

# ***Exploring the History and Challenge of Government-authorized English Textbooks in Japan and Mainland China***

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the history of English textbooks and the challenges they are facing in the current EFL contexts of Japan and mainland China. In these countries, English textbooks, and textbooks for all other subjects, can only be used in classrooms following governmental evaluation and approval. The main set of criteria for textbook evaluation is provided by the national curriculum, which also serves as a guideline for compiling textbooks; it illustrates the purpose and objectives of each subject, contains descriptions of achievement levels for each grade, as well as suggestions for teaching, assessing and compiling textbooks. In effect, textbooks are the direct materialization of the national curriculum implemented in real classrooms, particularly in textbook dominated English classes. This paper starts by discussing the significance of textbook research before presenting a historical review of English textbooks in Japan and mainland China. The focus of the review is to delineate the current challenge of underestimating the use of the first language in EFL textbooks. The final section draws trajectory maps of the two countries and explores a new approach to overcoming the challenge of creating engaging activities that incorporate both student's first language and target language in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** textbook research; EFL; L1; language awareness; metalinguistic.

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## **1. 1 Introduction to English Textbook Research**

### ***1.1. Textbook Research: from the Perspective of Curriculum and Instruction Theory***

Textbook research has drawn increased attention as an autonomous academic research field within curriculum and instruction studies since the 1970s, growing from the discipline of sociology in education termed the "New Sociology Education

“ initiative (Young, 1971; Bernstein, 1971; Gorbitt, 1972). This new field aimed to apply a sociological approach to the study of curricula and textbooks by focusing on the control and management of knowledge resulting from the complex relationships between knowledge and power. From these beginnings, debates about how public educational knowledge is selected, classified, distributed, transmitted, and evaluated have been prominent. And such discussions reflect the realities and rules of how social power is distributed and social control manifested.

Apple (1979; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991) critically examined curricula and textbooks from the viewpoint of ideology and politics in an attempt to answer the classic question “whose knowledge is worth the most?” He made clear that legitimate knowledge in textbooks was determined by interactions among political, economic and cultural variables. Although he criticized textbooks as controlled by mainstream ideology, he never denied the value and significance of textbooks. He saw the textbook as the preferred medium to deliver the intended curriculum and its key role in connecting curriculum theory with practice.

In addition to ideologies present in textbook content, the functional aspects of textbook usage are the other primary area of textbook research with a long history. Textbooks have been a mainstay educational tool for centuries, and their influence on classroom practices is synonymous with teaching. Researchers look at textbooks through the lens of being the concrete materialization of curriculum and instruction. Studies illustrate to what extent textbooks can support teachers’ teaching and learning, in addition to the teachers’ role in curriculum development in classroom practices associated with educational reform settings (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Remillard, 2005).

In recent studies on the importance of textbook research, Oates (2014) posited the importance of textbooks by showing how high-quality textbooks lead to higher performances in international standards of education. He showed that the extent of textbook use in science classes could be correlated to differences in educational performance. Comparing textbook usage in countries taking part in PISA he pointed out that textbooks had been largely abandoned in England, to the extent that only 4% of teachers claimed to use textbooks for instruction, a figure that contrasts with top-ranking PISA countries Singapore, 68%, and Finland, 94%. Based on such arguments, restoring the primacy of high-quality textbooks is seen as key to the classroom experience and a crucial aspect to achieve the highest-performing standards of school education.

## *1.2. English Textbook Research: Why The ESL and EFL Distinction Matters*

In the field of English language education, the development of English textbook research coincides with that of textbook research in general. An overarching topic guiding this research is on the selection of textbook content. At the top of this area of research is the distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries. An ESL classroom is narrowly defined as one in which English is the native or official language of the country, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, where the original purpose of

learning English is to survive in the target society. An EFL classroom is described as one in which English is not the country's native language, such as Japan or China. The meaning of learning English in EFL countries is embedded into the national curriculum as a school subject. Since the two settings differ in educational goals, learning environments, and educational systems, it is important to distinguish them in order to apply appropriate analytical methodologies that apply to their context. An intuitive but broad precursory notion is that EFL textbooks are expected to have unique characteristics that contrast clearly with ESL textbooks. This viewpoint is important to consider, but is often neglected from textbook research.

The distinctions between EFL and ESL started to become a prominent linguistic issue from the 1960s onward (Okihara, 2011). Different terms were used to make distinctions between these terms as a result of the growing market of English teaching in a global context. One researcher produced a model that transformed how linguists, educators and textbook writers view and understand the use of English in different geographic locations around the world. Kachru (1982, 1992) coined the term «world Englishes» which created a paradigm shift in how this language was viewed: there is not a «correct» version and there are varieties of English with different vocabulary items and grammatical part terms. Later he proposed the three concentric circles model to demonstrate different socio-cultural environments where English is used and taught. Another established linguist, Holliday (1994a, b), used the two terms BANA and TESEP to make a distinction between two types of educational contexts in various countries. BANA refers to Britain, Australia and North America, where English language teaching is mostly private and much like a daily commodity product. Similar to Kachru's concept of the «inner circle», TESEP refers to state education, either in tertiary institutions, or secondary and elementary schools in countries where English teaching is associated with national public education, and relates to Kachru's definitions of "outer circle" and "expanding circle". Using these established categorisation models as a starting point to analyse textbooks both China and Japan are ascribed to the expanding circle, TESEP, and EFL.

The above categorical distinctions and descriptive terms do not apply to all cases as, by nature, social forces, economical and political factors all work to influence variability. That said, it is clear that by employing these general terms, scholars have been stressing the existence of distinctions between ESL and EFL. Taking another angle though are two internationally influential associations, IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, based in the United Kingdom) and TESOL International Association (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Language, an international association headquartered in the United States) who are both attempting to devise an inclusive, unifying term to diminish the distinctions between ESL and EFL. One of the reasons attributed to this agenda might be an attempt to maintain their dominant position as an English language teaching and learning provider. In their positions they could gain the convenience and benefits of promoting standardized global textbooks, which also brings with it an inevitable influence on the socio-cultural aspects of regional English education. This situation suggests the need for more research the localisation of EFL textbooks for a closer understanding of the idiosyncrasies of EFL contexts, rather than trying to homogenize them for commercial benefit. This notion moves away

from the current trend of international publishers producing homogenized global commercial EFL textbooks to fit as many contexts as possible. A notion that involves pressure from local initiatives, and action research, that has increasingly resulted in the development of original materials that cater to the needs of speakers of specific mother tongues (Saito et al., 2013; Akita et al., 2013; Saito et al., 2014; Akita et al., 2014; Akita et al., 2015; Akita, Saito, Fujie, 2019; Wang, 2020).

## 2. English Textbooks in Japan: An Overview

There is a diverse body of published literature regarding the history of English textbooks in Japan and on a range of topics. Studies, in addition to content analyses of textbooks (Kihei, 1988; Yamada, 1998; Ishii, 2002; Ozasa, 1995), have been on investigations into rare historical materials comprised of collections of old textbook copies (Omura, Takahashi & Deki, 1980; Takahashi & Deki, 1992), interpretations of textbook features in different historical periods (Takahashi & Deki, 1993), and the establishment of databases of old textbooks (Erikawa, 2003).

In their review of the history of English education in Japan through textbooks Ozasa & Erikawa (2004), Ito (2003) & Erikawa (2008) have unfolded a detailed chronological picture of textbook development in this context. Their work stresses the significance of learning from history as a way to figure out solutions to current challenges and problems. Using this and other selected research the following section provides an overview of how English textbooks have been developed since the textbook approval system was established.

### 2.1. *Imported English textbooks were considered to be superior to domestic English textbooks*

The emergence of English textbooks in Japan began with textbooks imported from Western countries during the Meiji period reached their peak from 1885 to 1888. At this time English became a hot topic socially as there was a controversial process of Westernization during what has been call the «Rokumeikan period». However, the importance of imported English textbooks did parallel that of domestic-approved textbooks for a while, even after the textbook approval system was established in 1886. The leading imported English textbooks were *New National Readers*, *Longmans' readers*, *Swinton Readers*, *Union* and *Wilson*. Most of them were English-language textbooks made for English native speakers. One of the main features of these textbooks was that their corpora of literature readings were varied and of high quality, but with less focus on grammar. Since they were widely-used materials at the time, they had a significant influence on the development of both approved English textbooks and Japanese textbooks.

There were 20 approved English textbooks in the first two years of the approval system, but it was eventually made extinct eight years later in 1894. One-third of approved English textbooks were written by non native Japanese speakers, and some imported textbooks were authorized as approved English textbooks. It is worth noting that the level of post-elementary school (10-13 years old) was established in

1886, and English education was further promoted. Thus the majority of approved English textbooks were made for post-elementary schools. However, English education in post-elementary schools fell abruptly into decline from 1890, which caused a slump in textbook numbers.

## 2.2. *The establishment of state-approved English textbooks in schools*

With steadily growing numbers of students in secondary schools, approved English textbooks re-flourished in 1901. Around the same time, the Copyright Act was promulgated, which contributed to the disappearance of pirated versions of imported English textbooks, and worked to stimulate the development of domestic English textbooks. The most-used textbooks at the time were *Kanda's New Series of English Readers*, that notably specialized in balancing the four skills, and *Standards Choice Readers*, that selected contents from leading imported English textbooks arranging them in a way that catered to Japanese learners.

As imported English textbooks made their gradual exit, decision makers in Japan started to explore ways to compile textbooks more suitable for Japanese learners. Unlike the difficult-to-understand imported English textbooks, domestic textbooks attempted to set reasonable learning objectives which could more realistically be achieved by Japanese-speaking learners. This transition is significant as it can be considered as the time that initiated textbook designing within the context of English as a foreign language. The primary innovation was in controlling and more gradually building the exposure of grammatical and vocabulary items in order to make content more comprehensible to learners. One potential downside that writers had, and continue to have, is that restricted and limited grammatical items can easily lead to simplistic and boring language materials. The consideration of balancing simplicity and authenticity when composing and selecting language materials was a key concern to the early writers, which further supports to notion of their efforts being the beginnings of EFL.

## 2.3. *Improvement in compiling skills for English textbooks*

In 1931, English was made a compulsory subject in teachers' schools, and in 1932 occupational schools began to adopt state-approved textbooks; reforms that increased the demand for textbooks. The most representative textbook at the time was *The Standard English Readers* by Harold E. Palmer. He developed the Oral Method approach where learners acquire speaking fluency skills by repeating oral practices. This era of growing requests for a large numbers of textbooks encouraged two more milestones in producing effective contextual textbooks scientific investigations in how to select often-used (high frequency) vocabulary words, and research into the sequencing of language materials.

## 2.4. A crucial time for textbooks during the Second Sino-Japanese War

In 1940 textbooks were restricted to 5 titles for each subject. Among these, *The New Monbusho English Readers for Elementary Schools* were published for use in national 2-year post-elementary schools. The publisher, Secondary School Textbooks Publishing, was a merger of multiple publishers into a national company that exclusively produced approved textbooks for secondary schools. The contents were not only Japan-centred but included information on British meals, Christmas, and Aesop's Fables, some also included contents relevant to war. In Navy and Army preparatory schools alternative textbooks were used and as the operation of regular schools was ceased during wartime, some of the Navy and Army preparatory schools, whose soldiers were fighting against western military forces, kept teaching English. Right after the war, some schools used so-called *Sumi-Nuri* textbooks, in which sensitive war-related contents were covered with black ink.

## 2.5. Gradual recovery from war damage with a newly-developed national textbook

In the immediate post-war era, junior-high-school education became a part of the compulsory education system and contributed to the popularization of education. This ensuing surge in demand for textbooks saw the contents cut down, following requests to simplify teaching materials. The national textbook *Let's learn English* developed by the Ministry of Education focused on reading, and was structured contrary to previous oral-centred textbooks. The approved textbook *Jack and Betty*, however, continued with the oral-centred approach, depicting American middle-class life. Textbooks in the post-war era adopted a grammar-controlled approach, which focused on clear-cut objectives, dominated by a carefully-restricted and sequenced grammar. From this period onwards, textbooks established a tendency to obey the stipulations of the national curriculum, which heavily handedly governed both teaching methods and teaching materials. This phenomenon resulted in a high level of homogeneity among textbooks, with standardized restrictive lists of grammar and vocabulary items.

## 2.6. The emergence of innovative textbook models

In 1965, a textbook labelled as ground-breaking at the time, *The Junior Crown English Course* by Sanseido, caught people's eyes. Its featured storyline was centred on the Browns, namely Tom and Susie. A Japanese painter visited their town, and they reunited once again when the Browns stopped by Japan on their way to India and Africa, resulting in a storyline that differed from then-current Western-dominated textbooks. It inserted a foldout page with a drill chart as an appendix, a feature that was copied by other publishers. In the era of high-speed economic growth, the theme of Japan's growing worldwide presence was reflected in the contents of English textbooks, such as Mujina from Koizumi Yakumo's *Kwaidan*, a Japanese character who attended American schools. Reading-centred textbooks lost their edge, since

the time allotted for English classes was shortened, and several textual contents in language materials had to be cut down.

### *2.7. A growing awareness of Japanese identity and decreasing of textbook contents*

In an attempt to alleviate school violence and failures in classroom discipline, a more relaxed education policy was introduced in 1977 that reduced curriculum contents and overall class time in an effort to make education freer from emotional pressure. It resulted in a decrease of vocabulary and language materials in English textbooks, especially reading-centred textbooks. Textbook contents tended to shift from cultural Western dominance to the stressing of multiculturalism and Japanese identity. Contents such as saving African children were included in *New Horizon*, and the number of Japanese culture-related contents (such as an interview with *kyogen* performer Izumi Junko, explanations of Japanese calligraphy and the culture of Ainu people) were also increased in other English textbooks.

### *2.8. Emphasizing a global perspective while encouraging the cultivation of practical communicative ability*

By inheriting the predominant stance of the aforementioned ‘relaxed education period, Western-centric perspectives in state-approved English textbooks became less dominant, and characters from Asian countries were seen communicating with Japanese characters about Japanese Manga. Japan-centred topics became the standard such as *shamisen* music, greeting customs, or “Japanese” ways of thinking were arranged in textbooks with the aim of guiding learners to consciously consider their identities following a state-approved uniform notion of what it is to be «Japanese». Ethnic minorities, like those from the Bhutanese kingdom, were included in English textbooks to convey the message that understanding minority cultures is essential. Each publisher made efforts to incorporate contexts close to learners’ real lives in order to stimulate relatable places that real communication would take place. This concerted effort to enhance their communicative ability included references to conversations with foreign students, gathering information on the Internet and travelling abroad.

### *2.9. Highlighting the integration of the four skills*

The national curriculum was revised towards developing the communicative ability of Japanese learners to better enable them to survive in an interconnected world. In the enhancement of foreign language education, curriculum contents including vocabulary were increased mainly because of the boosted numbers of classes in schools. Textbooks emphasised listening and speaking activities, and textbooks, and textbooks were introduced to elementary schools (*English Notes, Hi, friends!* and *Let’s Try! We Can!*). In secondary schools, language learning activities were devised to integrate the four skills synergistically, rather than developing them

in isolation. Such changes are inline with the Ministry of Education's mission to teach through communicative activities; these changes reflect a more direct effort to pursue this goal. In high schools, the aspect of communication was so heavily emphasized, that names of compulsory and selective English subjects were titled *Communicative English*, *English Conversation*, and *English Expression*.

In 2017, the newest national curriculum has released to promote proactive, interactive and deep learning in all schools and subjects. From 2020, English was officially introduced as a subject in elementary school for Grades 5 and 6 and a new series of authorized textbooks for elementary school was developed and started to be used from the start of the academic year in April. This was first time an authorized English textbook was used at the elementary school level in Japan.

### 3. English Textbooks in China: An Overview

The history of English textbooks in China has, at the time of writing, has been neglected in academia and few published studies address textbooks prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Liu (2011) briefly reviewed the last 150 years of history of English textbooks used in China throughout five historical periods, but for certain periods, accurate sources and references were not made fully clear. While taking into consideration the results (Liu, Gong & Zhang, 2011; Dong, 2013; Qin, 2014; Liu & Wu, 2015; Sheng, 2016) of previous literature reviews and looking at existing documental sources as a whole, this section presents a historical overview of the development of English textbooks in China.

#### 3.1. *Reliance on the introduction, translation and adoption of foreign textbooks*

A government school for teaching foreign languages, Tongwen Guan, was founded in Beijing in 1862; this signified the start of English education in modern China. The textbooks used in Tongwen Guan were mostly imported textbooks from overseas (i.e., *The Mother Tongue*, *School Reading by Grades: Baldwin's Readers*), along with Chinese translations as supplementary materials. Given their large quantities of repeated sentence pattern drills, without any vocabulary or grammar explanations, they implied a preference towards the Direct Method as the main teaching approach. English language education was later officially established in China during the 'Self-Strengthening Movement' in the late Qing Dynasty in the early 1900's. It was the nation's first coordinated attempt to learn a Western language after years of reluctance, and the motivation behind this shift was to improve its weakened position when negotiating with military Western powers. In previous years, China had been forced to sign a series of unequal treaties as the result of military defeats that granted territorial and legal concessions to various Western countries. The final interpretations of the legal dispositions in the treaties were detailed in the English versions of the documents (Li, Zhang & Liu, 1988).

The emergent needs for translating Western books led to a thriving situation for publishers, one of which was Commercial Press. It published the very first English textbook series *English and Chinese Primer* and *English and Chinese Readers* for Chinese students in 1898. These books were translated and edited from the textbook



series *Primer* that the British originally developed for students in India during the colonial period. Another influential translated textbook series that brought to China after being used in India was *Nesfield's English Grammar Series*. This book was originally used in secondary schools in the U.K.

### 3.2. *Rapid development of textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars*

The number of textbook series compiled by Chinese scholars grew rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1922, it was decided that the new school system would feature English classes from junior high school, and guidelines for textbooks and teaching methods were enacted to regulate textbook publications. In contrast to secondary school, the English textbooks used in higher education were mostly imported (as textbooks were for other subjects), and a situation that made the grammar-translation approach the main teaching method in universities. English literature books were also widely used under the belief that language should be learnt through the study of classic literary works.

### 3.3. *A temporary shortage of learning materials and the politicization of English textbooks*

At the onset of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russian became dominant as the foreign language taught in universities, while English was replaced in high school, and suspended at the junior high school levels. This was the result of a national diplomatic strategy for establishing stronger ties with the Soviet Union against the capitalist camp led by the United States. The production of English textbooks was ceased until 1956 when English regained its position as the country's main foreign language. From 1956 to 1963, a number of national textbooks were designed for the secondary school level by the People's Education Press; English textbooks were also made for the university level. However, the Cultural Revolution movement brought tremendous setbacks for the production of English textbooks through claims that revolutionist ideals and content ought to be added into formal textbooks, while any capitalist or traditionalist pre-revolution elements should be deleted from all textbooks. As a result, political slogans such as "Long Live Chairman Mao" were included in the English textbooks.

Along with the country's socialist-focused development starting in 1957, English gradually regained its former importance. The number of secondary school English classes in an academic year increased from 749 periods in 1953, to 1238 periods in 1963, during which textbooks intended for the senior high school level and above were developed, as well as a 10-year and 12-year curriculum.

### 3.4. *The development of national English textbooks based on a constructivist theory of language teaching and learning*

The often-cited policies for economic reform promoted by Deng Xiaoping (often referred to in the Chinese language as the "reform and opening-up" period) viewed

English as the international medium of scientific and technological knowledge that held the key to China's modernization. Thus, the revival and expansion of English language education was seen as a crucial step to allow more people to access, and reap the benefits of advanced global science and technology development. The national English textbook committee drafted a tentative 10-year English teaching guideline in 1978. This advancement in English educational policy initiated the compilation of 6 textbooks for elementary and junior high school, and 2 textbooks for high school, each accompanied by a teachers' book. These textbook series led to improvements teaching quality and brought forth a sense of order out of the chaotic socio-political situation from previous historical events when policies were heavily influenced by political priorities, rather than sound language learning principles.

The Ministry of Education released another tentative 10-year English teaching guideline in 1980. The newly-compiled textbooks were put into use from 1982 to 1998. They were the longest-running set of textbooks in use after the formal declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During this period, the teaching guidelines were amended numerous times, and textbook contents were marginally decreased. Later on in 1986, and reflected in the guidelines for teaching, the government felt there was a need to lower the difficulty of textbooks to decrease the burden on learners and clarify teaching requirements. The guidelines also defined two starting points for English learning: from junior high school and high school. Completely new textbooks were also created for high-school students who started to learn English in high school and had not previously studied in public schools. These textbooks were written using a constructivist theory of language teaching and learning and used nationwide from 1978 to 1992. The consensus on this constructionist approach by writers and editors was in favour of it, as seen in their assessments of imported language materials.

### *3.5. Cooperation with foreign publishers with a focus on language structure and function*

In 1988, the first edition of the National English Teaching Guidelines for 9-year Compulsory Education was released. To cater to localised needs in different geographic location the Ministry of Education permitted and encouraged editing of textbooks, with the caveat that national guideline requirements remain at the core of content. Six of the most widely used textbooks were: the People's Education Press version that was used nationwide, a «Shanghai version» used in Shanghai, a «Guangdong version» used in Guangdong and Fujian, a «Beijing Normal University version» used in Shangdong, and the "Sichuan version" used in Sichuan. This movement established the start of the period known as "multiple versions under one guideline". Even though these different versions varied in overall features, volume, difficulty level and sequence of contents, they all adopted a structural-functional approach.

The "People's Education Press version" was compiled collaboratively by the People's Education Press in China and Longman Publishing in the U.K. as well as receiving support from the United Nations Development Programme. This was

actually the first English textbook series produced in cooperation with a foreign publisher since the implementation of the economic reform policies in 1978. The textbook series of *Junior English for China* (JEFC) was first tried out in a limited number of cities and later adopted nationwide (except for Shanghai) after being formally authorized by the textbook evaluation committee in 1993. At the high school level the *Senior English for China* (SEFC) was trialled in 1993 before being authorized for use across the nation (except for in Shanghai) by the same evaluation committee as in 1996. These two series were used until 2005, with only minor edits.

The functional approach used in all of the textbooks, also referred to as the communicative approach, was advocated by European linguists in the 1980s. They began by first analysing what learners can do with language in order to determine the necessary and relevant language for instruction. Based on this foundation, notional-functional syllabi were developed. The functional approach focuses on the essential functions of language and is inherently learner-centred. It guides learners to acquire language by using it in personal and practical ways to develop their communicative competency.

### 3.6. *Increased diversity of English textbooks at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

The tentative national curriculum issued in 2001 required elementary schools to start English classes from grade 3 (MOE, 2001). The initiation of this policy initiative, which happened almost two decades before Japan started English instruction at this level, can be linked to three sociocultural factors (Hu, 2005). First, it was promoted by China's upcoming entry into the World Trade Organization. Second, it was intended to prepare Beijing to become the host city of the 2008 Olympic Games. Third, it was expected to improve the quality of English language teaching from an earlier stage. In previous years little improvement had been made in English language ability at the secondary level despite considerable efforts, according to large-scale survey of English language education quality from the late 1980s (Hu, 2005).

Similar to the policy directive of introducing English classes into elementary schools in 1978, the expansion of English language education into the compulsory education system was faced with the challenge of there being a lack competent teachers and inadequate teaching materials. There were multiple English textbook series published in the 1990s, but in practice most areas used the "People's Education Press version", except for in Shanghai. The new textbooks using a structural-functional approach and made in line with the revised national curriculum of 2001, was met by a wide pool of publishers submitting their textbooks for approval. In total, thirty textbook series for elementary schools, ten textbook series for junior high schools, and seven textbook series for senior high schools that were authorized by the Ministry of Education's textbook evaluation committee. Of these, half were imported and adapted from foreign publishers, while some of them are co-edited by both Chinese and foreign experts, and a small number were originally made by Chinese experts and later revised by foreign experts.

An examination of subsequent curriculum standards shows that communicative language teaching was given increased prominence and, to date, task-based teaching is strongly advocated as a form of communicative pedagogy. And these

ministerial developments have resulted in pedagogical recommendations now being written as guiding principles rather than as detailed prescriptions, while teaching objectives are furnished with detailed descriptions.

This overview of the history of English textbooks in China since the late 1980s has focused on how the process of textbook diversification, was adopted and realized. On one hand, locally-produced textbook series are available to cater to varying local needs, and on the other many teachers fail to understand the underlying principles of the textbooks. The core to this issue lies in outdated pre-service teacher training and inadequate in-service support, which is reflected in textbooks being used in traditional ways, and their full potential being unrealized.

### *3.7. Towards textbooks with Chinese characteristics in fulfilment of 2011's revised national curriculum*

In 2011, after 10 years of experience using the revised functional approach textbooks, a revision of the previously tentative national curriculum was released. The objectives (similar to the 'Can do list in Japan) listed in this curriculum are divided into nine ability levels, corresponding to the attainment targets of certain grades. Other changes were not radically different in terms of the traditional language learning paradigm, and two major points are reiterated from the previous curriculum. The first can be labelled as "humanistic". As is common in all subjects, moral values and the integrity of students should be prioritised, and achieved through a well-rounded education. The subject of English in the modern era has shifted to be more than a subject to acquire the linguistic (lexical and grammatical) items of, but now serves to deliver both a humanistic feature and an instrumental feature. The humanistic quality that English provides is in helping to cultivate students' all-round development and provides them with opportunities to broaden their horizons that enrich their life experiences. Going further, this subject can help to develop the memory, imagination and creativity to simultaneously establish a notion of national identity, and an awareness of and respect for cultural differences, and to build moral integrity that facilitates a healthy outlook on life. In practice, this human-oriented educational concept takes dedication to be realised and requires the valuing of each student's feelings, caring for individual differences, and addressing all students' needs in a balanced way.

The second core point is to foster students' practical abilities in "learning English by using English". This principal is recommended once again for developing a comprehensive language competence that is comprised of five objectives: language skills, language knowledge, positive attitude towards learning, acquiring learning strategies, and cultural awareness. Task-based teaching is suggested as an approach for engaging students in situations relevant to their life experiences and cognitive level in order for them to be able to participate in common social interaction using only English. There is, however, a body of research questioning the appropriateness of the task based approach in the Chinese context (Li, 2001; Zhang, 2005; Wen, 2016) where of grammar translation and a form-focused approach to language has a long history and the target of language learning is to pass grammatical tests to

enter university, and not to communicate. Building on from such research, future research should critically assess reasons hindering its successful adaption and evaluate ways to creatively implement more communicative approaches into the Chinese educational environment. Factors to consider in creating communicative content in textbooks include how teachers will be able to use this framework (as previous training has been an issue) and consideration to alleviate excessive study loads in students.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper stressed the general significance of textbook research in EFL contexts and reviewed the historical development of EFL textbooks in Japan and mainland China. Based on the need to raise awareness about the differences between EFL and ESL, and to distinguish them in terms of teaching and learning, Japan and China are chosen here as representatives of EFL textbook countries. These two countries represent Japanese and Chinese speakers who use the common logograms of Chinese characters in their activities as English learners. Global English textbook publishers from BANA countries have sought to promote their products in EFL markets, while ignoring or not paying attention to the fact that speakers of different mother tongues learn English in different ways, and for different purposes. An English textbook designed for global use and inserted to a cultural market without further consideration of the context is unlikely to work well in the long run. Simply inserting illustrations and pictures that reference the local regions they are published in misses the core understanding of learning styles, cultural educational practices, cultural psychology and specific needs of students.

The historical development of English language education between the two countries, dominant features are laid out in Table 1. It demonstrates that both Japan and China were strongly influenced by imported English textbooks from when English was first taught as a foreign language. However, from there, policies and social influence guided their choices of textbook publishers and content in opposing directions. Confronted with imported ESL textbooks, Japan chose to search for original material that suited the reality of Japanese learners specifically. China chose to follow global trends and use widely used ESL textbooks in the belief that they could adjust contents to meet the needs of Chinese learners. These early developments grew into the trends we see today: Japan using «in house» textbooks, and China continuing to outsource both textbooks and teaching approaches. The current authorized English textbooks in Japan are all made by independent domestic publishers, and the majority of authorized English textbooks in China are all developed in collaboration with foreign publishers. Curriculum revisions and textbook renewal have continued for decades. These developments show that both countries are facing the challenge of developing more effective EFL materials that meet the needs of learners, and develop the skills of what society seems to be demanding of them.

The Japanese and Chinese EFL context is still far from successfully producing large numbers of English speakers and one of the crucial reasons is related to teaching methods not fusing the learners' first language (L1) with the language they are studying. Otsu (2009; 2010; 2011) conducted classroom research that aimed

to provide learners with improved metalinguistic awareness by directly comparing aspects of Japanese and English. Other recent action research also implied that by comparing two different languages helps learners to fully grasp metalinguistic concepts in a clearer way, which should then have a positive effect on their linguistic skills (Saito et al., 2012; Akita et al., 2012; Saito et al., 2013; Akita et al., 2013; Akita et al., 2014; Wang, 2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2020). Otsu (1989), and Otsu & Kubozono (2008) argued that both mother tongue and foreign languages could be cultivated synergistically and effectively by encouraging learners to become aware of linguistic commonalities and the unique characteristics and mechanisms of each language. Also, Candelier (2007) has argued that multilingual and multicultural education, which is being increasingly cultivated in Europe, can be applied to foreign language activities in EFL contexts. A conclusion from this study and previous studies put forward here is that materials development, that includes knowledge of L1 and EFL, is urgent.

Future comparative textbook research studies need to provide a more detailed analysis of textbooks in each stage of historical development with particular attention given to social-cultural contexts in the countries in question. Similarities and differences from such research, as well as chronological changes, come from different sources and need to be treated individually. As the analysis of the national curricula in both countries exposed the gap between what textbooks present and what curriculum requires, this research provides some initial criteria for EFL textbook evaluation and selection. Future studies of EFL materials development should elaborate on this criteria and develop the significance of L1 according to their findings. Support for pursuing further research into EFL cross-cultural textbook and materials development come from a 2016 international survey targeting 120,000 learners in 18 countries. This survey found that the more the students talk about their mother tongue together with their target language, the better their academic abilities at school will be (Agirdag & Vanlaar). Also, when mastering a foreign language, Ortega (2018) pointed out that we should place more importance on the value of the native language. Finally, given the importance of L1 in EFL learning language materials development, along with action researches in classrooms, should be encouraged (Cook, 2010).

Time	Japan	China
1800s-1890s	Imported English textbooks for native speakers dominated and influenced on developing domestic English textbooks.	Imported English textbooks, along with Chinese translations, were used in foreign language schools.
1900s-1920s	Due to the copyright protection of imported textbooks, domestic ones were made to cater to Japanese learners.	Chinese scholars became the mainstream developers of English textbooks under the regulated guidelines. A variety of textbook series were published with different features. Unlike basic education, textbooks for higher education were still mainly imported ones for all subjects.
1930s	Given the increased demand for textbooks, compiling skills were encouraged to improve.	
1940s	Textbooks were restricted to numbers. Western culture-related materials were included in textbooks, as well as war-related topics.	
1950s	Textbook contents were simplified for the expansion of compulsory education. Guided by the national curriculum, textbooks tended to be standardized within designated grammar and vocabulary items.	The political strategy made Russian the main foreign language until English regained its position in 1956. National common English textbooks were published by the People's Education Press. Revolutionist ideas and contents were added into English textbooks during the Cultural Revolution movement.
1960s-1970s	In the economic recovery period, innovative textbooks that centered on the storyline of characters emerged and brought variety to the textbook industry.	
1980s-1990s	To cope with the increased school failure crisis, curriculum contents were reduced. Instead of western dominance, multiculturalism and Japanese identity were introduced.	English teaching guideline was made to instruct textbook compiling. English textbooks were revised to lower the burden on learners. In reference to imported language materials, the constructivist theory of language teaching and learning was applied.

1998-2007	Textbooks made efforts to relate to real lives to promote Japanese identities and develop communication ability.	Multiple textbook series existed in different regions, but the People's Education Press version, which was made in cooperation with Longman Publishing, was the most popular and longest one in use. English textbooks were firstly introduced in elementary schools since 2001.
	Integration of the four skills was highlighted in textbooks under the national curriculum. Authorized English textbooks were introduced in elementary schools in 2020.	Through the development of English textbooks, each region started to choose different publishers to suit their needs.

Table 1: Timeline of the history of English textbooks in Japan and China

## 5. 5. References

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