidence of the students so that
they may proudly stand, shoulder to shoulder with international students (Ding, 2016). The educational reforms are modified at three different management systems; namely at national, regional and school levels. A profound professional yet friendly enthusiasm is brought into the field of learning, where both the teachers and students actively participate and cooperate with each other to produce the desired outcomes, and where learning and teaching is up to the standards.

New reforms for the senior high schools were brought into action initially in 2014. The ministry of education introduced “fulfilling the fundamental task of foreign education” and “the opinion on deepening curriculum reform in an all-round way” as guidelines for the crucial changes in the educational board. Further, they conducted several tests and carried out research on more than 40,000 students in over 19 different cities of China. This was done to check the efficacy of the educational reforms. Later, a committee was formed in 2017 by national teaching material to assess the standards of education. Finally, after thorough scrutiny, “the senior high school curricular plans and standards” was issued by the ministry of education in 2018 as the final guideline to be followed by all the teachers and students alike. However, the senior high schools in China have a long way to come before they can completely modernize the educational standards. Teachers have yet to learn how to implement these reforms and the students have yet to learn how to apply these teachings in their practical lives.

It has become evident that English is an important means of interaction and communication internationally. The importance of English as a tool can be recognized by the fact that English is now taught in very early ages in China, starting initially in primary schools. The ministry of education believes that introducing the English language early into the students’ lives has several advantages. Children, being quick learners can learn the new language and start using it in their everyday communication (Mo & Luo, 2019). They become more fluent and have a firm grasp on
the subject early on. However, many challenges are faced by the teachers and students into achieving this target.

It is true that no curriculum or educational standards were introduced regarding English as the first foreign language at national levels. It was only by the end of the twentieth century that awareness regarding use of English began to spread and people began to accept the reforms made in its regard. But these reforms required definite alteration. Firstly, school administration, teachers, parents and other educational organizations did not see a productive outcome in their students. Although learning English since third or fourth grade, students were not able to speak fluently at all. Secondly, there was no fixed precedent regarding teaching English in primary students. Moreover, the number of qualified English teachers was very limited.

As awareness grew, further modified reforms came into application. With major emphasis on primary schools, introducing English from grades 3 and onwards. The main objective was to recognize the words and read them in the correct pronunciation. This is followed by reading out plain texts and short stories which aims to further enhance the English vocabulary. All of this was achieved in collaboration with the educational boards, the teachers, parents of students as to revise the subject with their children and finally the students themselves.

In order to achieve pertinence and sustain English core competency for students in China, the ministry of education has come to believe that this initiative should be taken when students are at their peak to learn and effectively retain new information. This can occur only when students are in their primary schools. The educational board has come to realize that Basic English knowledge cannot be retained effectively when students have reached their secondary schooling. Therefore, introducing the foreign language in early years is proving to be an effective regime for understanding and implicating the language in their practical lives.
Objective 3: What Methods Can Be Adopted by the Primary Teachers to Increase the English Core Competency in Primary Students

Due to growing international demand, need for English language could not be neglected by the ministry of education in China. After several studies and thorough evaluation, the ministry introduced educational reforms in 2001, which were further modified in 2011. During this time, the population of China had realized the need for attaining a deep, profound knowledge on the subject. The awareness was not only limited to the major cities of the country, but had also spread to other parts of China, reducing disparity between different parts of the country. Moreover, the decision was made to introduce English from early primary grades.

Primary school teachers were also given special guidelines and instructed through workshops as to how they can further improve core competency amongst students. It has been demonstrated that there are four basic skills involved in knowing a language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These entities make it easier for the teachers, as they can now separately focus on the part that requires attention. Different English movies, audios, videos illustrated by several cartoons are used as tools to teach students the basics of the language. Identification of alphabets, followed by adjoining the alphabets to make small words and finally the correct pronunciations. Once this skill is mastered, teachers move on the next level, where students are able to read short English stories, assisted with pictures. Along with these skills, the students are advised to apply the newly learned concepts into their practical lives so that they may become fluent in English. Next, teachers must provide examples that serve as reference to students when they are required to write small words and phrases. On a slightly higher primary level, primary students are taught spellings, new vocabulary and the correct usage of grammar and punctuation. They are educated to read the text aloud and finally urged to write down on paper what they have learned.
According to the new curriculum issued in 2011, the teachers are emphasized on adopting a new technique, “Task-based Language Teaching” (H.Y, 2007). Rather than focusing on linguistic-based syllabus, teachers are encouraged to use task-based language teaching (TBLT). Through this method, teachers formulate real-life, practical scenarios in which students can learn problem-solving techniques and improve their communication in English. The education board must ensure that it provides its teaching staff with sufficient reading material. They highlight the need for reading outside the standard school curriculum in order to augment English vocabulary and learning. Since we live today in a digital world, use of DVDs, Youtube channels, cartoons, TV programs, etc. is suggested. However, this education may be challenging (Li, 2007), especially in schools located outside big cities and in ones that are poorly resourced. It is the responsibility of the educational board in China to provide standard teachers to schools in these areas. Provision of internet equipped computer facilities and literature-rich libraries has become a necessity.

Another method discussed that aims to raise English core competency is increasing the number of lessons and hours given to the subject per week (Zhang, 2010). Some schools designate only a 40-minute class for the subject every second week. This amount of time is insufficient. Teachers need to work on formulating timetables with more lessons for English. Moreover, they need to encourage students to purchase English books outside their curriculum course so they may frequently practice reading and develop fluency in English.

Teachers are considered the medium for transmission of language. Teachers in primary schools are especially instructed to implement the new English curriculum. This led to an increase in demand for qualified English teachers (G, 2005). The quality of success in English in students of primary schools is directly proportional the qualification and number of teachers available. Finally concluding, in order to improve core competency, the ministry of education board must
ensure that the teachers teaching the subject must have a firm grasp on the subject. The teachers should possess a certain degree so they do not instill incorrect knowledge in students, rather improve English core competency in primary schools.
Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be said very conveniently that the English language is the most widely used means for communication around the globe. Whether its use in the business market or in the education system. Although, not a native language in many countries, English is still used the main mode transmitting knowledge in any field. People's Republic of China realizes its need. Keeping up with the global trend, China is making utmost efforts to increase English core competencies.

Conclusion

Through decades, there have been several changes in the institutional structure. These alterations are continuously being made so that its students can effectively compete with international professionals. At the moment, China is one of the leading trading countries in the world. The government realizes that students are the future entrepreneurs, leading them into the world. Therefore, these future leaders should be up to date with the modernizing world; that means being fluent and possess a firm grasp of the English language. To further increase English core competencies, the ministry of education in China has introduced a curriculum that not only aims to target secondary students but also students in primary schools. They believe that children become masters of foreign language if exposed to the language in their learning stages of life. Besides initiating a local awareness of the use of common English as a foreign language amongst the Chinese population, the ministry of education also focuses on educating its teachers and giving them the guidance they require to produce keen learners who possess adaptive knowledge over the subject. Teachers are specifically educated in regards to subject delivery. As it is believed that students are truly the pioneers for the future of the country. Although English was not readily
accepted as the foreign language in China, the government is taking actions for its overall acceptance and is thereby continuously making efforts for this purpose.

Recommendations

Although China is one of the few countries that is up to date with the current and continuously evolving trends around the world, there is always potential for further growth and development. New suggestions and recommendations are continuously being provided to the ministry of education in China to enhance its core competency in English language. This initially starts with creating awareness, especially in areas outside the big cities of the country. Primary and secondary schools in these far off, rural areas may be underprivileged and perhaps under-equipped. Moreover, there is limited access to highly trained teachers and useful resources that prove to be useful in the learning of English. Recent resource material for this purpose is crucial for healthy growth. This includes modern literature that is updated in libraries. Also, access to the digital world has proved to be highly crucial. Some resource materials, including educational videos, movies, and cartons, are available through the internet.

The government should ensure these basic requirements are provided to schooling institutes at the level of both primary as well as secondary education. To encourage more effective language learning, some suggest that the medium of examinations, especially at secondary and higher university education should be conducted in the English language. This way the students know to have selective focus over the subject. There should also be more advanced syllabus and literature at university levels so that many students are encouraged to take up English as their main degree course. This way, more qualified personnel can graduate in English. Moreover, the parents
and families are advised to include English speaking in their daily activities so they may become more adaptive, thereby, improving overall English core competency.
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