

# ***EFL in Primary Schools: Case Studies in TESOL Practice***

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## ***Case Study Focus***

There is controversy over the best age for introducing English language instruction in countries where English is not usually spoken in the home (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2001; Nunan, 2003). Even so policy changes mandating the earlier introduction of English in foreign language settings are increasingly being implemented worldwide.

Factors influencing each country's decision as to what grade to introduce English varies due to the language or languages used in students' homes, the education systems, the cultural influences on language practices, the approaches to educational administration, and each nation's history of language teaching and learning. These 13 case studies provide insight into these factors in contexts around the world. Of these countries seven have chosen to begin English in 1st grade, four begin in 3rd grade and two begin English language instruction in 4th or 5th grade.

Recently, educators have been encouraged (and sometimes mandated) to rapidly implement English language education for younger learners as young as 6 or 7 years of age. Often, the speed of implementation exceeds the pace at which programs are able to prepare materials and teachers, creating questions about the goals and quality of primary English language education.

## ***EFL Trends in Primary Schools***

As the editors reviewed the case studies, a few notable trends appeared. They are listed below with the country/ies following in parenthesis where a trend was noted.

1. Government is making the decision about English language instruction with little consultation of the MOE or other knowledgeable ELT professionals. (Italy, Sri Lanka, Egypt)
2. Implementation timelines are short so teacher training is not sufficient or thorough in either pedagogy or basic communication. (Taiwan, Turkey, France, Egypt, Italy)
3. English language curriculum and instruction in secondary schools must be revised if students begin studying English in primary. (Mexico, India, Italy)
4. Community concerns with the influence of English instruction on L1 reading. (Vietnam, India)
5. Improve the quality of English language instruction by improving the quality of spoken English of the instructors. (France, Italy, Korea, Sri Lanka)
6. A shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approach through the adoption of new curricular initiatives, literature-based approach (Hong Kong) or a content-based approach (Mexico, Taiwan, Italy).

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13 case studies from around the world are grouped into three sections described below. Following the name of each chapter is author and a very brief highlight from the chapter.

- Approaches to Primary EFL Program Development,
- Primary EFL Curriculum and Classroom Practices, and
- Teacher Development for Primary EFL.

### ***Approaches to Primary EFL Program Development***

*Multilingualism in the Educational System in Valencia, Spain.* Carmen Pinella-Padilla describes how English instruction was instituted in Grade 1 in Valencia where teachers use a content based curriculum model for instruction that includes instruction in three languages.

*Leading the Way in the New Millennium: Integrated Multiaged English as a Foreign Language Program in Taiwan.* Yi-Hsuan Gloria Lo explains how the introduction of English was shifted from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 2005. The model employed includes innovations in instruction, such as accommodating a variety of learning styles, using groups and cooperative learning structures, fostering student autonomy through learning centers, and developing positive attitudes toward language learning.

*Pass It On: English in the Primary Schools of Coahuila, Mexico.* Elsa Patricia Jiménez Flores explains how the expansion of English instruction included the early introduction of English in Grade 1 in a majority of the states in Mexico. This has required administrative changes to include both pre- and in-service training in English language and English pedagogy to prepare teachers for program implementation. As a result, the design of English instruction at the secondary level is also in need of revision.

*The Long and Winding Road: A Profile of Italian Primary English as a Foreign Language Teachers.* Lucilla Lopriore describes Government leadership that led to the rapid implementation of primary English education, but preceded the teacher development required for implementation. Now innovations are taking place in schools. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the European Language Portfolio influenced the professional development program established to develop both English language proficiency of learners and the pedagogy of primary English teachers.

### ***Primary EFL Curriculum and Classroom Practices***

*Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Primary Level in Turkey.* Yasemin Kirkgöz reveals how Turkey, with its complex political and economic ambitions, has shifted the introduction of EFL instruction from secondary to primary schools. A key challenge is ensuring that sufficient numbers of skilled teachers are ready for the expanding English primary program each year. A second challenge is to develop and use curriculum and instructional materials specifically designed for young learners.

*Flavoring the Salt: Teaching English in the Primary Schools of India.* Jayashree Mohanraj finds that though India has a long history of using English, current models of delivery may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. India's curriculum and textbooks are being revised to meet the demands of today.

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*Is Grade 3 Too Early to Teach English as a Foreign Language?* Is one of the questions Ha Van Sinh asks as he describes how the Ministry of Education briefly started English in Grade 1, then, because the community was concerned about the effects of the early introduction on pupils learning to read Vietnamese, the introduction to English quickly shifted back to Grade 3 where it originated. However, it required further teacher training and an appropriate follow-up program of English for secondary schools.

*A Local Approach to Global English: Bulgarian English as a Foreign Language Model Based on International Children's Culture.* Lilia Savova describes Bulgaria's unique three-part instructional model for teaching EFL in Bulgarian primary schools.

### ***Teacher Development for Primary EFL***

*Developing Teachers in the Developing World of Sri Lanka.* David Hayes illustrates the effects of the political situation in Sri Lanka on English language instruction and teacher training. He finds that the improvement in the quality of schooling can be addressed through improved teacher competence which leads to the success or failure of educational reforms.

*The Pyramid Scheme: Implementing Activity-Based Communicative Language Teaching and Supervision with Primary Teacher Educators in Egypt.* Mary Lou McCloskey, Linda New Levine, Barbara Thornton, and Zeinab El Naggat explain how effectively developing knowledge, skills and attitudes for educating young learners is essential for implementing a new program. Applying principles of local ownership, cultural relevance, innovative methodologies for language teaching, technology integration, experiential and active learning, a long-term timeline and long-term usability can result in leaders ready to implement innovation.

*The French Communicative Connection: Catching Up* by Marlene Dolitsky tells how teachers are prepared in a system where "the cart has been put before the horse", i.e. the Education Ministry has decreed that foreign languages must be taught in primary school in spite of a crying lack of human resources. Marlene tells how teacher educators help the teachers structure their lesson preparation, so that even with limited competence in English they can guide children to succeed in their first steps of foreign language learning.

*English as a Foreign Language Teacher Training for South Korean Elementary School Teachers.* Sung-Hee Park relates the logistical and methodological aspects of the introduction of English in Grade 3. Focus is placed on the development of appropriate teaching methods and skills, improving teachers' ability to use English as a medium of instruction, and helping teachers prepare to teach basic communicative language skills. The author provides insights and information on the program's effectiveness.

*Enabling Effective Practices in the Teaching and Learning of English in Hong Kong.* Gertrude Tinker Sachs and Tony Mahon describe the shift from an oral approach to primary English study to a literature-based approach and offer insight into the development of pupils' enjoyment in learning English.