



## FROM AROUND THE WORLD *SOUTH KOREA*

### Korean National Project for the Introduction of ELT to Primary State Schools

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#### Background

English was introduced as a compulsory subject to pupils in Year 3, who are at the age of 8 to 9, in all the primary state schools in March 1997. So far English has been taught as an extra-curricular activity at most primary schools since 1982. The introduction is mainly due to the needs for globalisation; there has been an increase in the need to learn English as an international language. Even most Korean university graduates have difficulties in communicating with English-speaking people despite their experiences of learning English for 10 years. This is because English language teaching has focused exclusively on grammar and translation in preparation for the entrance examination for universities. Recently the exam board has added listening comprehension to the components of the English test so that English teachers at secondary schools started developing students' listening skills. However, university students still have problems in understanding natural spoken English. Such a situation has strongly reflected that the Ministry of Education needs to take an action to develop students' communicative competence. At last the Ministry of Education has planned the project of introducing English to primary schools on a national level. The project, which covers only the children in Year 3 in 1997, will expand to cover the children in

Year 3 and 4 in 1998, the children in Year 3, 4, and 5 in 1999, and the children in Year 3, 4, 5, and 6 in 2000.

### **English Curriculum at primary level**

The aim of the primary English curriculum is to develop pupils' communicative competence. The objectives are to enhance pupils' interest and self-confidence in English and to develop their ability to understand and produce basic spoken English. The main principle is the learner-centred communicative approach. The focus is placed on speaking and listening skills. The curriculum which was drawn up by the Ministry of Education is shown in Table 1. The children learn English through 2 lessons per week.

**Table 1.** The English curriculum for each Year at primary level

	Topics *	Communicative functions	Vocabulary limit	Skill focus
Year 3	daily life topics	expressing personal feelings, greeting & leave-taking, apologising, introducing oneself, expressing & acknowledging gratitude, making requests & suggestions, giving instructions, forbidding, issuing commands, asking about & describing people and things	100 words	speaking listening
Year 4	daily life topics	(following functions are added) expressing or inquiring about want or capability/incapability, expressing wishes, describing present actions	200 words (100 more words)	speaking listening reading
Year 5	daily life topics	(following functions are added) expressing concern for other people's welfare, congratulating, making appointments, inviting, making a phone call, giving or inquiring directions	350 words (150 more words)	speaking listening reading writing
Year 6	daily life topics	(following functions are added) receiving visitors, comparing, offering food or drinks, describing past actions, expressing agreement/disagreement,	500 words (150 more words)	speaking listening reading writing

		reporting other's utterances		
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(\* The selection of topics is based on pupils' needs, interest, and their affective and cognitive development level.)

**English teachers and Teacher training**

There are two types of primary teachers who are teaching children English. One is the class teacher who completed only the general English teacher training course, which runs through 120 hours. The other is the so-called specialised primary English teacher, who was originally a primary teacher and completed the intensive English teacher training course, which runs through 240 hours, as well as the general English teacher training course and with scores of 500 and more in TOEFL or TOEIC. The provision of specialised primary English teachers is firstly to lessen the class teachers' work load, and secondly, to make English language teaching more effective. There is a strong tendency among educators to believe that primary English should be taught by specialised primary English teachers.

Now 241 schools have specialised English teachers among the total 4491 schools. In Seoul, 79 schools have the specialised English teachers among 241 schools. The schools to which the specialised English teachers were allocated have more than 9 classes in Year 3. The number of teachers, trained and to be trained through the two In-Service training courses mentioned above, is shown in Table 2. In addition to In-Service training courses, Pre-Service training courses for prospective primary English teachers are being carried out in Primary Teachers' Colleges.

**Table 2.** In-Service training courses and the number of teachers trained and to be trained

Types	Teachers trained (1996)	Teachers to be trained (1997)	Total
General training course	3,200	3,400	6,600
Intensive training course	500	1,500	2,000

**Textbooks**

Each school chooses one among 12 textbooks which were published in Korea with the permission of the Ministry of Education. Each textbook set is composed of Teacher's Guide, Pupils' Book, 4 cassette tapes for children, and 16 video tapes for teachers.

### **The Special Committee for primary ELT**

The committee was formed with 7-8 members in December 1996. The members include the Head of Primary Education Department, inspectors in charge of primary English education, and primary teachers. The regular meeting is held once a month. The committee attempts to settle English as a subject in the primary education curriculum by developing teaching materials and English teacher training programmes, by inspecting classroom practice, by monitoring teachers' opinion, by intensifying extra-curricular activities for English learning after school, and by checking all the preparations for the expansion of ELT to children in Year 4 in 1998.

### **Reaction of teachers and parents to the National Project**

Research into the attitudes of teachers and parents toward the introduction of English as a subject to the children in Year 3 was carried out by Media Research Inc. from 29th May to 12th June 1997. The research method used was questionnaire, and 1,000 teachers and 2,000 parents of the children in Year 3 responded.

To summarise the results of teachers' responses,

- I am satisfied with the content and level of the Pupils' Book (73.9 %)
- Teacher's Guide is helpful (88.4 %)
- The use of video tapes is helpful for teaching English (96.6 %)
- The general English teacher training course in which native speakers participated was helpful (88.0 %)
- I prefer 3-month-training course to 3-week-training course (55.6 %)
- I prefer 3-week-training course to 3-month-training course (27.6 %)
- As suggestions for improving the course, the course needs
  - expanding the sessions for speaking with native speaker in English (33.8%)
  - more lectures about the approaches to English language teaching (30.7 %)
- I have gained more or less self-confidence in teaching English (84.4 %)
- It is necessary for specialised English teachers to teach English (83.8 %)
- Children are actively involving in learning English in the classroom (96.0 %)

To summarise the results of parents' responses,

- I agree with the national project (91.9 %)
- I agree that the focus of teaching should be placed on listening and speaking (95.1 %)
- The limit of 100 words is appropriate to the level of children in Year 3 (73.3 %)
- 2 lessons per week are sufficient (49.8 %)  
2 lessons per week are not sufficient (40.0 %)
- I agree with the ban on private English lessons (82.1 %)  
I disagree with the ban on private English lessons (13.7 %)
- I agree with the use of audio and video tapes for English language teaching (93.0 %)
- Audio tapes for children help them learn English at home (71.7 %)
- My child likes learning English (91.9 %)
- My child enjoys learning English at school (89.6 %)

So far primary teachers and children seem to have positive attitudes towards English teaching and learning. However, further research into classroom practice should be carried out to improve the quality of English teaching and learning.