
Hiring native-speaking English teachers in East Asian countries

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A review of a vast and complex recruiting program

ENGLISH is the most commonly used language in the world. As it has become the language that provides access to higher education and job opportunities, and has become almost exclusively the language of diplomatic discussion and business negotiation (cf. English APEC Strategic Plan, 2004), there has been a growing interest in hiring native-speaking English Teachers (NSETs) in Asian countries. The aim of this paper is to report policies and practices that invite NSETs to Asian countries, including China and Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, with emphasis on public education sectors. Through surveying both similar policies and the implementation of policies in several Asian countries, we seek to find practical suggestions for hiring NSETs. We survey policy goals, recruitment procedures, and the qualifications of NSETs. The analysis will be based on the premise that 'language planning cannot be understood without reference to its social contexts' (Cooper, 1989:3).

China

Since 1978, when China opened its door to the rest of the world, the importance of English has been recognized as a key to the country's development (cf. Xiaoqiong, 2005) and to its economic and social mobility (cf. Ross, 1993). Since the early 1980s, English education has become a nationwide endeavour at all academic levels, and there has been an explosive development of both public and private English language programs (cf. Qiang & Wolff, 2003b). The Ministry of Education encourages all young Chinese to learn English because of China's international roles as both a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the

host of the 2008 Olympics (cf. Qiang & Wolff, 2003b). According to various estimates, about 200 to 300 million Chinese can use English (cf. Yang, 2006). In 2005, there were over 60 million senior and junior high school students studying English (cf. Xiaoqiong, 2005).

China annually recruits 100,000 Foreign Experts (FE) to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) <www.Chinatefl.com>. In 2006, there are 150,000 foreign EFL teachers working in China <www.AbroadChina.com>. However, China does not have a central government policy on hiring NSETs (Qiang & Wolff, 2003a); instead, each province has its own policy on hiring them. Thus, the Educational Department of Liaoning Province (EDLP) authorized the Liaoning Union of Degree and Graduate Education (LUDGE) to recruit NSETs in Liaoning Province <<http://www.teach-in-china.cn/>>. The only universal guidelines, regulations or laws regulating salary, travel expense, housing, medical insurance or teacher qualifications appear in a 1994 publication of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts, *Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China*, republished in 1999 and 2002 (Qiang & Wolff, 2003a).

Universities have Foreign Affairs Offices which are in charge of the recruitment of FEs. Many public elementary, junior, and senior high schools engage private recruitment agencies (Qiang & Wolff, 2003a). Such agencies, including both overseas organizations and

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domestic intermediary organizations, are limited to the recruitment of teachers for client schools, and they charge a fee either to the school or to the recruited FE. A few agencies also act as the Foreign Affairs Office for their client schools and provide some or all of the services required by the FE. However, most agencies do not, and do not provide any services beyond the initial contact between schools and FEs. Some provinces – for example, Liaoning – have established government agencies to aid in recruitment (e-mail communication with W. Tong, 31 Jul 06). The State Bureau of Foreign Experts (SBFE) is the sole administrative department for the registration and qualification approval procedures for FEs. The target populations include kindergarten to university students, private English school students, private company employees, and English language training-centre students (Qiang & Wolff, 2003a).

The average teaching hours per week are 16 to 20. The wages range from RMB2917 to 5029 per month (US\$365 to 629), which is much higher than for Chinese teachers, who earn from RMB813 to 2342 (US\$101 to 284) <<http://www.abroadchina.org/salary.asp>>. (See appendix for compensation for NSETs.) The State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) regulations state: ‘An ordinary foreign teacher of language shall have earned a bachelor or higher degree and professional training in language teaching as well as some amount of language teaching experience’ (2002, REGULATION No.1). However, in many circumstances native English speakers have been employed with an associate degree or as little as a US high school diploma. FE qualifications vary from province to province. For example, some of the remote provinces have allowed US high school graduates to teach, while Shanghai and Beijing have not (Qiang & Wolff, 2003a).

Liaoning Province has stated its policy as, ‘We can consider a native speaker of English if he doesn’t have a bachelor’s degree or equivalent diploma. Motivation, international experience, teaching experience, study level attained and specific skills and certificates are taken into account as well’ <<http://www.teach-in-china.cn/faq/>>. The lack of a universally reinforced standard for NSETs in China causes problems in terms of the quality of those recruited (Qiang & Wolff, 2003b). Many recruits are young without prior teaching experience,

and consequently many do not finish their first-year contract (Qiang & Wolff, 2003b).

NSETs should be from the ‘English Five’: that is, be ‘nationals from [the] British Isles, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or United States who speak clear English, with good enunciation and diction that is not unduly influenced by the vernacular, colloquial and other parochial nuances’ <<http://www.chinatesol.com>>. Nationals from European countries outside the British Isles may be hired, if they clearly demonstrate spoken English with a minimum non-English accent.

Hong Kong

Although in 1997 Hong Kong was reincorporated as a special administrative region (SAR) of China, the history and practice of English education continues to be different from that of mainland China. Since occupation by the British in 1841, English has been important in government, administration, law, international trade, and business. In 1858, English became an official language, and continues in this role along with Cantonese. Even after Hong Kong was returned to China, the importance of English in Hong Kong did not diminish, as Hong Kong serves as an unmediated contact with the rest of the world (McArthur, 2005). Moreover, the importance of English is reinforced by the status of Hong Kong as an international financial centre (Pang, 2003). Although Cantonese has been recognised as the general mother tongue since 1997, English remains a language for the elite, and the widening middle class seeks to join the elite through learning English (McArthur, 2005). As a result, Hong Kong has been active in recruiting NSETs as government policy.

Hong Kong has adopted a series of measures to improve students’ English proficiency. To provide an English-speaking learning environment, the Hong Kong government has since 1997 provided each public secondary school with one NSET and since 2002 provided every two public primary schools with one NSET (Law, 2004). In 1997 there were fewer than fifty NSETs in secondary schools, but by 2006 there were nearly 800 in primary and secondary schools, with plans to expand further to have a primary NSET to work in one school only, rather than two (Wardlaw, 2005). The Hong Kong SAR Government has spent an

average of HK\$560 million each year in support of the NSET Schemes (Li, 2002).

Under the Secondary NSET Scheme, each school is allocated one NSET, and schools using Chinese as a medium of instruction may opt for a second NSET. Under the Primary NSET Scheme, each NSET is allocated to two primary schools, teaching 6 classes or more. Schools without an NSET are offered a cash grant to buy the services of one. In the 2003/04 school year, primary schools received one NSET on a sharing basis. Each school is required to assign an experienced local English teacher to work in partnership with the NSET.

The government provides support for the Scheme by way of an Advisory Teaching Team (ATT), which comprises 20 NSETs and 20 local English teachers. The ATT designs and operates regular teacher-training programs as well as conducting school development visits to participating schools. It monitors the effective deployment of the NSETs, provides support for the development of innovative teaching methods and related curriculum resources, and disseminates good teaching practices in schools. The ATT also provides peripatetic support for schools with fewer than six classes.

The agency for the NSET Schemes is the Education and Manpower Bureau, and the target population is primary and secondary students. These Schemes aim to support and strengthen English-language learning and teaching by providing an authentic environment for children to learn English and develop their confidence in using it. The salary scale is from HK\$16,165 to HK\$43,940 (US\$2,077 to 5,700) per month, while the salary scale for local English teachers ranges from HK\$18,010 to 43,940 (US\$2,300 to 5,700). Teaching hours range from 16 to 18 per week. Individual applicants apply through the EMB office. The applicant should be a native speaker of English or possess the competence of a native speaker. Preference will be given to applicants with experience in teaching English as a second/foreign language. There are five categories for primary NSET appointments and 7 categories for secondary NET appointments, based on the applicants' qualifications. The qualifications for Category 1 (Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress) are: (1) a Bachelor's degree in English from a Hong Kong university or equivalent; (2) a recognised teacher-training qualification in primary education; and (3) a Teaching of English as a Foreign Language or a

Second Language (TEFL/TESL) qualification at least at certificate level. The qualifications for Category 5 (Certificate Master/Mistress) are (1) a recognised teaching certificate obtained after at least two years' full-time study or equivalent, and (2) a TEFL/TESL qualification at least at certificate level.

Taiwan

Under the pressure of economic globalization, the Taiwanese government in 2001 began providing compulsory English education from Grade 5, and in 2005 extended English education to Grade 3 (Law, 2004). In the new national development plan (2002–2007), the Taiwanese government announced its plan to improve the English-language environment by converting road signs, shop names, and restaurant menus to a bilingual format by 2008 (Executive Yuan, 2002, as cited by Law, 2004).

Although the EFL industry is flourishing in Taiwan (Yeh, 2002), there is no governmental policy regulating the hiring of NSETs. In early 2000, an amendment to the *Employment Service Law* allowed private junior, junior high, and elementary schools to hire foreign teachers <<http://www.evta.gov.tw/english/lawevta.files/lawevtal.htm>>. In 2003, the Taiwanese government began to recruit 3000 NSETs for public primary and junior secondary schools (Law, 2004). Licensed recruitment agencies are responsible for recruiting NSETs. The target populations include kindergarten to university students, private English 'cram' school students, and private company employees <<http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/taiwan-en.asp>>.

The salary scale is from NT\$50,000/month (US\$1,540) for NSETs with bachelor's degree and/or TESL/TEFL certificate to NT\$70,000/month (US\$1,870) for NSETs with bachelor's degree and qualified teacher certificate, which is much higher than the salaries of local Taiwanese teachers of English, ranging from NT\$22,000 to 24,000 (US\$670 to 731) (Yeh, 2002). Teaching hours range from 15 to 25 per week. Only foreigners who possess passports from countries recognized by the Taiwanese Bureau of Education as 'native-English-speaking', mainly USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ireland <<http://www.hess.com.tw/careers/english/requirements/>>, will be granted work permits. However, some schools will employ foreigners

whether or not they are native English speakers, while others insist on Anglophones with preferred (usually North American) accents. A Bachelor's degree in any discipline or an Associate's degree with a TEFL/TESOL Certificate is required. However, most elementary and kindergarten-level schools do not require Anglophones to have previous teaching experience or ESL certification <<http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/taiwan-ell.asp>>.

Japan

Ever since English education in Japan started with the opening of the country in the late 19th century, it was considered to be a means of absorbing modernized culture and civilization. Having undergone World War II and its consequences, Japanese nationalists attacked the learning of English on the grounds that it would lower Japanese students' national pride and weaken their identity. Moreover, emphasis on English education has been only at the secondary and post-secondary levels, in particular being strongly affected by college and high school entrance exams, which predominantly measure students' reading and writing skills.

The limited interest in teaching English has gradually changed, as is clearly reflected in the plan provided by the Japanese government in 2003. Recognizing the strong wave of globalization, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology implemented an 'Action plan to cultivate Japanese with English Abilities' (Butler & Iino, 2005). The goals of the plan are: (1) at the elementary level, to introduce English instruction early enough to significantly enhance young children's interest and understanding of foreign culture, and (2) at the high school and college level, to improve English proficiency to the extent that high school and college graduates are able to conduct daily business in the target language.

The Japanese government has been involved in recruiting NSETs for quite some time. The program is known as JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching program), and it approaches its 20th anniversary in 2006. The program is run by local authorities in cooperation with the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Communications, of Foreign Affairs, and of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and the Council of Local Authorities

for International Relations (CLAIR). That is, central government agencies are deeply involved in recruiting as well as assigning NSETs. The recruitment is done through Japanese embassies or councils in foreign countries. The organizations review applications, and follow up with intensive interviews.

Because the main purpose of the JET program is to encourage cultural exchange between young Japanese learners and NSETs, it seeks to recruit people who are younger than 40 years of age. Among the several qualifications suggested by the government, academic and practical experience are less clearly defined. To qualify as an NSET, a candidate must be strongly motivated towards teaching and have gained at least a Bachelor's degree by the July before departure. A TEFL qualification is helpful, but not required <<http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/join/join.html>>.

The salary is approximately 300,000 yen per month (US\$ 2,600), while the salary scale for local English teachers ranges from 23,650 yen to 43,900 yen (US\$2,043 to 3,795). The government arranges accommodation, but related expenses, such as rent, housing deposit, and real estate agent's commission, must be paid by the NSETs, who also pay for their own health insurance (around 40,000 yen/month). NSETs are expected to work at school for around thirty-five hours per week. They work Monday through Friday from 8:30 am until 5:15 pm: regular working hours for teachers in Japan. Sometimes they are asked to do some extra work depending on each school's schedule. Their main duties include:

- assisting Japanese teachers of elementary, junior high and high school English
- developing teaching materials
- participating in English speech contests
- collaborating with officials at boards of education
- attending cultural-exchange events.

According to statistics for 2005, there are around 5,200 NSETs in Japan from such countries as the USA (2,757), the UK (876), Australia (376), New Zealand (306), Canada (735), Ireland (111), and South Africa (71).

South Korea

Since the inception of official English education in South Korea 120 years ago, the growth

of English education was moderate until recent years, in which South Korea is said to have developed 'English fever' (Jeong, 2004). This drastic development occurred as Korea became industrialized and begun to increase its trade with foreign countries. As a result, English is now the paramount language in the job market. The government's decision in 1997 to teach English from Grade 3 onward only increased the fever. Then, however, in 2001 the Korean Ministry of Education proposed that English be taught through English, a development which frustrated a majority of local English teachers, since few had the proficiency to meet the demand.

In its continued effort to facilitate English education, in May 2005 the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development announced a Five Year Plan for English Education Revitalization, which would locate an NSET within each junior high school by 2010 (a total of 2,900 NSE teachers nationally) and promote a 'one NSET per school policy' at elementary and high school levels. In the long run, however, the government plans for each elementary and high school to have *at least* one NSET. The rationale for the plan is that interaction with NSETs will provide students with more English input, a more authentic English environment, and greater cultural understanding.

We argue that the plan has emerged as a result of the significant economic loss to the Korean educational system incurred by sending students abroad to study. According to census data from the Korean Educational Development Institute in January of 2005, there were approximately 16,446 elementary, junior high, and high school students who went abroad to learn English. According to the Bank of Korea, during that year 3 billion dollars were spent on study abroad. Considering that the GDP of Korea in 2004 was 673 billion dollars, the financial burden of learning English abroad could not be ignored. If the NSET were to be implemented successfully, it could significantly decrease the number of students who go abroad to learn English.

Both private and public agencies work to recruit NSETs. According to an interview with an NSET at a public junior high school in Seoul (personal communication with K. Crowe, June 16, 2005), several private agencies recruit them. These agencies, however, usually ask for large commission fees from NSETs. Because of this, after the recruited NSETs fulfil their contracts,

they try to contact such government-related agencies as EPIK (English Program in Korea), which usually does not require such fees.

EPIK, which is government-driven, was launched in 1995 with the goal to improve English proficiency among Korean students and teachers and to develop cultural understanding. During the period of operation, more than 240 NSETs have joined the program. They are generally from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Their duties include teaching English at public schools, training Korean English teachers, and assisting the Board of Education. Teaching hours are limited to 22 per week.

The government provides free accommodation and, if housing cannot be provided, an additional 300,000 won (US\$320) is paid to subsidise rent. If NSETs are allotted to the countryside, they will receive an additional 100,000 won (US\$105). However, unlike JET or any other programs in Asian countries, the EPIK program does not specify an NSET's salary. According to a recent media report, NSETs working in an English village in Paju receive approximately 2,600,000 won (US\$2,750) per month, or 600,000 to 700,000 won (US\$635–740) more than NSETs in English 'villages' in Seoul. NSETs in public school systems are also paid from 1,400,000 won to 2,600,000 won (US\$1,480 to 2,800), while the salary scale for local English teachers ranges from 2,155,000 won to 3,800,000 won (US\$2,258 to 3,877).

Conclusion

The aforementioned five Asian countries have found that hiring NSETs is one of the most efficient ways to improve local student English proficiency. However, the ways in which each hires NSETs vary. Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea have adopted more centralized governmental policies in hiring NSETs; whereas in China and Taiwan, private agencies are usually in charge of recurring NSETs.

We conclude by providing a few practical suggestions for the successful implementation of hiring NSETs in Asian countries. First, we suggest enhanced training of unqualified NSETs upon hiring. Since there are various public and private sectors that require them, and the demand for NSETs will exceed the supply of qualified candidates, hiring unqualified NSETs is unavoidable. We therefore need to

develop training programs. Secondly, it will be desirable to form an Advisory Teaching Team consisting of both NSETs and local teachers of English in order to promote the collaboration between them. The responsibilities of the Advisory Teaching Team may include:

- 1 assisting the professional development of both NSETs and local English teachers through workshops;
- 2 assisting the development of teaching materials;
- 3 building supportive working relationships.

Lastly, we also suggest an in-depth longitudinal and cross-sectional evaluation to examine the extent to which the key objectives of the policy are being achieved, with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of the policy. This evaluation will be to examine the on-going development of the policy at the school level, to provide schools with recommendations for the future implementation of the policy; and to inform policy makers on possible future modifications to the policy. ■

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