30 years of Teaching English in East Asia:

An appraisal

Bachelor Thesis

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1 Introduction

Despite considerable economic growth in recent decades, research shows that insufficient English proficiency continues to persist in East Asia. Student achievements are notable in the science and math sector, but English education continues to appear neglected or at least inadequately developed. Are these perceptions factual? What is English education still lacking in East Asia when compared to other developed countries?

The purpose of this paper is to explore the development of English education in East Asia, particularly Japan, China and South Korea, over the last 30 years and beyond, and how Western influences, such as foreign teachers, have influenced this development. The paper will be divided into four main sectors. A background of the history of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in East Asia, the current situation, teachers and students' part in the issue and finally Western influence in the form of foreign teachers.

The history of English as a foreign language in the three countries afore-mentioned and current status quo will be looked at and whether cultural beliefs influence foreign language education. The importance English carries in school and society for these countries will also be interrogated as part of the issue. Privatization of education has emerged as a vital factor as well. Companies trying to make English education a for-profit issue play an important part in the subject matter such as learning institutions, online tutors and organizations alike. The effect on the education system and students in general will be therefore of concern in this paper. The arguably most important stakeholders involved, teacher and student, and how they take part in the issue will be of interest in this paper as well. To get more insight, the role of teachers, teacher education and their didactic approaches will be examined. In contrast the students' perspective and reasons for their possible insufficient English abilities will be looked at. How student motivation and wellbeing factor into this issue will also be taken into consideration and possible solutions for this issue investigated.

However, East Asia itself is not the only factor in the equation. "Western" influence, particularly in the form of foreign teachers are of vital importance in East Asian education. Reasons for the demand in foreign teachers and the sustainability of their continuous work in East Asia will be explored. Lastly, the future prognosis for the development of EFL in East Asia and possible continuous fields of research will be looked at conclusively.

2 History of English Education in East Asia

English education takes on a unique shape depending on the history of a country. East Asia with its rich and diverse background in no exception. Japan, South Korea and China all developed under distinct conditions that shaped who they are today. This development is also influencing English education in current times. Carl Sagan, even though in the context of science, stated: "You have to know the past to understand the present" (Sagan 2013, n.p.). This quote rings true for all conditions in life. It is important to look at the past to fully understand the present. Therefore, in the following part, a thorough background to the history of English education in East Asia will be given.

2.1 Japan

Japans history in EFL education reaches far back into the 17th century. "The first record of Japanese contact with the English language is that of the meeting of Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Feudal Government,' with the Englishman William Adams (1564-1620)" (Ike 1995, 3). Japan would remain *Sakoku* or a "locked country" until 1853 though, due to fears of negative influence from foreigners, before opening up to the outside once more (cf. Williams 2017, 31–32).

The relationship with English remained tumultuous however. After abandoning *Sakoku,* due to US-American insistence and establishing contact and trade with Westerners, English suddenly became of immense importance within the country (cf. Ike 1995, 4–5). In 1871, during the Meiji period, English was included in the national curriculum (cf. Williams 2017, 32). The English boom, due to massive modernization and a desire to understand Western innovations to adapt them for themselves, became manifested (cf. Williams 2017, 32). However, increasing nationalism led to a decreased interest in English. "In fact, during the early 1900s many events took place which foreshadowed the rise of Japanese nationalism and influenced the role of English education in Japan." (Ike 1995, 6). These developments made it very hard for the subject to persist within the education system.

According to Clay H. Williams these developments also directly influenced the education system today. After the government appointed linguist Harold Palmer in the early 20th century, he criticized the use of the grammar-translation method[1]

[1] The grammar-translation method is a teaching methodology that focuses on interpreting foreign languages by translating from L1 to L2 and analysing grammatical features. It is widely considered in Western educational settings to be good for teaching about a language but not for language as a vehicle for communication.

(GTM) and asked the government to focus on direct methods that foster oral skills, but he was ignored (cf. Williams 2017, 33). This example is one of many that shows Japans early problems with English education and their inflexibility to adapt to changes.

The general dislike for English stayed this way until 1945 when the Second World War ended (cf. Yamada 2016, 20–22). After 1945 American occupation brought forth an increased interest in English once again (cf. Yamada 2016, 20–22). The establishment of the current school system and the manifestation of English as a subject for secondary education were trademarks for the post-war era (cf. Løfsgaard 2015, 15). From this point on English education would be under continuous reform.

With newly revived interest, English education would undergo tremendous changes. “The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 spearheaded a new English boom in Japan. In addition to this, increased social mobility and the growing economy allowed a huge number of Japanese going abroad in the 1970s, sparking a new interest in learning foreign languages.” (Løfsgaard 2015, 18). English education took on a new image, as it was now the language of a globalized world and access not exclusive to certain people only.

The Heisei period, starting in 1989 and continuing until present times, brought many changes that shaped Japan. The economic crisis, natural disasters such as the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and the upcoming 2020 Olympics as some outstanding events to be mentioned. Continuing globalization influences the desire for many Japanese to acquire English as Ike describes:

> *Today there are far more opportunities for Japanese learners to gain access to spoken English than there were in the past. In Japan, English is used more often on the radio and television. […] Many more Japanese travel abroad, and we also see a great number of foreign travelers in Japan.* (Ike 1995, 9)

One interesting initiative worth mentioning is the JET programme (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme), which was established in 1987. It was designed to bring native English speakers into the country and let them help teach communicative skills and foster a general cultural interest in English. The General Information Handbook for the JET programme describes the purpose of the programme as: “increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations. It aims to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level.” (The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) 2018, 79). With the introduction of

the JET programme *Oral Communication* became an obligatory subject in schools. This, combined with the JET programme, would lead to a greater focus on oral competences in English, was what the government hoped for (Løfsgaard 2015, 26).

However, many problems continue to influence English education in Japan, such as student participation and fluency. Changes in policies and reforms are targeting such problems, like the *Yutori* education in the 90s with a "relaxation of the educational system" (Løfsgaard 2015, 23) and *The 2003 Action Plan* to help "improve the English level of Japanese students" (Løfsgaard 2015, 23). Most of these policies have however been criticized by experts and some even proven to be contra-effective.

As we have seen, English education in Japan has undergone tremendous changes. Japan continues to struggle when it comes to teaching English effectively, but the growing positive image of the language and reforms show an unchanging interest in changing this issue.

2.2 South Korea

South Koreas history of English education does not go back as far as that of other East Asian nations and was continuously held up by war and other historical events. Despite this, the motivation to catch up and interest in the language remains incomparable within East Asia. The first contact with English was in 1883 when the first English language school was established to train translators after a treaty with the USA was established (Kim 2008, n.p.).

The annexation of South Korea by Japan that lasted from 1910 to 1945 heavily influenced education. English was a mandatory subject for the few that could actually afford education but the focus was on Japanese language, above anything else, and Korean, the native language, was often banned (cf. Williams 2017, 34–35). English would even become a symbol of resistance against the Japanese occupation. After WWII ended and the formation of the U.S. Army Military government in South Korea, the importance of English grew massively and it quickly became the foreign language of choice (cf. Williams 2017, 35).

The North-South conflict would continue to worsen, and with it, the need for English-speaking Koreans grew so to be able to communicate with the US-forces (cf. Williams 2017, 35). Tremendous economic growth and budding trade relationships solidified the strong foundation of English education. Ultimately, the first national curriculum in 1955 would include English as subject (cf. Williams 2017, 35). The popularity of English has since not diminished, this might also be

due to the positive image the language holds for many Koreans on a personal level, as it was always the language of resistance against oppression and stood for better living conditions and growth in the country.

South Korea also seems to be the most open to reforms and change within their English education system compared to their East Asian neighbours. This can be seen in their willingness to “shift […] dominant teaching methods” (cf. Williams 2017, 35). From the GTM adapted from their neighbours in the early stages to a curriculum emphasizing audio-lingual methodology and communicative ability (cf. Williams 2017, 35). The implementation of such reforms has not proven easy and especially teachers found the switch to be difficult. The system needs continuous improvement, but it can be considered as leading within East Asia regarding methodology. South Korea was also the first East Asian nation to include English at the primary level in 1997, far before China and Japan (cf. Williams 2017, 35). This shows that the South Korean government is aware of the importance of early foreign language education. English continues to remain the most important foreign language in the country. The government’s constant efforts prove hopeful in establishing a productive and engaging English education system.

2.3 China

The first documented records of contact with the English language in China date back to more than 200 years ago. This makes China the East Asian country with the longest history of English education. Of course, English would only later become relevant in the country and be part of the curricula. Similar to Japan, prior motivation in early stages was to be able to understand Western innovations and adapt them for themselves (cf. Williams 2017, 29). This was also reinforced by having suffered losses in war at the hand of Western powers (cf. Williams 2017, 29). This development, however, would be the beginning for Chinas relations to the West and their rise to become a leading nation of the world.

The first stages for English in China cannot be considered easy. English became officially part of the core subjects in the secondary schools curriculum with the foundation of the Republic of China (cf. Hu and Adamson 2012, 1–17). Due to important historical events such as the Japanese invasion, Communist takeover and ultimately the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, English education and its development was put on the backburner for a long time (cf. Hu and Adamson 2012, 1–17). Because of communist ideals and problematic relations with western countries, English did not have a favourable image in the mind of the Chinese public. This would eventually lead to a total abolishment of English in the

school system in favour of Russian as a foreign language (cf. Hu and Adamson 2012, 1–17).

The Cultural Revolution in the 60s and 70s sparked another period of intense negative sentiment against the English language. The promotion of nationalist values and rejection of foreign influence led to the prohibition of foreign language books and materials and discrimination against foreign language teachers (cf. Williams 2017, 30). While English classes were reintroduced after having initially been banned, they would only promote Communist teachings and Mao ideals (cf. Williams 2017, 30). English was misused as a political tool and did not serve any other purpose than that of propaganda. From this, we can see that Chinas government and society have had a huge impact on English education or as Hu summarizes it: “Policies on basic English language education in China have been inextricably linked to political, economic, and social development in the country in the last 25 years or so” (Hu 2005, 6).

Mao Zedong’s death and his successor Deng Xiaoping’s modernization program and market reforms in 1977, also called “open door policy”, would start the serious implementation of English in the Chinese school curriculum for the first time (cf. Hu 2005, 7). English became core subject next to other subjects such as Math, Science and Chinese language. The Cultural Revolution had caused havoc on foreign language education and created an acute shortage of English-speaking citizens (cf. Hu 2005, 7). The modernization program could only be realized, if China was able to keep up with current innovations, which were led by the Western world. As the language of instruction was usually English, it was necessary to increase English skills in the country. Therefore, a heavy emphasis was put on reinstating English education to implement new political ideals (cf. Hu 2005, 7). Great importance was also put on oral proficiency, so to be able to cultivate citizens, that were able to communicate and partake in global trade.

China developed into an economically strong country and this also caused many educational reforms. First of all, great effort was put into “expanding English provision on the secondary level” (Hu 2005, 10) in the 1980s. But regional differences in economic ability and prosperity also led to the unequal provision of English education, which favoured economically strong urban regions (Hu 2005, 10). In 2001, English was implemented into the elementary curriculum starting from the 3rd grade instead of the previous 7th grade. The change was welcomed by most Chinese, that hoped it would help improve English education and tackle the issue of the rising number of English learners. However, the transition did not go smoothly and many challenges emerged, such as unsuitable learning materials,

greatly unqualified teachers and poor coordination between primary and secondary schools (Hu 2005, 10).

In the last century many efforts have been made to improve the efficiency of English Language Teaching (ELT), but China seems to favour quantity over quality as they continue to raise efforts in providing English, but do not improve quality of instruction (Hu 2005, 12). It can be said that the syllabus has continued to improve, especially regarding methodology by emphasizing communicative approaches, task-based teaching and increased language input from students (Hu 2005, 12). The problem of realization in the classroom seems to be that policies and realities of teaching drift further away from each other. Chinas unwillingness to address issues directly and their suggestions of unrealistic solutions continues to affect ELT directly until today. Good ideas also need well-thought out plans to be successfully implemented e.g. greatly improved language learning material will be of no use if teachers do not understand how to use them.

Within a short timeframe the number of English-speakers and learners has risen rapidly from nearly inexistent to covering almost an entire nation. Chinas relationship with English education can be described as a tumultuous and difficult one. In current China, English has become a language of prestige, and more importantly, is seen as vital necessity to find success on the highly competitive job market. Problems such as the lack of professionally trained teachers, unsuitable learning materials and outdated methodology despite reforms continue to hold up China in improving their English efficiency, especially in rural areas.

3 Current Situation of EFL in East Asia

The necessity of learning English in East Asia can be summarized by the fact, that the world is getting more globalized and English continues to be the most important *lingua franca* of the world. This is supported by English becoming the sole working language of ASEAN (Kirkpatrick 2016, 6) and the pragmatic need for English as unifying language on the continent, showing the importance of the language on the continent. In China, English is perceived by the government as essential in helping the nation to further open up, and an important cornerstone in international competition. On a personal level, many Chinese need English to enter and graduate from university, to go abroad for further education and to secure desirable jobs (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 2004, 119–20). A very similar situation can be found in South Korea regarding the public and personal level, though the importance of English has been recognized earlier than in China. Japan stands out a little more as its government started to put great emphasis on the use of English, but on the

personal level many Japanese feel that English is not as essential in their lives, if compared to China or South Korea. This view is slowly changing, but it might take some time before the general public has reached a consensus on the importance of English (Honna and Takeshita 2004, 216-217).

The three countries investigated in this paper all share a strong economic development in recent decades. The Japanese economic miracle, the miracle on the Han River and the Chinese economic boom are all proof of the strong economic force they displayed in their growth. It can be said that the countries have experienced rapid economic growth during the 20th century and have a high GDP, in comparison to other Asian countries.

A correlation between strong economy and English proficiency are usually assumed, and in many cases proven (cf.EF Education First 2017, 10–11). To investigate the English proficiency in East Asia the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) will be used to explore English proficiency levels in East Asia. The company writes about its test:

> *The EF SET is an online, adaptive English test of reading and listening skills. It is a standardized, objectively-scored test designed to classify test takers' language abilities into one of the six levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). […]*
> *The EF EPI 2017 country/region scores have been found to correlate strongly with TOEFL iBT 2016 country/region scores (r = 0.82) and IELTS Academic Test 2015 country scores (r = 0.71). These correlations show that, while these tests have different designs and test taker profiles, they reveal similar trends in national English proficiency. (EF Education First 2017, 41)*

While the findings of EF do not fully reflect all English learners and the EF EPI is used by the company for marketing purposes, it still gives indication to basic situations and trends. The EF EPI shows generally low English proficiency within the countries investigated. China and Japan rank as having low English proficiency with place 36 and 37 respectively (EF Education First 2017, 22). South Korea ranks slightly better at place 30 being classified as having moderate proficiency levels (EF Education First 2017, 22).

Usually a correlation between strong economy and English proficiency can be seen, but from the EF EPI it can be deduced that English proficiency is still low in East Asia despite great economic achievements. It can be concluded, that English proficiency levels do not fully reflect the economic ability of those countries. How to improve proficiency will be discussed in the rest of this paper. The following part will take an in-depth look on how culture, government and shadow education impact EFL in East Asia.

3.1 Cultural Understandings of Education in East Asia

While Japan, China and South Korea are very diverse from each other, their shared history and geographical closeness has led to many similarities in their educational beliefs (Williams 2017, 26-27). Williams argues that this makes it easier to discuss shared cultural understandings of education (Williams 2017, 26-27). This is also important to note, because culture defines education (Williams 2017, 26). Educational settings in East Asia are largely based on Confucianism (Williams 2017, 25). Up to now, Chinese and South Korean society is still based largely on Confucian values. Japan shows signs of influence but takes on a more distant stance. Education is very valued in East Asia, as by Confucius's thought, a person does not become a competent human being, unless educated through deliberate efforts. Additionally, education can also provide the means to escape poverty, which is relevant especially in China.

One virtue the teachings of Confucius highlights is "ritual property" or *lí* in social life such as maintaining social roles and keeping social relations harmonious (cf. Peng 2007, 251). Confucius also emphasized the importance of keeping *face*, a term that would later be adapted by Western researchers of pragmatics. The *face* or public-image has to be always kept and therefore avoiding confrontation[2] will be the usual recourse (cf. Peng 2007, 251). For students this means that they are reluctant to challenge teachers or even participate in a way that could lead to a loss of face, such as answering a question they are unsure about. A student in a study conducted by Peng said this about the situation: "I fear that I'd get stuck standing there while the whole class are [sic] looking at me. That's terribly embarrassing'" (Peng 2007, 257). For foreign language classes, where student participation and a communicative approach are vital for learning a language efficiently, this leads to problems. Peng stated it as such: "The culture of the language classroom, first of all, is *interactive*" (Peng 2007, 252). This stands in direct contrast to the teacher-centric classroom appreciated in East Asia. Teachers that follow Confucianism principles in the classroom will put emphasis on their students being disciplined and attentive, taking notes and memorizing (Jin and Cortazzi 1996, 24). Teachers might also unconsciously take on the expected social role, even if they believe in different teaching strategies. Therefore, teachers must be aware of this issue and know how to appropriately handle it. Possible solutions might be to voice questions in a way that will not lead to a loss of face for students and to not respond negatively to wrong answers.

[2] In pragmatics reffered to as the the "face-saving-act"; Further literature by Yule, George

Parents are an integral part of education, especially in Asia. Another virtue emphasized by Confucius is *Xiaō* (cf. Williams 2017, 26). *Xiaō* (孝) translates to filial piety. It consists of two complexes with separate meaning. The component meaning elder (耂) is on top being "carried" by the component meaning child (子). This helps us understand that respecting elders and showing utmost obedience towards them can be considered an important part of conduct in society. The Chinese Mandarin language shows this cultural custom is deeply engraved, even in its language. Expectations from parents and teachers can therefore not be denied by children as they are culturally obliged to follow orders and please their seniors unless they want to commit an offence. Jin and Cortazzi described it as following:

> *Asking questions is part of some Chinese students' conceptualization of learning and of what it means to be a good student […]. It can be argued that this is a strong part of the Confucian tradition but one which may overridden by other Confucian maxims which stress respect for the teacher and being obedient (Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 13)*

The concept of Xiaō also exists in Korea where it is known as Hyo (효) and Japan where it is called Kou (こう). In an educational context this reflects in social relationships and the students' inability to voice individual thinking. While neither Western nor Eastern approaches to education are "good" or "bad", as both have positive and negative aspects, it is important to realize how cultural beliefs might affect the EFL classroom.

Jin and Cortazzi conducted extensive studies on *cultures of learning* in China, Japan and Great Britain to find out what expectations towards a "good" teacher and "good" student consisted of in Western and Eastern society. Their findings concluded that students expectations towards a good teacher were to have deep knowledge as being the most important trait and for him or her to be patient, humorous and a good morale example as other important factors (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 42). Clarity is important, and ambiguity discouraged as Confucius stated: "Say yes, when you know; say no, when you don't. Both cases indicate your knowledge" (Peng 2007, 252). Asian students seem to favour teachers that have a lot of theoretical knowledge. In contrast: "The British gave an extraordinary range of metaphors and numerous descriptive phrases, dominated by *enthusiasm, interest, organization, discipline,* and *nurturing."* (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 42). This shows contrasting expectations towards teachers in Western and Eastern settings.

The study also found contrasting expectations towards students. A good student is, according to Chinese students, hardworking as the most important factor. Other important traits are being sociable i.e. learns from/with others, is sociable, pays attention to the teacher and respects and obeys the teacher. While this correlates with British and Japanese answers to some degree Western students did not value obedience to teachers as important (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 42). “The Chinese students give *shyness* as the major reason for not asking questions in class. If the question is thought to be foolish, others may laugh, or they are afraid of making language mistakes when speaking out” (Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 49). “In Chinese terms, a learner needs to know *before* asking. In British terms, students come to know *by* asking” (Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 49). This links directly back to cultural beliefs. The study by Jin and Cortazzi is valuable in understanding student and teacher motivation and how cultural beliefs play a role in this.

Japan has taken on a bit of a separate stance as it does not build its entire belief system on Confucianism. Japan is still heavily influenced by the animistic religion Shinto and Buddhism (Williams 2017, 27). Sinification was not as extensive as in South Korea and therefore the country shows a mixture of cultural backgrounds (Williams 2017, 27). Ike also stated that cultural awareness is developing positively in Japan and supporting the development of designing lessons in EFL:

> *One positive aspect of English education in Japan is the fact that much more consideration is being given to cultural differences. […] For example, being shy, while highly valued in Japanese culture, is seen as a weakness in American culture. […] It is hoped that a greater emphasis on communication and on cultural sensitivity in English education will contribute to a deeper understanding, and in turn will eventually help Japanese learn English. (Ike 1995, 10)*

Even when comparing countries on whether they are a highly collectivistic or highly individualistic culture, which means one that favours collectivism or individualism above the other, Japan takes on an outsider stance. While China and South Korea are clearly collectivistic, Japan has begun to lean towards individualism. Their individualism score records at 46 according to Hofstede’s research (Hofstede 2018, n.p.). This is far more than their neighbours China and South Korea which rank at 20 and 18 respectively. This makes Japan the most individualistic country in East Asia.

Conclusively it can be said that Confucius and his teachings have greatly influenced East Asian perspectives on teaching and conduct, especially in China and South Korea. Many Asian parents put high hopes on their children which might pressure them in turn as they feel the need to be successful to provide for their family. Possible consequences for English education could be teaching problems

in the EFL classroom as foreign language is hard to teach passively. Many steps have to be taken to be aware of cultural implications and still design successful lesson plans.

3.2 Current School Systems and Curricula in East Asia

The integration of English into the East Asian curricula must be looked at more specifically to understand the current situation better. How is English integrated into the East Asian curricula? What other subjects' impact on the students? And what are the surrounding conditions English is integrated into i.e. how does the school system work?

English is a compulsory subject in all three countries. It is mandatory from grade 3 until grade 12 in China (cf. Williams 2017, 31). Interestingly, English is also compulsory in University and tested with the CET4 and CET6 (College English Test). English is a compulsory subject until grade 12 in South Korea. In a surprising move, South Korea recently banned English education in first and second grade of primary school in favour of strengthening the native language Korean (cf. Ghani 2018, n.p.). Responses to this have been broadly negative from parents and experts. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has however also implemented various revisions to the English curriculum in recent years to improve English education (cf. Kang 2014, 63–65). In Japan, English is compulsory only in middle school, which is three years. Ikegashira states regarding this: "Even though English is an obligatory subject in middle schools, the high school legislation states that any foreign language can be studied as a second language. In theory this gives opportunity for the high schools to choose which languages to offer their students, but in reality English is the only option, due to the fact that most university entrance exams put heavy emphasis on English" (Ikegashira 2009, quoted in: Løfsgaard 2015). The lack of English education in primary school has been heavily criticized. Though primary schools could offer a weekly English lesson targeted towards communication starting from grade 5 it was only until 2011 that they were made mandatory (cf. Williams 2017, 32–34). The ministry of Education in Japan has made plans to introduce English as full-fledged subject into primary schools starting at grade 3 by 2020 when the Olympics will be held in Tokyo (cf. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), n.p.). This comes quite late when compared to their neighbors.

These facts help us to reflect the value English holds in these countries and their engagement with the language. In China, English is of immense importance as it is a required subject even in higher education. It is also perceived to be very

important in South Korea as English is a compulsory subject that is integrated early on into the curriculum and revised often to bring forth better outcomes. English is elective in Japanese high schools and has not yet been fully implemented into the elementary curriculum, it therefore does not hold as much prestige in comparison to other subjects.

It has already been established earlier that English proficiency is still considered poor in East Asia. Despite this, Japan, South Korea and China continue to rank at the top of standardized tests such as PISA (cf. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015). They do however perform poorly on English standardized tests such as TOEFL and IELTS (cf. Lee 2015, 47–48). PISA tests Science, Math and Reading. Because great emphasis is put on those subjects in East Asia students continue to excel in them. China for example recently introduced Science classes as early as grade 1 while cutting back on English (cf. Xiang 2017, n.p.). The main reason students thrive in these subjects can be explained with the focus on teacher-centered input and memorization in class which works well for logic-based subjects. This is a great achievement, but it illuminates that the approaches to teaching in East Asia suit certain subjects more than others. Foreign language teaching must be done actively, and passive ways of teaching have not proven very fruitful so far. English does not seem to prosper in the current system and it is advisable to adapt a different style of teaching depending on the individual needs of a subject.

It is also significant to examine the current surroundings of EFL. The different school systems lay out conditions which influence the subject. Therefore, we will take a closer look at examinations. China used the *KeJu* or imperial examination in ancient times. This was implemented to be able to give their citizens a chance at moving up the ranks unrelated to their status (cf. Williams 2017, 26). South Korea used a similar concept called Gwageo which they adapted from China. This *KeJu* system shares many similarities with the current system used in China - the Gaokao. "In China, the *gaokao* is widely considered to be the most important exam, which can make or break a young person's future. It is also intended to help level the playing field between the country's rich and poor" (Pinghui 2017, n.p.). China uses the Gaokao, or University Entrance Exam, to determine students' access to higher education. Once again, the same system is used in South Korea, where it is called *Suneung* or *CSAT*, and in Japan with the ***nyūgaku shiken***. It poses the only option to receive admission into university, and with few other options as vocational education remains underdeveloped, many students are desperate to pass with high grades. The great focus on passing university entrance exams

makes studying a matter of training to graduate rather than learning content (cf. Pinghui 2018, n.p.). This focus has been widely criticized but many also see it as necessary as it is the only system that has proven to work so far, especially in a highly populated country such as China.

In this part, the Gaokao will function as exemplary model for the other university entrance exams as they are similarly built. In the Gaokao, English takes equal part with Chinese and Math (cf. Pinghui 2018, n.p.). The English Gaokao contains usually a reading, writing and listening segment. It also reflects the use of GTM often found in prior exams and textbooks. It is heavily grammar-focused, contains mainly Chinese instructions and exercises are badly stylized (cf. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, n.o.). University entrance exams in East Asia seem to contribute to the problems in ELT tremendously as they make it nearly impossible for students to focus on anything else other than passing them by repetition, memorization and focusing on grammar (cf. Williams 2017, 79–80). They give no real opportunity to learn English for communicative purposes (cf. Williams 2017, 79–80). The focus is clearly on skill testing rather than oral competences. This is reflected in the classroom as teachers focus mainly on exam preparation and leave little time for anything else (cf. Williams 2017, 79–80).

The urban-rural gap in China is very strong as well. Students receive different levels of education depending on their living situation. Shanghai and Beijing offer different textbooks, exams and generally better school quality than the rural areas for example. University entrance admission is also limited to fewer students from rural areas than students from the city, which makes it harder for rural students to get into a good university (cf. Pinghui 2018, n.p.). Unequal ratio for university admittance has been a long issue for students and parents from the provinces.

In response to the Gaokao a new trend of private international schools has emerged as well. Students there will be prepared for "Western" education and don't necessarily take the Gaokao, as the goal is to study abroad for higher education (cf. Sharma 2016, n.p.). Such schools can be established by locals and natives, but a rising number sees foreigners found such schools as well (cf. Sharma 2016, n.p.). In the next chapter this issue of privatization of education will be looked at more closely.

3.3 English Education as a Business Model

The privatization of education has long been an issue within East Asia. This so called "shadow education" is considered a problem, especially in regards to providing equal education opportunities (cf. Bray and Lykins 2012, 6). Parents

invest a lot into the private education sector as they believe that regular schools are lacking and cannot provide their children with the best education possible. China, Japan and South Korea rank at the top when it comes to money spent on private education (cf. Sharma 2013, n.p.). “[In South Korea] the market for private English institutes for children amounts to one trillion [W]on (approximately US$800 million) and the market for English education materials amounts up to 500 billion [W]on (approximately US$400 million) while more than 5000 kinds of English education-related publications are available throughout the bookstores” (Shim and Baik 2004, 250). With shadow education being an integral part of the education system in East Asia we will explore more on the example of South Korea.

South Korea ranked first in spending on private education among OECD countries (cf. Lee 2015, 47). South Korea is also known as one of the four tiger states, for its development from a developing to a developed country within a quick time frame, akin to the strength of a tiger. This success was accomplished through hard work by its citizens and the Korean people take pride in this achievement. They want their future generations to be as hardworking as possible to secure future growth. Many children, teenagers and young adults feel that a lot of pressure is put upon them because of this. Interestingly the term *tiger parenting* coined by Amy Chua, a Chinese-American, also uses the tiger to describe a fierce and strict parenting style which pushes children to attain high levels of academic achievement (cf. Bray and Lykins 2012, 25). Because of this, in South Korea and beyond, Asian parents have fallen for the so-called *education fever* (cf. Sharma 2013, n.p.). The term describes excessive spending on education, often in the form of extra-curricular lessons and cram schools, and sending children to study abroad even if they have trouble to afford it (cf. Sharma 2013, n.p.). From this, one can conclude that Asian parents sacrifice their time and money to provide their children with education, tutoring and extracurricular activities.

One such private learning institution are *Hagwons* or so called “cram schools” (because students are crammed together). They are very popular after-school programs in South Korea where students spent considerable amounts of time revising and preparing for exams. (cf. Williams 2017, 9). They exist in China and Japan as well, where they are called *Buxiban* and *Juku* respectively. Many such companies are trying to make (English) education a for-profit issue. Ike writes about this: “The anxiety about the lack of communicative proficiency is heightened by commercialism. Some business language institutions claim ‘In three weeks you can become a good speaker of English!’ This has resulted in some very prosperous private English conversation institutes.” (Ike 1995, 9). It also opened a huge job

market for foreigners seeking teaching jobs in East Asia and this issue will be elaborated on later in the paper. Heavy governmental regulations have been put on private education institutions to scale down on them, but despite that they continue to thrive (cf. Bray and Lykins 2012, 61–62).

Online tutors are another factor in the issue. Online English lessons provided by English education websites can be found plenty on the Internet (cf. Shim and Baik 2004, 250-251). According to DeHart, Online-tutors can earn great amounts of money such as Kim Ki-hoon, who reportedly earns $4 million annually (cf. DeHart 2013, n.p.). Such extreme cases stand out of course, but it seems, that nowhere else individuals can earn such amounts of money through private education. DeHart continues to elaborate:

> *Some, […] believe a laissez faire approach to education may be the answer to improving the nation's public school system as well by paying teachers more across the board. Others have expressed doubts that students are really learning anything more by hitting the books after the last school bell rings. They may become standardized test superstars, but are they learning to think? (DeHart 2013, n.p.)*

The greatest criticism such approaches to education receive, is that they focus on teaching to give the right answer to examination questions (cf. Shim and Baik 2004, 251). Communication is never the focal point. Additionally, class sizes are big and (foreign) teachers often unqualified. One could argue that such institutions simply cover the supply to a demand. The amount of money involved, and the actual outcome of such teaching methods leave a bitter aftertaste however, as they do not stand in relation to each other. Parents evidently seem to believe that investing into shadow education is worth it.

It is crucial, that tutoring companies must be regulated better and held accountable. A change in parents' minds should also be striven for. While extracurricular studies are not to be discouraged and entirely viewed negatively, they must be overviewed better and the people behind it especially. The social cost has also to be taken into consideration, as Bray and Lykins summarize it:

> *While some dimensions of this growth might be welcomed as ways to extend the provision of education and build human capital, shadow education brings threats to government goals of social equality. Shadow education is much less about remedial help for students to keep up with their peers, and much more about competition and creation of differentials. It may also contribute to inefficiencies in education systems, and even to elements of corruption. (Bray and Lykins 2012, 67).*

4 The Role of Teachers

English language teachers occupy an important role in ELT, as their choice of teaching style influences learning outcomes the most. Though individual attitudes

and practices are dynamic and varied, ingrained beliefs and environmental factors, that influence the classroom environment additionally to the teacher exist as well (cf. Williams 2017, 73). Because of this, the role of teachers, their education as well as their didactic approaches will be investigated.

East Asian teachers' didactics have been characterized by three traits: they are largely teacher-centered, textbook-focused and emphasize on preparing students for exams such as the university entrance exams (cf. Williams 2017, 73). While educational reforms in all countries have helped to change attitudes towards new learning styles, exam-focused textbooks, parents and school systems make it hard for teachers to implement non-traditional teaching styles in the classroom. Additional to this, as already established, the cultural role of teachers is heavily linked to Confucian beliefs. This also makes it harder for teachers to adopt didactics and practices that do not conform with Confucian teachings such as encouraging students to speak up in the classroom.

The social value of teachers is extraordinary. They hold high status in their communities but pay varies in East Asia with Japan giving high wages and China comparatively low ones (cf. Shi and Englert 2013, 113) (cf. Miyajima 2013, 83–84) (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 1996, 16). The job is however also considered to be very labour intensive, as teachers invest unproportional amounts of time into their work. This can also lead to teachers being too tired to properly prepare outside the necessary and many loose enthusiasm for their vocation (cf. Smith 1975, 4). Additionally, many report feeling uncomfortable in their communities, as they are under constant watchful eyes and must act as role model even in their private lives. A teacher named Higashino reported:

> *I try to behave even in my private time, especially if I am around town. Lots of parents are watching teachers without your knowing. I go out of town for shopping or anything. I want to feel free. In this neighbourhood, I am a teacher seven days a week. (cf. Miyajima 2013, 83–84)*

This shows the strong responsibility teachers' hold, and with high pressure put among them, burnout can be an issue in the occupation.

4.1 Teacher Education in East Asia

Before we delve further into didactics favoured by East Asian teachers, a thorough look at teacher education must be made. This helps to understand what teachers bring into the classroom and which tools they have been given even before entering a school for the first time. Teachers in all East Asian countries must study and graduate from a University or other qualified higher school to become certified teachers. This is however not the case for foreign teachers that work as Assistant

Language Teachers (ALTs) or in other teaching positions. Often even an unrelated bachelor's degree is enough to find a teaching position. They will be examined closer when Western influence will be discussed. In the next part, native teachers and the education they receive will be investigated.

Japan and China face issues in implementing Elementary School English as the switch was made later than in South Korea. The rather sudden change created an urgent need for English Elementary teachers. Many secondary teachers were suddenly re-trained or elementary teachers had to start teaching outside of their subject area and were unprepared for the responsibility (cf. Williams 2017, 84). A very similar situation happened in South Korea (cf. Kang 2014, 69) and China where around 60% of English primary teachers came from unrelated bachelor degrees or other subjects (cf. Wu 2014, 15). As a consequence there is a large number of elementary school teachers in East Asian with little to no English language background and/or training who are expected to teach it as a subject (cf. Butler 2007). In Japan 77% of these teachers reported to be significantly anxious about their English proficiency, especially in regards to their speaking proficiency and their ability to teach the subject (cf. Williams 2017, 86). Many cope by using ALTs excessively or rely on the familiar book-focused and teacher-centered didactics that do not challenge their abilities outside the framework given. Wu summarizes: "Teachers with poor or with no background in teaching English as a foreign language have had a negative influence on students' language learning, and students poor English training has caused problems for their further studies in junior and senior middle schools" (cf. Wu 2014, 15–16). The strong effect of poorly trained teachers is immediate and can cause damage to long-term English studies. Students are early on disillusioned about the subject and miss the basic knowledge for later studies. A more conscientious approach to hiring and educating teachers would have been desirable. For the time being, steps to slow down the negative effects of poorly trained teachers such as thorough re-training and governmental incentives for teachers might help the issue.

Secondary school teachers have received better education as the history for the school form is more extensive. This will be elaborated on the example of Japan. Old teacher training practices stressed the importance of the GTM as recounted by a Japanese teacher in 1998: "When I began teaching I taught English focusing on the grammar translation." (Lamie 1998, 522). More than 40 years ago Smith already wrote about issues in East Asian teacher education, complaining:

> *Teachers usually lack training in language teaching techniques since they spent their university years mostly reading classic and modern English literature and*

> *translating it. There is tittle supervised practice teaching or study of methodology. A few teachers' English proficiency is good but most have limited aural/oral skills. All of them can read and translate, therefore that is the principal classroom activity. (Smith 1975, 3)*

Unfortunately, it seems that little has changed to today. Revisions to teacher training legislation have been made towards a more communicative approach, but the changes did not seem to have the strong effect wished for, as teachers found them hard to implement in real life (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 207–08).

After the revision, different significance is given to certain topics in teacher education for junior and senior high school. The focus of teacher training for junior high school gives more significance to subjects on teaching rather than senior high school (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 207–08). Both give equal importance to subjects on English (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 207–08). This means more importance is given to learning about classroom management and pedagogy for junior high school teachers and equal importance to English. English-related subjects include “linguistics, English and American literature, communication in English, comparative culture, etc. […] Subjects on teaching include educational principles, educational psychology, English teaching methods, practice teaching, etc.” (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 208). Interestingly, computer literacy and communication in English became compulsory after partial revisions to the teacher training legislation (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 208). This shows willingness to incorporate more communicative subjects into teacher training and make use of new media. MEXT has also spoken critical of the grammar-translation method and advocated to improve general quality of teaching through various teacher training courses and support systems (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 208). Other East Asian countries have taken similar steps in their teacher training approach, such as South Korea with stricter teacher admission rules (cf. Lee 2015, 60–61). Overall, this shows a greater motivation to implement a more communicative approach towards English education in teacher training. The changes made still do not seem to have a strong effect, as not enough emphasis is put on English proficiency and knowledge of didactics and it is of importance that further revisions be made. The revisions should also reflect classroom realities and ways have to be found to realistically carry them out. So far however, the governments changing attitude towards teacher training has been going in the right direction.

4.2 Didactic Approaches

From personal experience I vividly remember my first English lesson during my exchange year at a Japanese High School. The Japanese teacher came in and would ask us to open our books before proceeding to spend the next hour talking

in Japanese and writing grammar rules on the blackboard. Such lessons would bore or even confuse me and my Japanese classmates. The only “fun” we had was during English Communication classes. Our teacher was an Australian woman called Ms. Michelle and we would talk with each other and play games exclusively in English. My Japanese classmates struggled a lot more than during regular lessons and often were afraid to speak up but unanimously they considered our English Communication classes to not only be more fun but to be more contributing in being able to *speak* English. Such experiences are no rarity in Japan or even East Asia. Many students go through English education designed to teach them the language only on paper. Therefore, it is of importance to investigate didactic approaches – or the lack thereof – in the East Asian English classroom and what could be done to improve didactics.

Even though teachers are expected to adopt the oral communicative approach represented in the new curricula, the truth is that many still struggle to employ new regulations. This can best be seen in class routine, which is generally very repetitive. The teachers provide input and students are expected to absorb it. They learn vocabulary or grammar through repetition or silently listening to the teacher (Jin and Cortazzi 1996, 20–21). They might read textbooks and do some form of pair work as alternation but a wide range of tasks, games or similar activities is unlikely to occur in the classroom setting. This has been widely criticised, as Smith for example states: “Almost always the students are highly motivated at the beginning of English instruction, but this soon begins to flag. They are taught to analyze and admire rather than use the language.” (Smith 1975, 3). It can be seen, that not enough diverse activities and too many repetitive tasks are given. The question why many teachers struggle so much to implement a more communicative approach remains.

The first reason why teachers are at odds with the communicative approach is because governmental top-down approaches cause many teachers to struggle in implementing changes because they force them to leave their comfort zone even though their abilities are not up to par yet (cf. Lee 2015, 61). For example, the language of instruction is very often the native language of the teacher. This is because unqualified teachers are too pressured to adapt their lessons to the enforced changes, so they teach English mostly in their native language. In China for instance, only more than 60% of the senior secondary teachers and 91% of the junior secondary teachers held the qualifications necessary in 2001 (MOE Department of Development and Planning, 2001) (cf. Hu 2005, 16). While this is an improvement to prior years, it still shows that teacher qualifications are not fully

developed. This is also partially due to regional accessibility to further training in China. Therefore, the teachers struggle to let go of the grammar-focus of their lessons seems to be stemming from the limited abilities of teachers themselves rather than unwillingness to implement them. Teachers simply find it hard to replace the focus on grammar skills and memorisation, despite teachers and students wishes to be more communication-focused (cf. Løfsgaard 2015, 28).

In addition, "problems were compounded for the teachers by the fact that university-bound high school students would continue to sit for examinations based on the old formal grammar/structure literacy-centred curriculum while being taught a new curriculum aiming for communicative oracy." (Lamie 1998, 515). Løfsgaard summarizes it with: "Very few teachers have the necessary communicative competence to teach a more oral method and […] implementing methods that anticipates student discussions and so on has proved to be a challenging task." (Løfsgaard 2015, 26). For students, this means a lack of exposure to spoken English and ultimately hesitancy to speak English. Greater focus on qualification for oral communication should be given during teacher training and in the workforce and bottom-up approaches favored in implementing new curricula.

Additionally, school material that is state-sanctioned, has not yet reached its full potential. In China for instance, school material, that is state mandatory, is based on passing examinations and ultimately the Gaokao. Revised textbooks, that have been designed in cooperation with foreign help, show great improvement, as Adamson and Morris state:

> *"More recently, a number of local education departments and publishers have been collaborating with overseas publishers and textbook writers in producing up-to-date learning materials. For instance, the most widely used textbook series, Junior/Senior English for China, are results of collaboration among the People's Education Press, the Longman publishing company and the United Nations Development Program. […] Compared with their predecessors, recent textbooks are more innovative, learner-centered and communicatively-oriented because of their incorporation of new conceptions of education and international developments in language education" (Adamson and Morris 1996, quoted in: Hu 2005, 15).*

Nonetheless, while Adam and Morris praise the newly-developed textbooks, they also acknowledge that they generated substantial discussions between poorly and better qualified teachers (cf. Adamson and Morris 1996, 27). In the affluent regions, reactions have been favourable to the pedagogical innovations. Less developed areas complained about the difficulties met in handling the materials (cf. Adamson and Morris 1996, 27). Teachers' struggle to realistically use it in the classroom as they simply lack the resources needed and expected such as technical equipment or small class sizes. Rural teachers also have less possibilities to understand

unfamiliar nuances in textbooks and end up trying to adapt them to the teaching style they are familiar with. Teachers may use other materials as well, but because of the high focus on passing exams it is unlikely to happen. They are under great governmental and parental pressure to provide students with the best possible preparation for the Gaokao, so they rather focus on finishing material than on the students' improvement. This means that teachers favour state-issued teaching materials and textbooks in favour of other, maybe even self-designed ones. The fear of "doing something wrong" is less this way and no burden lies on the teacher to overstep expectations placed on him or her. It could almost be called a culture of fear, if we consider that China is still a communist country. It also costs less time and investment to simply follow a book instead of coming up with additional lesson material.

If we take a closer look at the English language education books currently used in China, for example Unit 3 of the first English school book used during primary school, we can analyze possible problems further. Unit 3 is titled "Look at me" and covers general greetings, vocabulary to describe a face and the letters e to i (cf. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1). The analysis further discloses that the general design is colourful and appealing to young children. No Chinese is used for instructuions, everything is in English. The tasks are not all related with each other e.g. one task jumps from a game similar to "Simon Says" to chanting the alphabet (cf. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1). Overall, there are two tasks where students can speak themselves – one is practicing the pre-learned greeting phrases with a neighbour and one is chanting the alphabet as a listen and repeat exercise. All exercises are passive, which means the teacher leads them while students follow. Listening and repeating are predominant. New vocabulary is not introduced in a context but mostly randomly e.g. *gift* and *green* for the letter *g* (cf. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1). While too intense communicative excercises cannot be expected at this learning level yet, if we consider that many teachers, especially insecure ones, will follow the textbooks closely, it is no wonder that a more communicative approach has not yet reached the classroom.

Honna and Takeshita point out the fact that ELT for communicative purposes is often seen as learning about foreign cultures rather than facilitating cultural exchange (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 214). An example would be Japanese students being ordered to write Christmas cards to friends overseas, a holiday that is not celebrated in Japan, instead of traditional Japanese New Year cards (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 214). The word "foreigner" also almost exclusively

referred to white Americans in discourse (cf. Yamada 2016, 58). It is important to re-think “English culture” as being exclusive to the USA and Great Britain. To foster a more international approach to English communication, in which students are participants that can share their own experiences rather than be absorber of Anglo-American culture, should be desired. English is used in an intercultural setting and a Japanese and Korean person meeting are unlikely to communicate about Christmas in the USA. Fortunately, there are signs that textbooks in Japan are changing in the desired direction (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 214). But on “the pedagogical level, most teachers have just very rough idea of what culture should be and what should be taught in terms of cultural component” (Li 2016, 771). Language teachers task is not to teach cultural contents, but to enable learners' interaction with said cultural content and to help them reflect this for themselves. A shift in how intercultural communication is viewed will also facilitate student motivation and engagement in the classroom, as students have an easier grasp on the issue they want to communicate since they are familiarized with it and are more motivated to express themselves.

The best approach to teach how to speak, listen, read and write in East Asian EFL settings remains heavily discusses. Williams writes, regarding listening and speaking competence, that while many teaching concepts were designed with Western settings in mind and do not necessarily fit in the Asian context, they can be adapted through modification as to better fit the Asian teaching setting (cf. Williams 2017, 96). He also questions why the GTM was received so enthusiastically during the 20th century but following methodologies such as the audio-lingual method or total physical response never found acclaim (cf. Williams 2017, 96). East Asia seems to have never went through the same methodology process as the Western world. The greatest point of conflict would be, that newer methodologies focus on student autonomy and student-centered classrooms, which was not possible or even thought of in East Asia during the early stages and in some part even today. “It is likely that the vast majority of educators in East Asia simply looked at such approaches and thought, ”that would never work here…”” (Williams 2017, 105). It can be said that communicative language teaching[3] (CLT) cannot find success in East Asia as long as the GTM suits the needs of exam-focused teaching. What can be changed for the better acceptance and implementation of CLT in the classroom? Williams argues that it is to focus on teachers and students training of acceptance and understanding of alien

[3] Communicative language teaching is a teaching methodology that emphasizes interaction as the main focus of instruction and learning goal

methodology (cf. Williams 2017, 107). New propositions are quickly abandoned, but if the focus shifts to repetition and accustomedness to new methods the understanding and acceptance of them will also rise. The focus should also be on respecting teaching and learning styles, while at the same time introducing new methods and establishing their use and worth slowly and steadily to build students confidence. Speaking and listening competence are therefore best taught by being aware of cultural settings and adapting techniques accordingly. A recommendation by Williams would be to make liberal use of visual aids, limited use of drill exercises and avoid teacher-centric lectures and too much grammatical instruction (cf. Williams 2017, 108).

As honorable mention, in a project by an English communication class near a famous tourist spot in Narita students learned various communication strategies before being asked to talk to foreign tourists at the spot (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 214). Most children reported that they really enjoyed the exercise and felt it had boosted their confidence in their communication ability (cf. Honna and Takeshita 2004, 214). Such task-based teaching approaches show willingness to not only go with the generic GTM approach. While this is of course not an option for all East Asian areas, it showcases making use of the ability to communicate in real life settings with English.

The possible improvement strategies for listening and speaking competences have been introduced, and while many of them apply to reading and writing competences, a closer look at reading competences will be taken. This is done to contrast them with the GTM reading competences, that have dominated the East Asian classroom. Additionally, nothing more than reading competences enable students to take their learning into their own hands. Jin and Cortazzi describe a typical approach to reading competence at a University-level reading course:

> *A common sequence starts with students preparing for the new unit themselves before the class, checking meanings of unknown words in dictionaries. If a cassette is available they may listen to a reading of the text and new words. Students often practise by reading aloud, sitting in odd corners of the campus. In class, the teaching begins by the teacher asking students to read aloud. The teacher will check pronunciation and intonation and ask some general comprehension questions. The teacher then explains new words in the text. These are practised in word study exercizes [sic] involving pronunciation, translation, use of synonyms and paraphrase. Then there are comprehensive explanations of selected grammatical points and their functions in the text. These points are practised by drills, translations, sentence manipulation and blank-filling exercises. Further practice includes paraphrasing, summarizing and retelling the content of the text. Occasionally there will be class discussion, debate or role playing, but more often there will not be enough time for such activities. (Jin and Cortazzi 1996, 20–21)*

The focus of this class was not to improve reading comprehension but to memorize new vocabulary, to learn grammatical points in the text and to be able to read the text aloud in contrast to actually understanding it (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 2004, 19–20). Communication is limited to converse for a limited amount of time about the topic in general. “Language as communication is neglected and the excessive focus on teacher-centred activities puts students into a passive role of listening and memorizing” (cf. Jin and Cortazzi 1996, 21). To improve reading competences first of all the teachers have to be aware of orthographic differences in L1 and L2[4] that can affect literacy achievements (cf. Williams 2017, 122). This will be elaborated further on the example of the Japanese language. Japanese makes use of three types of script. When Japanese learners of English are faced with spelling rules of English they struggle as they cannot relate it to the scripts they are familiar with which have sound-to symbol (Kana) and no sound-to-symbol (Kanji) relationships (cf. Williams 2017, 134). They then use processing strategies similar to that used for the Kanji decoding and have a harder time gaining English literacy. Another factor would be at the phonological level, where Japanese learners of English struggle with learning to separate consonants from vowels as their syllabic language has always set them together (cf. Williams 2017, 133). Improvement strategies for reading competences would therefore be: being aware of orthographic differences, raise phonological decoding skills in English and mapping semantic relationships between English vocabulary items (cf. Williams 2017, 137–38).

Conclusively, it can be said that didactic approaches are not solely generated by teachers. As already mentioned, the three major traits of East Asian EFL didactics have been identified to be the teacher-centered classroom, text-book focused work and exam-oriented teaching (cf. Williams 2017, 73). Changes that have to be realised in East Asian EFL didactics are therefore: take the focus from the teacher to the students, take the focus from textbooks to the improvement of didactics and reduce the direness of exams. This cannot be done by teachers on their own, they must be given the framework to develop their didactic approaches. This calls for strong political and societal involvement. Teachers should focus on improving their qualifications, especially regarding their own proficiency, intercultural competence and use of didactics. Additionally, they should give their students as much chances as possible “to listen to as much authentic English as possible; to read as much living English as possible; to have as many chances to use English as possible; to

[4] L1 refers to first language or native language; L2 refers to second language or target language

extend a cultural background knowledge; [and] to cultivate a sense of international citizenship." (Lamie 1998, 518). This will help to improve current didactic approaches of English teachers in East Asia.

5 The Role of Students

Students are an integral part of the issue and many factors surrounding them have been identified. The focus shifts to students themselves and their experiences and part in English language education. This section takes a detailed look at students in East Asia and particularly the reasons for their insufficient English abilities and how surrounding issues affect them. Moreover, their motivations to learn English and ultimately how their wellbeing is affected by studying and living in the current school system will be investigated.

The East Asian learner and his approaches to learning are often overlooked or misunderstood in the subject matter. English students in East Asia have often been described, especially from Western standpoints, to be extremely quite in the classroom. Williams points out the importance of understanding East Asian learners when teaching there (cf. Williams 2017, 47–48). According to Williams, East Asian learners have different approaches to learning than, for example, Western students. He mentions a preference for introverted learning strategies, knowledge being viewed as something that has to be *transmitted* rather than uncovered, favouring visual learning and very small emphasis on the *interpretation* of information (cf. Williams 2017, 50). In addition, vocabulary learning is usually achieved through memorisation strategies, where words are viewed as single semantic units in contrast to learning them in context (cf. Nakamura 2004, 232–33). This passive approach to learning explains students' behaviour in the foreign language classroom. While the behaviour the students assume during class might be perceived as quiet, it is necessary to remember that this might not be the behaviour they want to display (cf. Finch 2012, 49). Learning culture is also heavily influenced by stereotyping from surroundings and cultural factors that disenable students to use learning strategies they might want to adopt (cf. Finch 2012, 49). Being aware of this and involving students and their learning behaviours, while still facilitating a classroom environment in which students can speak up and communicate is therefore of great importance (cf. Williams 2017, 47–48). Ultimately, raising learning strategy awareness and letting students decide what works best for them can help boost learning results (cf. Peng 2007, 262–63).

5.1 Reasons for Insufficient English Ability

There are several factors that influence the English proficiency of East Asian students. One major factor that has been pointed out by many linguists and experts is, that the differences in language make it hard to acquire English as a L2. Japan will serve as example in the following part, though similar difficulties apply for Korean and Chinese English learners as well. The reason why English is difficult for native Japanese speakers can be explained with the vast differences in the languages, especially in terms of grammar and phonetics. For example, Japanese is a syllable timed language and thus in contrast to alphabetic scripts which are used in the English language (cf. Williams 2017, 60). Moreover, Japanese is written from right to left and from top to bottom, making it hard, especially for younger learners, to switch in between the two forms. English words are also often transferred to the Japanese language in *Katakana* such as the word juice which will turn into *juusu*. This evidently will confuse a Japanese learner of English. The Japanese grammar differs from the English one as well, for example the usual word order in English will be S V O, while in Japanese it will be S O V (cf. Yuasa 2010, 147). Different methods should be applied to teach English to Japanese EFL students than to European students, as Ike points out: “The method of teaching English in Japan, whose language bears no linguistic similarity to any of the European languages, is not much different from that used in continental Europe, and, therefore, has proved inefficient and unproductive.” (Ike 1995, 7). If this is not done, it will make it more challenging for a Japanese learners of English to properly acquire the language.

Another factor would be external factors such as cultural and societal understandings impacting students’ behaviour. Firstly, the historical influence such as *sakoku,* which inhibited early exposure to foreign languages and cultures in the country shaped the national understanding of foreign languages and cultures initially as negative. In recent years, while not connotated with a negative image, English remains as something foreign that can be appraised but should not automatically be mingled with, if not necessary.

Moreover, as we already established, the general cultural circumstances do not allow for student-centered, active classroom participation which is vital in EFL. „Shame culture“, the fear of speaking up in case of failure, is rampant with students. Some students wish to contribute and be active participants of their classes and obtain learner autonomy but feel that their circumstances and surroundings do not allow them to (cf. Murase 2012, 77–78). If attitudes of classroom behaviour do not

change, it will be hard for students to attain English oral proficiency as they will be lacking the practice needed for it.

Didactical problems such as the prevailing use of the grammar-translation method and teachers' inability to speak fluent English with authentic pronunciation themselves are another factor. Teachers just feed knowledge and have limited knowledge in didactics which reflects on students learning progress being slower and/or more ineffective. Exam-oriented study which focuses on passing the university entrance exam (Gaokao, CSAT or Nyūgaku Shiken) rather than actual understanding of the language can also be considered a didactical problem of English classes, as English education in East Asian schools is mainly geared towards helping the students to pass the written university entrance exams.

Several factors for insufficient English proficiency in students have been identified. Students inability to become proficient in English stem from a variety of factors such as the history of English and its development in the respective countries, didactical approaches and problems in realizing revised curricula, cultural understandings, teacher ability and several other factors that we have discovered so far. We can conclude, that many factors combine to let students struggle so much to acquire the English language, but that external factors rather than internal ones contribute to students lacking English proficiency.

5.2 Student Motivation and Wellbeing

Student motivation is lacking considerably and incentives to learn English are almost exclusively external in East Asia. Many experts have criticized the lack of learner involvement which leads to a lack in student motivation. However, motivation and activation of the student are essential to the foreign language classroom (or any subject, for that matter) to start any kind of learning experience. Butler and Iino summarize it as following: "Many students start studying English in junior high school with eager anticipation. Unfortunately, due to the emphasis on memorization and learning about English, rather than using English for the purpose of communication, many lose interest." (Butler and Iino 2005).

Japan, China and South Korea all show different strategies in their curricula for English. In Japan, for example "the majority of students have no motivation to learn English, since proficiency in English is not needed in Japan except for those in a special category of profession." (Ike 1995, 7). So Japanese students see no future use for English as the subject is still not of dominant importance in the job market. In contrast, South Korean & Chinese students experience a lot of pressure because of the high-stakes put on English during exams. Studies suggest that the

intense test-related pressure demotivates many students (cf. Fox and Aryadoust 2016, 505–06). The findings of such studies lead to recommend that test-designers "seriously consider the potential impact their tests can have on young ELLs and their educational environments" (Fox and Aryadoust 2016, 506). Additionally, students and their families invest a lot of money and time into English language studies, but it seems that they have no intrinsic motive to learn English. This means that they lack any motivation besides extrinsic factors. Therefore, lack in motivation because of few chances for learner involvement in the classroom and teacher-focused lessons hinder the development of improving English proficiency. Raising student motivation can thus help to improve students' English proficiency, because foreign language needs to be learned actively by activating to motivate. Solutions would be more active learner involvement and student-focused lessons, but this is easier said than done. Making students see the worth in learning an active foreign language, not for the sake of exams or necessarily professional success, but for personal gain and self-realization, would be another solution.

In direct relation to student motivation is student wellbeing, as they correlate with each other. It is an important issue in East Asia, as many criticize the highly success-focused system leaving behind weaker students'. The problem will be explored on the example of South Korea, which has the most data and statistics available regarding this topic. Schooldays in South Korea are long and study intensive. Students in higher grades will often spent all their free time studying in school, at cram schools and at home. They design their life completely around studying. PISA reports that:

> *On average, 15-year-old students in Korea reported a level of 6.4 on a life-satisfaction scale ranging from 0 to 10 (OECD average: 7.3) […] About 22% of students reported very low life satisfaction (4 or below) (OECD average: 12%) […] Some 75% of Korean students reported that they worry about getting poor grades at school (OECD average: 66%); 69% often worry that a test will be difficult (OECD average: 59%); and 42% get very tense when they study (OECD average: 37%) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015, 1)*

Students always score higher than the OECD average regarding life-satisfaction and anxiety which indicates generally worse psychological wellbeing than what is average. This is also reflected in the suicide rates of the country. The leading cause of death for the age group 10-39 years is suicide (cf. Yoon 2015, n.p.). Many students are reported to commit suicide due to academic stress and during exam season the number of articles covering the issue of student suicide rise tremendously (cf. Yoon 2015, n.p.). Counselling and other mental health aids are commonly denied by those affected, as they represent a loss of face in the

community due to showing “weakness”. The academic stress teenagers face is also reflected in modern media. Korean idol groups targeting school-age children sing about societal pressure and school related stress such as BTS with their song “No More Dream”. TV-dramas such as “School 2013” which also received high viewer ratings during their primetime airing spot deal with issues such as depression, stress and suicide in school (cf. Chosun Ilbo 2013). The effect of exam-focused studying does not only affect academic performance regarding foreign language education but also human beings, and it is important to re-evaluate the worth of such a system.

6 Western Influence: Foreign Teachers

Western influence is strong in East Asian English education as the countries search for support and innovations for their own systems from foreign assistance. This is particularly noticeable regarding foreign teachers in the education sector. The job market for English teachers in East Asia is big. The demand for English language instruction by native English speakers keeps constantly rising (cf. International TEFL Academy 2015, n.p). Cosmopolitan East Asian cities have up to 1,000 language schools employing up to 15,000 foreign English teachers (cf. International TEFL Academy 2015, n.p). In South Korea alone 24,000 native English-speaking teachers are employed per year (cf. International TEFL Academy 2015, n.p). The efficiency and sustainability of such involvement will be explored in the next part.

Native teachers and mainstream schooling are seen as „inferior“, which fosters great demand for private schooling and experienced teachers (cf. Bray and Lykins 2012, 27). Foreign English teachers are considered better than their native counterparts and popular with students, because they speak „real“ English and use student-engaging didactics. Perceived notions, such as this, fuel the demand for foreign teachers. The teaching jobs for foreign English teachers are various as the market is vast (cf. Williams 2017, 1–2). Interested teachers can use the JET programme, as already mentioned, and also the similar Korean EPIK programme that employ ALTs for public schools (cf. Williams 2017, 2). With governmental backing and extensive preparation, the jobs are secured and generally considered more sustainable than their private counterparts. The JET programme provides participants even with an extensive information handbook as well as a teaching material collection designed by former participants to help assist teaching, quicken acclimatisation and soften the possible culture shock (cf. The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) 2013, 2018). MEXT has also

defined the promotion and expansion of ALTs and strengthening and enriching ALT training programs as one of their English Education Reform goals for 2020 (cf. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), n.p.). From this it can be seen that governments invest a lot into the maintenance of their ALT programmes.

Private schools, such as *hagwons* in South Korea or *eikawa* in Japan, also employ foreign teachers but jobs are not as secured, as firms can quickly go bankrupt. This was the case with Japanese chains Nova and Geos, where many teachers suddenly found themselves unemployed in a foreign country (Matsutani 2010, n.p). Generally, the sustainability of such employments is questionable as 100,000 new teaching positions open up abroad every year. Out of those only 50% stay a second year which means schools need to constantly hire new teachers (cf. International TEFL Academy 2015, n.p). If teachers and students can not get used to the foreign teachers and the foreign teachers themselves leave shortly after getting acclimated and with few time to reflect what they are teaching, it does not seem to be a productive cycle.

Motivation and qualification from foreign teachers themselves is also questionable. Many books and blog articles are published on the issue of teaching English in Asia. Looking at different literature that caters to people interested in teaching in East Asia, the question arises whether they are teaching manuals or tour guides? If we take for example a quote regarding living as a foreign English teacher in China: “If you follow the steps in this book, you will find and excel at a job where you earn enough money to pay for all the delicious food you can eat, an apartment, travel expenses and be able to save at least $1000 US each month for 20-30 hours of work a week.” (Lonergan 2016, Kindle Positionen 29-33). The author seems to focus on the appeal of living in a foreign country while making “easy money”. Motives such as wanting to improve students English, experience foreign pedagogic settings and other educationally related purposes for teaching cannot be found. Regarding the actual teaching the author writes:

> *Four (yayy!) to six (unlucky) days a week you will be expected to teach for three to five hours. This is another instance in which confidence and negotiation come into play: if you feel like you need two days off a week, insist upon the matter […]. You are the most valuable part of their school and in the end your extra day of rest will probably just be an issue of asking the parents of a particular class to come in on a day when you are already teaching. (Lonergan 2016, Kindle Positionen 537-541)*

The author assumes that the motivation of the target reader to teach seems to be solely for personal reasons. A strong feeling of entitlement can be felt as the author considers the foreign English teacher to be the most valuable part of the school

and recommends that he or she should not be willing to negotiate with the school if it is to his or her loss. While this is a more crass example, general beliefs and notions that reflect such thinking can be found in many foreign teachers, who might want to use their gap year for travelling or living in a foreign country, but also make some money along the way. Other motivations besides “seeing the world” might be “saving the world”, “hiding from the world” or “becoming worldly” (cf. Stanley 2013, 26). This is also backed up by the fact that most foreign English teachers are in their 20s or 30s and in a period of their life where adventure rather than professionalism take priority.

Furthermore, the only qualifications needed in private as well as governmental programmes, such as EPIK, are often a bachelors’ degree that does not necessarily have to be related to English language or pedagogy and citizenship of an English-speaking country (cf. Lee 2015, 52). Teacher training is also not necessarily needed. The advertisement for a university teaching job in China may read as follows: “Education: Does not matter. However, a University/College degree is desired. TEFL/TESL/TESOL certificate does not matter however one of them is desired.” (Stanley 2013, 28–29). The qualification for being a teacher seem to be solely to be a native speaker. Of course, not all foreign teachers come to teach in East Asia because they believe it to be an easy job while they get to travel around. This can be seen on the extensive, reputable and professional literature and the careful preparation of some governmental programmes. But with little regulations put in place or qualifications being necessary, the problem of questionable motivations by foreign English teachers keeps growing.

The question of whether foreign English teachers are actually needed is also relevant and should be analysed closer. While some consider the foreign English teacher to be “the most important part of the school”, actual research shows that native speakers are not necessarily better teachers than local ones. “It is generally accepted within the literature on educational pedagogy that foreign language instructors need not be native speakers of the target language to be effective, but simply need to be well versed in the target language” (Williams 2017, 19). Additionally, native teachers have the advantage of having gone through the same learning process as their students and are aware of differences between the native and target language (cf. Williams 2017, 19). But because many local teachers struggle with the target language English, the foreign language teacher is seen as the better teacher. Instead of promoting more efficient teacher education the invitation of foreign teachers is seen as the solution to the problem.

The culture shock many foreign teachers experience should also not be underestimated. For example, with foreign teachers in China: “When ‘Western teachers’, as Chinese students label them […] teach English in China there are asymmetrical perceptions about what happens and differing evaluations.” (Jin and Cortazzi 1997, 4). Many foreign English teachers are not adequately prepared when they start teaching in East Asia. Problems between native and foreign teachers are often reported (cf. Lee 2015, 52). Difficulties during team-teaching, verbal misunderstandings or cultural differences can quickly ruin a lesson or cause a loss of face for one party (cf. Williams 2017, 86–87). Native teachers have also complained that many foreign teachers lack professionalism, which led to frustrations on the native teachers side. Perceived inadequate appreciation in comparison to foreign teachers leaves potential for conflicts. The conditions leave native teachers frustrated or even feeling resentment as they believe it to be an “encroachment upon their professional domain” (cf. Williams 2017, 89–90). Positive aspects have also been reported with many native teachers being able to improve their own English skills through daily communication and foreigners being able to convey their own culture authentically (cf. Lee 2015, 52). While many success stories have emerged, a vast majority of foreign teachers remain unsuitable for the job and their motivations questionable. As long as not more clear and strict qualifications are put in place the invitation of so-called English teachers is not sustainable and harming the system. The improvement of native teachers should be considered as the better long-term solution. If teachers are not taught properly to help themselves, it is like giving water to a parched person and leaving, instead of building a well.

7 Conclusion

East Asias’ history and development of English education have been diverse and individual to each country with considerable setbacks due to historical circumstances. With the rise of English as a lingua franca East Asia has been quick to implement English into their school curricula, but with substantial struggle regarding its efficiency. The current system of English education is widely considered to be ineffective and not sustainable. Many factors contribute to this issue such as cultural understandings, English curricula designed for exam-taking and the influence of shadow education. The teacher education, though improving, is still not able to generate enough proficient teaching personnel. This, along with many governmental circumstances, contributes to the didactic approaches, that have long been critized to add to the problem. Students’ motivation and wellbeing

is directly influenced by the school system and teachers, that are unable to nurture a healthy and productive outlook in students regarding English as a foreign language and their studies in general. Especially concerning student wellbeing it is necessary to decrease the pressure put upon students. Foreign English teachers, predominantly Western, have mixed influence on the issue and stricter qualifications and control of motivations should be implemented to foster more productive collaborations, if they are continued to be employed. The willingness to employ unqualified foreign English teachers should all but be abandoned. Overall, while many positive developments can be seen, a more sharp redirection of thinking and taking on new attitudes, especially in the didactics sector need to happen.

All the countries also have individual difficulties in their approach to EFL. In South Korea and China, the immense pressure put on students, the teaching of English merely to pass tests and lacking didactics and teachers seem to be main factors in the issue. For Japan, the low importance of English and student motivation seem to be additional influencing factors as well. Changing the mindset of people and their attitude toward English as a language to *use*, rather than a language to study, will help to improve proficiency especially in Japan and partially China where English has not yet fully reached its full potential. China also shows the least progress in implementing changing didactics and teacher quality, it is advised that they focus on equal development of those areas. For South Korea, while the image of English is good and proficiency allover better than in the rest of East Asia, the exam-focused classes will continue to obstruct a more communicative approach and governmental steps are urgent if this problem wants to be solved (cf. Ho and Wong 2004, 459).

“There is no doubt at all that English Language Teaching (ELT) is flourishing in East Asia.” (Ho and Wong 2004, 455). With the ever-growing importance of English, especially for economic advancement and globalization, communication is more important than ever. It is a desire by all countries to improve their citizens English skills. More importantly, foreign language skills enable communication and cultural exchange on the interpersoal level. Consequently, it is in the interest of the countries involved, the economy and individual people to improve their English proficiency. Continuous research for the improvement of English proficiency in East Asia, such as the adaptation of methodology for East Asian students’ learning needs and improvement of teacher education would be supporting the issue.

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