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Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

**A Study of English Language Teachers
in Singapore**

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C. Goh, L. Zhang, C. H. Ng & G. H. Koh

1

Introduction and Background

Many language programmes are centrally managed by education authorities or ministries. Besides making decisions and laying out policies about teaching and learning, these bodies also initiate curriculum innovation from time to time. Although not initiated by teachers, the success of a change such as this ultimately rests with them, as it is in the language classrooms that the objectives and aspirations of curriculum developers are supported or defeated.¹ Such is the case with the teaching and learning of English in Singapore. In 2001, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced English Language (EL) Syllabus 2001 ten years after an earlier syllabus was implemented. In order to ensure that the requirements of the revised syllabus are implemented, it is important to ensure that teachers are prepared for the task. More importantly, it is crucial that teachers believe in the benefits of the new syllabus and have the right kind of support and motivation to see it through.

Studies done in many countries across subject areas and levels have shown that classroom practices of teachers are often shaped and justified by teachers' perceptions and knowledge, working environments and institutional policies.² The interaction

of these factors has also been known to cause dilemmas among teachers, and such observations have also been documented in the area of EL teaching.³ That there are inextricable links between language teachers' pedagogical knowledge and beliefs and their instructional practices is supported by many studies in EL teaching alone.⁴

Such teacher factors also have wide-ranging implications for the implementation of large-scale language curriculum innovations.⁵ It is important, therefore, for managers of change to take into account teacher factors that could influence the day-to-day pedagogical decisions and practices in the domain of teaching and learning. Two factors that directly influence these thoughts and actions are teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and their beliefs about key aspects of teaching and learning. These factors can also influence the ways the aspirations and requirements of a new language syllabus are interpreted.

Many recent studies among language teachers have typically focused on small numbers of teachers to investigate how teaching practices have been influenced by the knowledge and beliefs that these teachers possess. These studies have been useful in providing detailed analyses of the influence of teachers' thinking on instructional practices. Case studies involving small number of participants, however, do not provide us with a comprehensive picture of thinking and practice among teachers in a large population. It is therefore advantageous that a study investigating teachers' knowledge and beliefs be conducted in Singapore. Such a study will provide insights into the interaction of internal and external factors that could have an impact on teachers' classroom

practices. Such a study can also have a confirmatory role with regard to observations derived from case studies.

Most importantly, such a study could explicitly examine possible implications of teachers' knowledge and beliefs for the successful implementation of large-scale curriculum change. In view of the amount of resources and time spent on developing a language syllabus, it is crucial that such teacher factors be investigated more extensively. The results of such an examination will be useful for drawing up policies for managing curriculum innovation and the setting of agenda with regard to teacher training.

The Present Study

The present study is an attempt to examine different areas of teacher knowledge and beliefs in relation to the implementation of the new EL syllabus in Singapore. These aspects include theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of appropriate teaching strategies, and knowledge of pupils' needs and motivation. The relationships between these areas of knowledge will be examined in the light of the teachers' self-confidence level and their teaching contexts. Also examined are the ways in which teachers are supported in the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001.

This new syllabus has incorporated a number of important features which assume a high level of pedagogical content knowledge on the part of the teachers. Key features of the syllabus are areas of language use, which include theories about discourse and genre, as well as the structures and grammatical features of a variety of text types.⁶ Another key feature is the specifications of

learning outcomes. Six principles of language learning and teaching have also been included: learner centredness, process orientation, integration, contextualisation, spiral progression and interaction.

As with all changes, main change agents (in this case, English teachers) need to understand the rationale and contents of the proposed change and be prepared to bring about the change.

The results of this study will give us an indication of the teachers' preparedness for using new teaching approaches as well as provide insights into factors that influence their classroom practices. These findings will have direct implications for teacher training, instructional materials and future curriculum innovations.

The study consisted of a questionnaire survey of a large sample of primary and secondary school English teachers and in-depth, semi-structured interviews of selected participants. It was both descriptive and explanatory in aim and examined three aspects of teacher cognition: theoretical and pedagogical concepts for teaching English language skills and grammar, learners' needs and motivation and understanding of syllabus innovations. In-depth interviews attempted to document factors influencing teachers' decision making that shaped their classroom practices. These first person accounts demonstrate the way some teachers attempt to balance their knowledge and perceptions about EL teaching against the complexities of day-to-day teaching and institutional expectations.

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of theoretical and pedagogical knowledge do EL teachers possess about listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and language learning in general?
- Can teachers identify the main features in EL Syllabus 2001? What is the relationship between pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge about syllabus requirements and teachers' confidence to implement the new syllabus?
- What are the teachers' beliefs about learner needs, problems and motivation? How do these beliefs influence their teaching priorities?
- How is syllabus implementation managed at the school departmental level? What challenges do individual teachers face and to what extent are they supported through measures in place?

Given the amount of time, research and resources put into curriculum development, research into teachers' understanding of an innovation can help top level managers of change to gauge the extent to which the objectives of central agencies can be met. In addition, findings from such a study will also enable other stakeholders such as teacher educators and in-service training

providers to better anticipate training needs. It is also hoped that school managers can also draw on the results of the study to better support their EL teachers to bring about greater effectiveness in promoting overall language development in school.

The study was conducted through written questionnaire surveys and individual semi-structured interviews among primary and secondary school teachers from Singapore schools. Data were collected in two staggered but overlapping phases between October 2002 and October 2003. The survey provided useful information about the knowledge and beliefs of teachers from various school environments. It also gathered information on change management strategies used in their EL departments in supporting the new syllabus. The interviews with selected teachers offered further insights into issues that arose from the survey results. An email interview was also conducted with officers at the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD) collectively in an attempt to get some baseline data for comparison purposes. Questions for this interview were adapted from the questionnaire items and the interview schedule used with teachers.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used for collecting information pertaining to the research questions. It had both close-ended Likert scale items as well as open-ended questions. It consisted of four parts:

Part 1 Teachers' priorities

Part 1 focused on teachers' priorities in their daily teaching activities. It elicited information on teachers' main considerations in lesson planning, time allocation for different aspects of the syllabus and perceptions of pupils' learning priorities.

Part 2 a) Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge

This part elicited teachers' self-ratings on their knowledge of theoretical and pedagogical concepts related to teaching the various language skills, vocabulary and grammar, as well as language learning in general.

b) Implementation of EL Syllabus 2001 and confidence level

This had close-ended and open-ended questions eliciting teachers' use of syllabus documents and level of self-confidence, understanding of key innovations of the new syllabus, perceptions of textbooks and materials used, their problems and how syllabus implementation is managed in their school.

Part 3 Teachers' perceptions of pupils

In this open-ended question section, teachers focused on a class they taught and reported what they perceived as these pupils' learning needs, motivation and learning problems.

Part 4 Personal particulars

Demographic details and use of language teaching resources are reported.

Part 2 of the questionnaire was constructed based on the researchers' interpretations of EL Syllabus 2001 and feedback from some colleagues. It also included a few concepts which were prevalent in some of the earlier syllabuses. Wherever possible these items were compared against explanations and publications from the CPDD, the central agency which designed the EL syllabus.⁷ An inventory of the theoretical and pedagogical concepts listed in the questionnaire was submitted to CPDD officers to rate their relevance to the EL Syllabus 2001. We received a general comment on what is expected of teachers but no explicit rating of the items:

Excerpt 1.1

The EL Syllabus 2001 does not prescribe teaching activities but lists the skills to be taught under the Learning Outcomes in the syllabus document. The importance of each skill may vary according to the stage of learning the pupils are at. This is also true of the strategies/activities that could be used by teachers. The Guides to the Syllabus suggests some strategies/activities which can be used to achieve these learning outcomes but the teachers should

use their professional judgement when deciding which may be most effective for their pupils.

The questionnaire went through six revisions before it was pilot tested on 33 primary and secondary school teachers. It underwent one more phase of editing and revision after the pilot test before it was administered to a sample of teachers in all the four zones in Singapore. The scale items from Parts 1 and 2 were analysed first in terms of descriptive statistics. The results were then cross-tabulated with a number of pre-selected variables (for example, primary/secondary level) to establish trends among the different groups of participants in our sample. Relationships between key findings were also investigated through correlational tests. For the open-ended items from Parts 2 and 3, written comments were analysed for saliency. Frequencies of items reported were tabulated and compared.

Admittedly, pedagogical content knowledge is an intricate construct which is often difficult to examine. Using questionnaires presents its own set of challenges. What we have done is therefore limited in scope. Nevertheless, the results are still useful in giving an indication of the balance or imbalance in the knowledge that teachers possess for teaching all the key elements of language use advocated in EL Syllabus 2001.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among key informants, selected for the diverse teaching experience and level of departmental involvement they represented. The aim was to capture the views from teachers who were involved in different ways in the teaching and managing of the new syllabus at the school level. The procedure was a modification of a three-stage in-depth phenomenological interview procedure.⁸ It established the interviewees' background, documented their reported practices and explored the meaning they attached to what they did in the light of teaching according to the new syllabus. Some of the questions in the interview schedule were adapted from other similar studies conducted in other countries.⁹ In addition to the core questions, a separate set of questions related to the managing of syllabus implementation at the departmental level was also asked.

Interviewees were questioned on their understanding and interpretation of EL Syllabus 2001. Their personal views about the syllabus were also sought. Other questions were related to the items in the survey to provide the opportunity for these areas to be examined in greater depth. A key focus throughout the interview was the respondents' decision-making processes as they carried out their work as Heads of Department (HoDs), subject heads and ordinary teachers in their respective teaching contexts. It also explored their beliefs and perceptions about learners and learning environments.

The interview data were fully transcribed and analysed for saliency. Care was taken to preserve the teachers' voices as they explored with the interviewers the meaning they made of their roles in teaching the new syllabus. These elements are reflected in the teachers' personal stories, compiled as 'profiles'.¹⁰ (Selected profiles have been included in Appendix 1). By engaging teachers' voices as one of the ways of reporting our study, we hope that readers can view various aspects of the findings in specific contexts. It also underscores the importance of the participants' experiences in coming to a better understanding of the process of syllabus implementation in Singapore. It is hoped that the profiles can demonstrate the complex relationships between teacher knowledge, beliefs, practices and syllabus implementation.

The Participants

The questionnaires were administered to a sample of schools from the north, south, east and west zones through the assistance of school principals and HoDs. Survey administrators, consisted mainly of former teachers, contacted the schools formally to explain to the principals the purpose of the survey. When permission was granted, the survey administrators then met with the HoDs wherever possible to enlist their help with distributing the questionnaires. Each questionnaire was presented individually in an unsealed envelope. A cover letter accompanied it to explain that participation was on a completely voluntary basis. It also asked respondents to return their questionnaires, completed or otherwise, sealed inside the envelopes provided. We received many

completed responses from most of the schools. Only in one school were all the questionnaires returned uncompleted.

We targeted 3000 teachers for the survey. In the end we received 2,752 mostly complete responses. Of these, some were largely incomplete and had to be disregarded. All teachers who participated in the study did so on a voluntary basis after permission was granted by their respective principals (see Appendix 2 for letters of consent for this study). It was conducted among EL teachers from a total of 150 schools. The tables below show the types of schools surveyed and the demographic details of the participants. Every attempt was made at achieving a degree of representativeness of the sample to some key characteristics of the population. It was, however, difficult to match every key characteristic due to factors such as accessibility to staff in some schools and classified MOE information.

Nevertheless, the sample obtained was generally representative of the population based on selected characteristics gleaned from the available information. The tables below present the demographic details of the sample as compared against two sets of figures. Based on this comparison, the participants sampled in the study can be said to be generally representative of the selected characteristics in the population.

Table 1.1 Samples of schools that participated in the survey

	Government	Government- aided	Independent	Total
Primary				
MOE website	132 (74.2%)	46 (25.8%)	-	178
Study sample	49 (72.0%)	19 (28.0%)	-	68
Secondary				
MOE website	124 (75.2%)	31 (18.8%)	10 (6.1%)	165
Study sample	59 (72.0%)	22 (27.0%)	1 (1.0%)	82

Table 1.2 Demographic details of survey participants

	Sex		Age	
	Male	Female	Below 30	30 and above
Available ⁱ	12.9%	87.1%	31.1%	68.9%
Study sample	17.8%	80.9%	27.0%	73.0%

The interviews were conducted and analysed with the written permission of the teachers involved. Interviewees were given the opportunity to accept or decline our request for interviews. They were also asked at the end of the interview to reconsider their decision. Those who changed their mind withdrew their written permission. For teachers who allowed the interview to be used, we

ⁱ Official permission was sought to collate selected personal details provided by 2877 participants for a compulsory English Language course conducted by the Ministry of Education for both primary and secondary schools teachers in 2002.

have made every attempt to ensure their anonymity. Table 1.3 presents a summary of the teachers' profiles.

Table 1. 3 Profiles of the teachers interviewed

	Primary	Secondary
Head of Department	3	2
Subject Head	2	1
Teachers (over 5 years experience)	2	3
Teachers (below 5 years' experience)	2	3
TOTAL	9	9

Organisation of the Report

Each of the chapters that follow focuses on one of the research questions identified earlier. It begins with a brief background to the issues in question before presenting and discussing the findings and discussions. Wherever possible, these are compared with official feedback from CPDD on specific issues.

Chapter 2 focuses on teachers' knowledge regarding the teaching of various aspects of language as well as their understanding of the syllabus innovations. The first part of the chapter presents the findings about teachers' pedagogical content knowledge elicited through self-evaluation. The results are then correlated with teachers' confidence with respect to implementing EL Syllabus 2001. Part two presents and discusses teachers' understanding of key features of the syllabus innovation, namely - its aims, guiding principles and innovative features. It also explores the connection between this knowledge and the

confidence to implement in individual teachers who were interviewed.

Chapter 3 documents teachers' beliefs about their pupils. Specifically, it examines what teachers perceived to be their pupils' learning needs and priorities, sources of motivation for learning English and their learning problems. The chapter further explores the factors that might have contributed to these perceptions and examines the way these perceptions have influenced teachers' interpretation of EL Syllabus 2001.

Chapter 4 addresses the issue related to the management of the syllabus change. It identifies the strategies employed by EL Departments to ensure that the teachers implemented the requirements of the new syllabus. It compares the ways in which teachers were prepared for the task of teaching the new syllabus, the challenges that teachers faced and the support they would like to receive.

Chapter 5 summarises the main findings and proposes recommendations for policy and practice.

Notes

¹ Kennedy, Doyle & Goh, 1999.

² Calderhead, 1987; Clandinin, 1986; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Day, Calderhead & Denicolo, 1993; Elbaz, 1983; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Shulman, 1987; Silver & Steele, 2005.

- ³ Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 1998; Flowerdew, Brock & Hsia, 1992; Kennedy, Doyle & Goh, 1999; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Richards & Nunan, 1990; Woods, 1996.
- ⁴ Johnson, 1992; Woods, 1991; Smith, 1996; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996.
- ⁵ Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Goh, 1999; Carless, 1999; Gorsuch, 2002; Li, 2003.
- ⁶ Lim, 2002.
- ⁷ Ang, 2000; Lim, 2002.
- ⁸ Seidman, 1998.
- ⁹ Wong, 2002.
- ¹⁰ Seidman, 1998.

2

Knowledge and Confidence

A Brief Overview of EL Syllabus 2001

English is an important working language in Singapore, providing access to information and knowledge in and beyond the country. Mastery of the language is the goal of the English programme and the focus of EL Syllabus 2001. The syllabus aims to “develop pupils to become independent lifelong learners, creative thinkers and problem solvers who can communicate effectively in English”, and it emphasises “accuracy and fluency, and on both form and function”.¹ The theoretical principles that lie at the heart of the syllabus are as follows:²

- Language is a system for making meaning.
- It is a means of communication and expression.
- Language use is determined by purpose, audience, context and culture.
- Language has grammar and linguistic structures and patterns, which can be used to create various discourse forms or text types depending on the linguistic choices made. Learners have to be taught how to make these linguistic choices to suit purpose, audience, context and culture.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

Based on the principles above, the syllabus has three key features: 1) language use, 2) learning outcomes, skills and strategies, 3) text types and grammar.³

In contrast to all previous syllabuses, EL Syllabus 2001 has been distinctly presented as a “language use syllabus”. It specifies three areas of language use: language for information, language for literary response and expression and language for social interaction, “The emphasis on the principle of language use focuses the teaching of English on the learning of language skills, the language functions and grammar rather than on thematic content”.⁴ Besides delineating the scope for which effective communication is desired, these areas also provide the context for selecting texts and tasks for use in the classroom.

The second key feature of the syllabus is the specification of pupils’ learning outcomes. There are altogether ten learning outcomes in the entire language programme from primary to secondary school education. These are stated in two-year blocks. Under each learning outcome are language skills and strategies that should be taught. As pupils progress through the school system, the learning outcomes are repeated at various stages at increasing levels of sophistication and complexity.

A main feature of the new syllabus is the emphasis on text types and grammar. The teaching of grammar is done beyond the sentence level to emphasise an explicit teaching of grammar at the text level.

Besides focusing on the acquisition of appropriate grammatical items, the new syllabus reinforces the need to teach various language skills in an integrated manner, an approach continued from the 1991 syllabus. Under the section labelled “Aims

of the Syllabus”, the new syllabus clearly highlights the desired communicative achievements related to each of these skills.⁵ Learning outcomes also include specific sub-skills to be mastered.

The different positions of importance of listening, speaking, reading and writing are reflected in a statement in relation to the use of text types: “A variety of text types from print, non-print and electronic sources are recommended for each year level to ensure that pupils learn English from many models of language use so that they can learn to *speak* and *write* (italics added) effectively for various purposes, audiences and contexts”.⁶ The emphasis on language production is clear.

Besides these two productive skills, great emphasis is also put on reading, as “literacy development is the heart of an English Language instructional programme in school”.⁷ Reading materials also “provide the context for teaching text level grammar”.⁸

On the whole, the key innovative feature of EL Syllabus 2001 is “Areas of Language Use”. It is meant to give pupils exposure to a range of texts. There is, however, a common perception that the explicit teaching of grammar is the main innovation, as borne out by findings in this study as reported in this chapter. This interpretation of the syllabus could have been influenced by efforts made by the Ministry of Education to prepare teachers for the syllabus implementation. 60 hour in-service courses on grammar and text types were conducted for all EL teachers over a period of four years. Media publicity could also have projected grammar as a major component of the syllabus.

Besides a focus on text types, there is also overt importance attached to the development of writing, presented as the culmination of the integration of language skills: “What pupils

know about, they can talk about; what they can talk about, they will read and write about”.⁹ Reading and speaking are also important for different reasons. Listening is mentioned in various parts of the introduction chapter and specified under various learning outcomes in the syllabus document. On balance, however, it has a rather inconsiderable role.

One aspect of language development that has not been highlighted as a learning outcome is vocabulary acquisition. This has been subsumed under the use of text types and literacy development.

In reality, do teachers interpret the new syllabus in the same way as the curriculum had intended for it to be? Do they think they have adequate knowledge for teaching the requirements of the new syllabus? How confident are they in successfully carrying out the mandate entrusted to them by the Ministry of Education? How does their understanding of the demands of the new syllabus influence the choices they make when planning and teaching their lessons? How are their decisions influenced by the realities of their teaching environment and their perceptions of what their pupils need? What kind of support do they get in their efforts at implementing the new syllabus?

These are some of the key questions we will attempt to answer in this and the next two chapters. Before that, it is necessary that we outline some of the current thinking about the teaching of grammar and the language skills that we believe has influenced the development of the new curriculum.

Teaching Grammar, Literacy and Oracyⁱ Skills

Many schools of thought have influenced the teaching of English in the last few decades. Due to the scope of this report, our review is by necessity selective and brief. We will therefore focus on those ideas which we think are most relevant to teachers in Singapore in view of the specifications laid down in the 1991 and 2001 syllabuses. It is necessary to discuss the earlier syllabus because much of the current syllabus, in particular the teaching of the language skills, is a continuation of the curriculum foundation that has been previously laid.

Our review will begin with grammar, which is an indispensable aspect of written and spoken language. This is followed by writing and reading. Vocabulary learning is discussed in this context. Finally, our review ends with the oracy skills of speaking and listening, which not only are important communication skills but also contribute to literacy learning.

Grammar

The teaching of grammar has been through various phases in the last century, from a rigid structuralist approach of teaching discrete grammar items to a less prescriptive communicative approach, where grammar is taught and learnt in context¹⁰: Under the influence of behaviourism in the fifties and early sixties, language was seen as a set of habits developed through modelling

ⁱ The term was coined by Professor Andrew Wilkinson (1965) to refer to speaking and listening skills, and is widely used in countries such as Britain.

and drills. In the 1960s, when the cognitivist view became dominant, learners were expected to develop a rule system (or grammar) through observation of the language. They were encouraged to compare the language they had developed (interlanguage) with the target language. Teachers enhanced this process of rule building through the provision of inductive and deductive exercises. In the 1970s, the social aspect of language learning became important and the communicative approach was advocated; explicit grammar teaching became less prominent, and in some cases, was abandoned.¹¹ Language was learnt through social interaction and teaching focused on role-plays, information-gap exercises, problem-solving tasks and cooperative learning.¹²

The language syllabuses in Singapore also reflected this change. Nevertheless, as the curriculum developers argued, “(d)espite popular perception at the time, grammar was an important component of the 1991 syllabus”.¹³ The 1991 syllabus, which focused heavily on themes and communicative functions, in fact, included a list of grammatical units from the level of morphemes to text. One of the reasons for this need to correct the misconception was probably the result of the interactive and fluency-oriented pedagogy associated with communicative language teaching approaches. The emphasis on performing communicative tasks appropriately and fluently means that “students’ grammar needs are determined on the basis of their performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus”.¹⁴ This shift from a prescriptive to a needs-oriented approach to grammar teaching was also reflected in the 1991 syllabus. It put the onus on teachers and textbook writers to select relevant grammar items for learning.

The 2001 syllabus, on the other hand, has reverted to a more prescriptive approach, “stating explicitly what and how language is to be taught”.¹⁵ The syllabus clearly says that pupils have to be taught how the English language works at the discourse/text level. The most important point is that pupils must learn how each type of text is supported by specific grammar items which help contribute to its effectiveness. Although the syllabus specifies the importance of teaching grammar in relation to text types, it does not suggest the techniques for doing it. Strategies for teaching are given to schools in guides to the syllabus and at workshops for teachers.

Currently, there is no agreement in the field as to the best methodology. Nevertheless, there seems to be the general consensus that isolated teaching of discrete grammar items may be less productive. There are also strong arguments in favour of activities that help learners notice language form¹⁶ and for contextualised grammar teaching through communicative activities.¹⁷ More recently, the learner was seen as a political being who needed to learn how to use language accurately to achieve social ends. It has been observed that “the learning of ‘correct’ and appropriate use of grammar was part of this process as it could enhance what the learner could achieve socially”.¹⁸ It has also been observed that “increasing emphasis is placed on process and functional approaches, on the interrelationships between discourse-level features, lexis and sentence grammar, and on the distinct grammar of spoken English. The movement to base pedagogic grammars on natural language corpora has reinforced these trends”.¹⁹ As for EL Syllabus 2001, there is a clear statement on grammar teaching: “Explicit teaching of grammar in a

meaningful context is advocated so that pupils will know how to use grammatical items and structures to communicate meaningfully.”²⁰

Writing

An influential approach to understanding and teaching writing is the cognitive model.²¹ Research into writing as a cognitive process studied what writers actually do during writing, which is seen as a complex problem-solving activity. Writing is described as a “non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning”.²² A cognitive model proposes that during writing, three mental processes are activated in an interactive manner: planning, translating and reviewing. This model has been challenged on the grounds that it fails to take into account the social context of the writer, that is, “the local, institutional and socio-historical conditions within which the participants are situated”.²³

In the 1991 syllabus, the “process approach” to writing is explicitly recommended. It has been described as simply a *writing process approach* to teaching writing,²⁴ as pupils are trained in solving problems related to each stage of the composing process as they go through the four basic stages of writing – planning, drafting, revising and editing. These four basic stages are recursive and the final product is accomplished after multiple drafts. Teachers play a central role in the classroom through their responses and evaluation at each stage. Pupils themselves can also be involved in responding to and evaluating one another’s work.

The prescribed kinds of writing are the various text forms, for example, story and poem. The plan, draft, revise and edit stages are still advocated in EL Syllabus 2001, as reflected in one of the learning outcomes for writing.

As a syllabus that focuses on language use, the 2001 syllabus highlights the importance of writing for “different purposes and audiences”. The first outcome to be achieved is the ability to select an appropriate text type to fulfil a specific purpose. The influence of the genre approach is clear here. Although the new syllabus uses the term “text types” rather than “genres”, a comparison of the kind of text types in the syllabus and that identified by the genre theorists²⁵ will reveal the similarity. Writing instructions in a genre approach classroom employ the techniques suggested in the Curriculum Cycle.²⁶ One version of the Curriculum Cycle has three main phases: Modelling, Joint Construction and Independent Construction.²⁷

In the Modelling phase, pupils are provided with sample texts of the target genre and a discussion of the various stages of the organisation structure and the social function of each stage. The relevant grammatical features of the genre are also highlighted. During Joint Construction of the genre, the teacher, together with all the pupils in the class are involved in producing a text of the target genre. The ideas for the content and organisation of the text are suggested by the pupils themselves. The teacher serves as the scribe and facilitates the composition of the text. The pupils see the text taking the shape of the target genre as it is being jointly constructed in the class. Finally, the pupils are ready to enter the Independent Construction phase where they will have opportunities to put into practice the writing of the target genre.

The Curriculum Cycle does not prescribe that the phases be carried out in a fixed sequence. Neither would it be necessary for the writing teacher to include all the phases in the teaching of a particular genre.

Reading & Vocabulary

Reading has always been a part of the EL syllabuses in Singapore. The ability to read is part of the overall development of pupils' communicative competence in English. It was observed that emphasis and orientation in English literacy in this syllabus reflected a move "from a concern with linguistic accuracy and functional literacy to an emphasis on literacy for personal growth and the meeting of students' present and future needs".²⁸ In spite of this, it was noted that there was a general lack of systematic reading instruction in schools, particularly at the secondary level.²⁹

In contrast, EL Syllabus 2001 states clearly the importance of literacy (reading and writing) development.ⁱⁱ In the traditional sense, reading involves an individual's ability to recognise and interpret printed texts and accompanying visuals. To this end, the syllabus states the need to teach basic decoding skills to macro-level comprehension skills. Reading strategies or problem-solving reading techniques are also identified for teaching. Some of these are outlined in the syllabus guides.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the literature identifies three key models for explaining the reading process: bottom-up

ⁱⁱ Reconceptualisations of the term "literacy" in recent academic and pedagogical literature are beyond the scope of this study and will not be addressed directly here.

processing, top-down processing and interactive processing. The bottom-up model suggests that readers start with letters in a text. This information is then processed and converted into strings of phonemes. These are then recognised as words.³⁰ It has been argued that contrary to this sequential text-driven model, reading is described as a “psycholinguistic guessing game”.³¹ By “guessing”, it is meant that readers predict text content by formulating hypotheses based on their schema or background knowledge. In teaching, we can see that such an approach is more “reader-driven” than “text-driven”.³² In other words, in the top-down model, the reader can control the reading process by having an overall plan and then execute it.³³ The reader can also revisit the text to confirm predictions. Expectations can also be brought to the text that is to be read.

More recent research has shown that word recognition and top-down processes can occur concurrently rather than sequentially.³⁴ The reader does not decode the printed text in a linear fashion. Instead all the mental mechanisms are activated to serve one common goal, that of comprehension. It is now generally agreed that reading involves word recognition (vocabulary knowledge), syntactical processing and semantic interpretation based on text characteristics.

Another important theoretical underpinning of the reading process is the importance of schema. There are at least two types of schema: formal (knowledge about the rhetorical structure of texts) and content (knowledge about content or topics).³⁵ The usefulness of schema has been questioned because it may not always compensate for a lack of linguistic knowledge,³⁶ but as an important means to facilitating reading comprehension processes,

the new syllabus has explicitly advocated activating schema knowledge as a teaching strategy in reading instruction. However, it needs to be pointed out that, in addition to schema knowledge, reading success also depends on readers' metacognitive knowledge of the reading process and factors that may influence their comprehension.³⁷

Speaking

Speaking good English has always been an emphasis of EL syllabuses. One crucial consideration has been pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation. The model has nevertheless moved from one that was distinctly British Received Pronunciation (RP) to one that is “internationally acceptable”. While the development of structural/formal features of speech is necessary, it is important to remember that speaking includes other important abilities as well. Speaking can be roughly categorised as production skills and interaction skills.³⁸

Production skills include using simplification and compensation strategies that help learners speak in the target language. Interaction skills, on the other hand, are necessary for at least two reasons. Firstly, in an interaction, speakers need to constantly negotiate meaning so as to make oneself understood and to understand other people. Secondly, participants in an interaction also need to know how to use language to manage the topic that is talked about as well as to handle turn-taking.

As one of the four key language skills in the 1991 syllabus, speaking was to be taught in an integrated manner with the other skills. The more recent 2001 syllabus, with its emphasis on

language use, specifically highlights the ability to produce the various text types in speaking. Of special significance is oral presentation which can be interpreted as an expected outcome or product in learning to use the English language for information. Both syllabuses have identified the skills and the outcomes that teachers should help pupils develop throughout their school years.

EL Syllabus 2001 included speaking skills and outcomes that are commonly found in the literature on communicative language teaching. These include retelling a story, describing a picture, expressing thanks and good wishes, giving instructions, explaining why and how something happens, explaining own views, and supporting opinions with reasons. Products of speech are forms of various spoken text types or speech genres, for example, oral presentations, debates, stories and oral summaries. Speech as a product is characterised by specific features such as discourse structure, spoken grammar, as well as phonological features, such as pronunciation, rhythm and intonation.³⁹

The revised syllabus also emphasises the importance of speaking/interacting appropriately to suit purpose, audience, context and culture.

Speech as a skill and a product is something that many teachers are familiar with. These notions have also been reinforced in the syllabus guides when discussing talk as performance, where speaking is the focused outcome of the activity, and talk as process, where talk is used to achieve other purposes. The latter, however, is not to be mistaken for speech processing, or the psycholinguistic processes involved in producing speech. Much like the cognitive processes involved in writing, various processes are needed to produce speech. While a cognitive model underlies much of the

teaching of writing, implications of a cognitive perspective for teaching speaking, have largely been overlooked, particularly in the Singapore context.⁴⁰

An established model for explaining speech production consists of three stages: conceptual preparation, formulation and articulation.⁴¹ Conceptual preparation refers to how speakers select the information to be expressed. The concepts have to be then mapped on to specific words that the speakers know.⁴² The process by which the selected concepts are converted into language is referred to as formulation. The formulated utterances are communicated through the physical articulation of the sounds that reach listeners as streams of speech.

Similar to other mental operations during information processing, these three stages often overlap and are interconnected. The speed at which they take place is in turn influenced by several key factors.⁴³ These include familiarity with discourse conventions, recalling words from memory, using language in an automatised manner and the ability to use facilitation features to cope with the tasks.⁴⁴ At the same time, speakers have to balance both linguistic and social demands. Attention to these processes can help teachers plan better oral communication lessons – ones that not only focus on the outcome but also on the process for arriving at the outcome.

Listening

More than 50% of our everyday language use involves listening, the figure being even higher in academic settings.⁴⁵ Communication experts agree that it is the most used language skill at work and at

home, but it is also an area where most people are weakest in. In language teaching, we can see two assumptions about listening. Firstly, 'good' learners do not need to be taught listening and the weak ones will generally 'pick up' the skill as they learn other language skills. Secondly, we can effectively assess learners' listening abilities through pen and paper examination.

Both of these assumptions appear to underlie the treatment of listening in Singapore schools. The cause for this, however, does not lie directly with the language syllabuses. On the contrary, both the 1991 and 2001 syllabuses clearly specify the importance of developing good listening skills in pupils. In fact, the 2001 syllabus goes as far as identifying the development of accurate and critical listening as an aim of the English programme. It also specially highlights the development of listening in the context of pupils' oral communication skills.

In this regard, five types of purposeful listening in communication can be identified: discriminative, comprehensive, therapeutic, critical and appreciative.⁴⁶ Discriminative listening allows an individual to distinguish auditory and/or visual stimuli, and is fundamental to all listening purposes. Comprehensive listening is listening to understand the message. To do this, a listener may employ one or more of the following skills: listen for gist, listen for details, draw inferences, make predictions and listen selectively. The ability to listen comprehensively is important to the other three types of listening: therapeutic (listen to someone talking through a problem, listen empathetically), critical (listen to evaluate the truth and merit of a message) and appreciative (listen for enjoyment). As a result of employing these listening skills, we can expect certain outcomes from the listeners. The language

syllabuses abound with examples. Follow instructions, identify, organise and transfer information, effective short notes, give appropriate oral responses are some examples.

In addition to presenting listening as skills and outcomes, recent literature also discusses listening as a cognitive process. Sources of learners' listening problems are examined not just externally (text difficulty, speakers' accent, etc.), but also internally from a cognitive perspective.⁴⁷ Taking the information-processing model as the basis for explaining language comprehension, we can identify three main phases: perception, parsing and utilisation.⁴⁸ These phases are recursive and also overlapping. Perception is the recognition of sound signals, whereas parsing is the processing of utterances grammatically, using knowledge about syntax as well as semantic cues from key words. Utilisation occurs when listeners relate mental representations of the input to existing knowledge or schema. These mental processes are by no means linear. They occur interactively, often under the demands of dealing with the flow of information within a short time. Some of the earlier discussions in reading about top-down and bottom-up processing also apply.

Besides adopting a cognitive model, the teaching of listening has also been informed by knowledge about language use in transactional and social contexts. In this regard, some writers have recommended the need to deal with listening systematically, as one way (non-interactional) and two-way (interactional) listening.⁴⁹ The skills and strategies needed for these different contexts may vary.

The rest of this chapter discusses some aspects of EL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge as well as their

understanding of the specifications of EL Syllabus 2001. In addition, it also examines the relationship between teacher knowledge and confidence to implement the new syllabus. Where appropriate, similarities and differences in primary and secondary school teachers are also examined.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

The study examined teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in the teaching of English. This contrasts with instructional practice. By pedagogical content knowledge, we refer to teachers' understanding of what is to be learnt and how it is to be taught.⁵⁰ This merging of content and pedagogical knowledge is an important part of language teachers' cognition.⁵¹ The construct of pedagogical content knowledge is a complex one. For the purpose of our study, we have limited it to knowledge about key areas contained in the EL Syllabus 2001 and some of the principles of language learning that underpin the syllabus.

This section addresses the question "What kinds of theoretical and pedagogical knowledge do EL teachers possess about listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and language learning in general?" For each concept listed under separate headings, teachers were asked to rate their own knowledge by selecting their responses from: never heard of it, heard of it, understand what it means, incorporate it in teaching. A 'never heard of it' response indicates that the respondent is completely unfamiliar with the concept. 'Heard of it' indicates that the respondent is familiar with the term but does not understand its meaning and significance. 'Understand what it means' indicates

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that the respondent understands its basic meaning and significance to language teaching, but does not take account of it when planning lessons and teaching. The final response ‘incorporate it in teaching’ indicates that the respondent not only understands the concept but also applies it when planning lessons or teaching.

Overall Knowledge

Table 2.1 provides a summary for the following areas: listening, speaking, reading and vocabulary, writing, grammar and general language learning principles. The results show unevenness in teachers’ reported knowledge about different areas of language teaching, with the highest amount of knowledge being reported for reading and vocabulary, writing and grammar.

Table 2.1 Teachers' reported knowledge for language teaching

		Never heard of it	Heard of it	Understand what it means	Incorporate it in teaching
<i>(in percentages)</i>					
Listening	<i>Pri</i>	28.5	22.2	28.2	21.1
	<i>Sec</i>	25.5	21.6	31.4	21.6
Speaking	<i>Pri</i>	27	18.6	27.6	26.9
	<i>Sec</i>	20.7	18	31.4	30
Reading & Vocabulary	<i>Pri</i>	10.4	10.4	23.5	55.6
	<i>Sec</i>	10.3	10.9	24.9	54
Writing	<i>Pri</i>	15.5	12.7	27.8	44
	<i>Sec</i>	11.5	12.2	26.9	49.4
Grammar	<i>Pri</i>	18.2	13.4	23.8	44.6
	<i>Sec</i>	15	14	29.5	41.4
General Language Learning	<i>Pri</i>	13.8	15.2	26.9	44
	<i>Sec</i>	9.8	16.5	30.8	42.9

Differences between primary and secondary school teachers' reported knowledge can be compared from the tables below.

Table 2.2 Primary school teachers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening	1.00	4.00	2.4066	.78339
Speaking	1.00	4.00	2.5407	.86951
Reading & Vocabulary	1.20	4.00	3.2434	.48531
Writing	1.00	4.00	2.9994	.63009
Grammar	1.00	4.00	2.9477	.72187
General	1.00	4.00	3.0089	.67524

(N=1717)

Table 2.3 Secondary school teachers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening	1.00	4.00	2.4858	.76550
Speaking	1.00	4.00	2.7045	.82068
Reading & Vocabulary	1.15	4.00	3.2267	.47678
Writing	1.00	4.00	3.1393	.66769
Grammar	1.00	4.00	2.9721	.67657
General	1.00	4.00	3.0690	.68086

(N=907)

Reading and Vocabulary

Compared to the other areas, the teaching of reading and vocabulary seemed to be the one that most teachers were familiar with. The figures in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 also show that this is one aspect where teachers show the least deviation, suggesting that

there is greater evenness of knowledge about teaching reading across all the teachers in our survey.

Most teachers reported incorporating knowledge about core reading strategies into their teaching. These included skimming, scanning, predicting, inferring and summarising. In fact, 87.8% of secondary school teachers included summarising in their lessons, possibly because it is an important skill tested in national examinations. In contrast, only 56.2% taught students self-monitoring, an important metacognitive strategy for comprehension.

Many teachers also reported familiarity with three types of reading activity: Shared Book Approach (SBA), Directed Reading-Thinking Activities (DRTA) and What I Know-What I Want To Know-What I Have Learnt (KWL). These were incorporated into their reading lessons by a large number of primary school teachers. Phonics was another important feature. Almost 90% of all teachers understood the meaning and significance of phonics, but predictably this was more important to primary school teachers. Schema theory, an important theoretical underpinning for language comprehension was familiar to 75% of the teachers. Less than half of all the teachers, however, said they understood the concepts of top-down and bottom-up processing even though many reading activities are based on these principles.

Three vocabulary teaching and learning strategies were included in the survey: semantic mapping, word association and using contextual clues. All three strategies appeared to be very familiar to most teachers. Using contextual clues was commonly adopted in both primary and secondary school teaching, but the use of semantic webbing appeared to be less so.

Writing

One of the concepts that teachers appeared to have good knowledge of was process writing. More than 90% of secondary and primary school teachers reported this, with about 70% of them incorporating the principles of process writing in their teaching. As for the genre-based approach, 90% of secondary school teachers said they understood what it was and about 70% said they incorporated it in their teaching. In contrast, only 68.2 % of primary school teachers said they understood it and only about half of them incorporated it in their teaching. On the other hand, a large majority (92.8%) of primary school teachers applied the idea of shared writing as a teaching strategy. A fairly large number (77.6%) of the respondents from secondary schools also indicated they knew shared writing, but it did not appear to be used as commonly as in primary schools.

Almost half of the teachers were not familiar with the cognitive process model. This means that they were not familiar with the theoretical underpinnings from information-processing models that could be used for explaining the writing process. Nevertheless, they appeared to be well-versed with the process writing approach, which is a pedagogical application of cognitive theories.

Grammar

Teachers were familiar with several pedagogical concepts about grammar teaching. Over 80% of primary school teachers indicated that they either understood or incorporated in their teaching the

following: rule-based teaching, text-based teaching, contextualised grammar teaching and grammar through communicative activities. Likewise, we also see similar proportions of respondents indicating familiarity with these concepts in secondary schools. Some concepts were unfamiliar to many teachers. These were consciousness-raising, the inductive approach and the deductive approach.

A difference, however, can be observed between primary and secondary school teachers. Whereas 70% of primary school teachers incorporated the teaching of grammar through communicative activities, only 56.5% of secondary school teachers did so. Interestingly, close to half (42.5%) of the primary school teachers indicated that they also incorporated rote learning of grammar in their classes, compared with only 27.8% of secondary school teachers. As for the text-based approach to teaching grammar, about 85% of all teachers said they understood this approach and about 65% adopted it in teaching. The difference between primary and secondary school teachers in this respect was minimal. This high degree of awareness about teaching grammar at the text level could be attributed to the compulsory grammar course that they were attending or had recently completed.

Speaking

In contrast to knowledge about grammar, writing, reading and vocabulary, concepts related to developing oracy (speaking and listening) were clearly less familiar to most teachers. Furthermore, even when a certain concept was familiar to many teachers, few reported applying the knowledge into their teaching. Such was the

case with ‘talk as performance’ and ‘talk as process’, two concepts that were clearly identified in syllabus guides. Although about 70% of both primary and secondary school teachers understood what these meant, only about 40% of them incorporated these ideas into their teaching of speaking. Two concepts of which more than half the teachers had little or no knowledge are meaning negotiation and management of interaction. Both concepts are important aspects of developing good spoken interaction ability. Only approximately 20% of the teachers reported incorporating these aspects into their oral lessons. Communicative competence, which is closely associated with speech, was also unfamiliar to many teachers.

On the whole, more secondary school teachers reported familiarity with concepts about the spoken language than their primary school colleagues. This could be due to the way speaking is taught at the two levels; hence, different emphases were placed during pre- and in-service training. Furthermore, primary school teachers may be more concerned with basic speaking skills of their pupils rather than specific aspects of interaction skills. Based on teachers’ responses to ‘talk as process’, which is the concept that teachers are relatively familiar with, we can see that speaking is often done as a means to an end. It may be used as activities that lead into reading and writing lessons. In this light, we may conclude that while speaking is done in class, and is in fact done in integration with reading, writing and grammar, speaking skills themselves may not always be taught systematically.

Listening

Much like the results on speaking, teachers were not familiar with principles that underpin teaching activities for listening. The concept that the biggest number of teachers was familiar with was self-monitoring. This refers to checking one's understanding and attention. On average, about 70% of the teachers were aware of its importance. It was also the feature that the most number of teachers reported incorporating in teaching. Self-monitoring was most likely to be encouraged after listening comprehension passages when teachers advised pupils to check their answers. In contrast with self-monitoring, top-down and bottom-up processes were least familiar to the teachers surveyed. (This pattern was earlier observed for reading.) Less than half said they understood what these were. Only 16% of secondary school teachers and 11.4% of primary school teachers said they incorporated the principles in their teaching.

The concept of critical listening was familiar to a little over half of all the teachers. Furthermore, only about 27% of them reported incorporating it into their lessons. This point is particularly worthy of attention because EL Syllabus 2001 identified critical listening as a key aspect of oral communication development for secondary school pupils. The same pattern is observed for discriminative listening. Less than 20% of the teachers surveyed said that discriminative listening was part of their language lessons. Finally, very few teachers reported knowing how listening activities could be organised. Only about 25% of them said they applied the principles of one- and two-way listening tasks into their lessons.

The results for listening suggest that many teachers did not know how to teach listening in a principled manner. There are two possible reasons for the teachers' lack of understanding about listening concepts. Firstly, compared with other skills, listening pedagogy has received little attention. It has often been assumed that listening is something learners develop with time, and so listening is not taught the way reading and writing are. Secondly, the lack of emphasis on listening comprehension abilities in public examinations reinforces the lack of importance given to the teaching of listening. This often translates into shorter class time spent on listening tasks (see Chapter 3). Listening is often assumed to be carried out during group discussions. Furthermore, all textbooks come with recordings and exercises or worksheets. Many teachers might have used them without spending too much time on principles for teaching listening.

In other words, like speaking, listening was done but seldom taught. Taken together, this may have negative implications for oracy development among pupils in schools.

Language Learning Concepts

In addition to grammar, literacy and oracy skills, teachers' knowledge and understanding of a number of selected language learning concepts were examined. At the top of the list was pupil-centred learning. Nine in ten teachers said they understood the meaning of this concept and seven in ten said they incorporated it in their teaching. A fairly large number of teachers (about 75%) were familiar with language learning and communication strategies, with about 40% of them reporting incorporating such

strategies in their language lessons. The two concepts that teachers were least familiar with were metacognitive awareness and metalinguistic abilities. Just about half of the teachers reported knowing what these refer to, while an even smaller number incorporated them in their teaching. Particularly worth noting is the small number of primary school teachers (13.8%) who incorporated the concept of metalinguistic knowledge in their lessons since such knowledge is an important part of children's literacy development. On the whole, the patterns of reported knowledge are largely similar for both primary and secondary school teachers.

Overall Knowledge: Summary

Based on the results mentioned in the previous sections, we may conclude that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge about key areas of language teaching was uneven. While most teachers said they understood and applied several concepts and strategies for teaching grammar and literacy skills, the same was not true for the teaching of oracy skills.

Concepts for oracy development, metacognitive awareness and metalinguistic knowledge were least familiar to the teachers. For every teacher who said they knew what a concept or strategy meant, there was usually at least one who did not. A possible reason for the overall lower level of knowledge for teaching speaking and listening may have to do with the pre- and in-service training that the majority of the teachers received over the years. The demand for training and the value attached to different areas of language learning in training are influenced by perceptions

about what is most needed by pupils. In primary schools, a great deal of emphasis is on literacy development and therefore more time would have been spent on grammar, reading, vocabulary and writing. The same trend may be observed in secondary schools where reading and writing are even more important because government examinations are heavily weighted in favour of literacy skills. This observation will be discussed further when we present teachers' beliefs and priorities in Chapter 3. Hence, more training time is also devoted to preparing teachers for teaching reading and writing.

With the explicit emphasis given to grammar learning in EL Syllabus 2001 and the compulsory grammar course that teachers attended, we can expect the place of literacy to be further consolidated in the language curriculum. There is definitely a positive outlook in terms of achieving some of the objectives of the syllabus. Unfortunately, the reported lack of knowledge about teaching oracy skills (speaking and listening) in the classroom may in the long run have negative implications for the effective development of literacy,⁵² since studies have shown that there are strong relationships between talk and the development of reading and writing.⁵³

Knowledge About EL Syllabus 2001

Teacher knowledge was further examined in terms of their understanding of the innovations and requirements of the new syllabus. This section addresses the question whether teachers could identify the main features of innovation in EL Syllabus 2001. An open-ended question was posed in the questionnaire: “Please identify those areas that you feel are innovations/new features of the new syllabus.” The responses from 300 teachers were analysed. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 present the results for primary and secondary school teachers.

Figure 2.1 Innovations of EL Syllabus 2001 identified by Primary school teachers

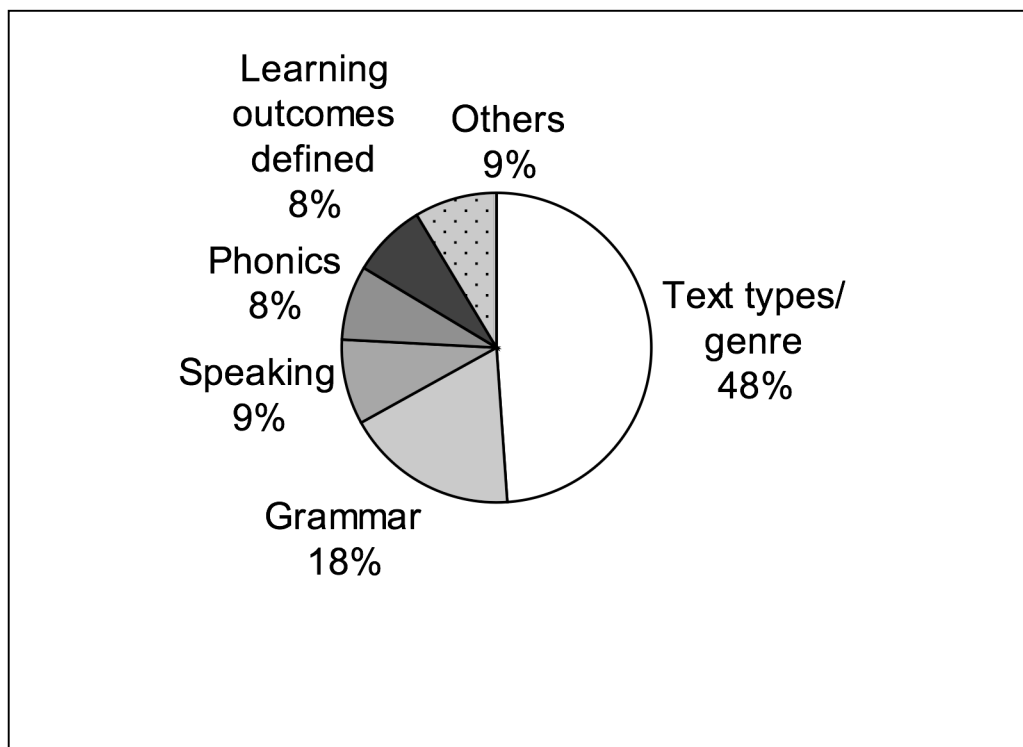
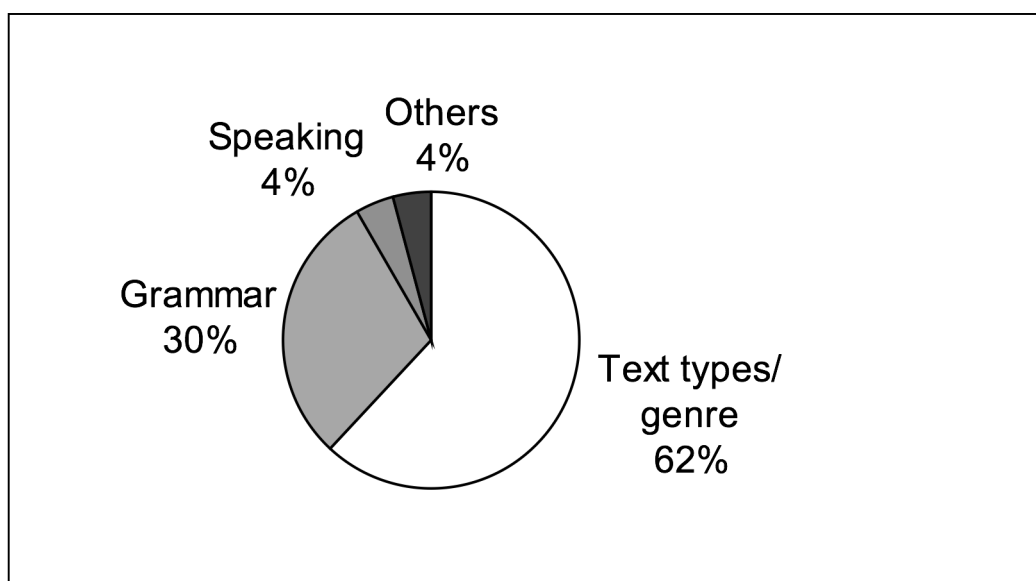


Figure 2.2 Innovations of EL Syllabus 2001 identified by
Secondary school teachers



It is clear from the teachers' written responses that most of them were aware of the innovative features of the new syllabus. They identified text types and the explicit teaching of grammar as important new features. It is interesting to note that a handful from both primary and secondary school respondents observed that speaking, particularly oral presentation, would be given greater emphasis. Other observations included a more structured presentation in the document which included "Listing desired outcomes for the various language components for 2-year levels starting with P 1 and 2." More creativity in writing, new ways of assessment using presentations and portfolios, introduction of poetry to primary school pupils and thinking skills were also mentioned by a small number of teachers.

Besides questionnaire responses, a more in-depth examination of teachers' understanding of the new syllabus requirements was carried out during the individual interviews. Teachers were asked to identify and explain some of the principles

of language learning that underpin the syllabus. They were also asked what the aims of the new syllabus were and how it compared with the 1991 syllabus. In addition, they were also asked to explain some of the key terms used in the syllabus document and syllabus guides, such as “three major areas of language use”, “integration”, “learning outcomes” and “authentic and meaningful language use”.

On the whole, most of the teachers could not articulate the aims of the syllabus as set out in the syllabus document nor were they clear about the three major areas of language use, namely language for information, social interaction, and literary response and expression. Similarly, only a small number of the teachers interviewed could explain what learning outcomes were. In general, the most knowledgeable ones were the HoDs. Nevertheless, more were familiar with the concepts of integration of skills, and authentic and meaningful language use. In general, the teachers did not seem familiar with the terms used in the syllabus document. Perhaps they felt that the eventual outcomes of learning English were the same as the previous syllabus, which was to prepare their pupils well for the major examinations at the end of primary and secondary school education. This observation about the effects of examinations is reinforced as the data was analysed in relation to other research questions. Or perhaps, as one interviewee reported, teachers tended to equate new syllabus requirements with new textbooks, which were expected to interpret the new syllabus and present it in a usable manner: “When you say new syllabus, my direct relationship to that is the textbook.”

Teacher Knowledge and Confidence

This section discusses findings to the question, “What is the relationship between pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge about syllabus requirements and teachers’ confidence to implement the new syllabus?” Although teachers did not display even knowledge for teaching the different language skills, about two-thirds of them felt that, in general, they had sufficient knowledge to implement the new syllabus. 72.5% of primary school teachers reported having the confidence to implement the new syllabus compared with 64.5% of secondary school teachers. (See Tables 2.4a and 2.4b.)

Table 2.4a Correlations of primary school teachers’ knowledge about L, S, R, W, G with their Confidence to teach EL (N=1,500)

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	General	Confidence
Listening	1.00						
Speaking	.736**	1.00					
Reading	.576**	.590**	1.00				
Writing	.491**	.527**	.669**	1.00			
Grammar	.592**	.600**	.677**	.642**	1.00		
General	.553**	.584**	.697**	.640**	.703**	1.00	
Confidence	.263**	.238**	.217**	.220**	.287**	.285**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

All the six categories of teacher knowledge are correlated to their confidence to teach English Language as specified in the revised EL syllabus.

Table 2.4b Correlations of secondary school teachers' knowledge about L, S, R, W, G with their Confidence to teach EL (N=850)

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	General	Confidence
Listening	1.00						
Speaking	.717**	1.00					
Reading	.596**	.621**	1.00				
Writing	.554**	.600**	.675**	1.00			
Grammar	.543**	.592**	.679**	.696**	1.00		
General	.530**	.579**	.685**	.683**	.725**	1.00	
Confidence	.329**	.311**	.296**	.309**	.327**	.328**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

It is clear from Tables 2.4a and 2.4b that confidence to implement the new EL syllabus was linked to reported knowledge about all aspects of language teaching for both primary and secondary school teachers. There were, however, stronger correlations between secondary school teachers' confidence and their knowledge for teaching listening ($r=.329$, $p<.01$), speaking ($r=.311$, $p<.01$), reading ($r=.296$, $p<.01$), writing ($r=.309$, $p<.01$) and grammar ($r=.327$, $p<.01$) (see Table 2.4b). Correlations for primary school teachers were weaker (listening $r=.263$, $p<.01$; speaking $r=.238$, $p<.01$; reading $r=.21$, $p<.01$; writing $r=.220$, $p<.01$; and grammar $r=.285$, $p<.01$).

On a more general level, teachers' overall perceptions of the sufficiency of their knowledge were strongly correlated with their confidence to implement the new EL syllabus. For primary school teachers, the correlation was $r=.766$, $p<.01$ (see Appendix 3A), and

for secondary school the correlation was $r=.784$ $p<.01$. (See Appendix 3C for more information.)

More importantly, confidence was also linked to other personal factors such as tertiary-level English language qualifications, age and experience. In other words, confidence to implement the requirements of the syllabus is linked to factors other than perceptions of one's own knowledge.

For primary school teachers, there was a correlation between the age group and the confidence level ($r=.277$, $p<.01$), i.e., the younger the teachers were, the less confident they were about implementing the syllabus. There was a negative correlation between the confidence level and general academic qualifications ($r=-.175$, $p<.01$). (See Appendix 3A.) This suggests that teachers with lower qualifications were more confident. One way of explaining this is to consider the age and experience factors. Many of the older teachers in primary schools had lower academic qualifications compared to their younger graduate colleagues. Nevertheless, they had the benefit of more years of teaching experience. They had also been involved in previous syllabus innovations and through the process had developed the confidence to deal with another innovation. This observation is supported by correlations with years of experience. Interestingly, having a degree was no guarantee of confidence to teach EL. This could be due to the fact that most of the graduate teachers teaching EL in primary schools did not have a degree in English.

In the case of secondary school teachers, EL qualifications were correlated moderately with confidence in teaching EL ($r=.154$, $p<.01$). This suggests that the higher the EL qualifications were, the more confident the teachers were in implementing the

new syllabus. Interestingly, teachers' general academic qualifications were not significantly correlated with their confidence to implement the new EL syllabus. This suggests that these teachers did not perceive their general academic qualifications to be in any way related to EL teaching. (See Appendix 3C.)

There was a correlation between years of experience in teaching EL and teachers' confidence to implement the new syllabus ($r=.166$, $p<.01$). In addition, there was a correlation between the year when the teachers received their initial training and their years of experience in teaching EL, suggesting that the older teachers were more confident in teaching EL ($r=-.159$, $p<.01$). This was further illustrated by the fact that the more years the teachers taught EL, the higher their confidence level was in implementing the new EL syllabus ($r=.166$, $p<.01$). It seems that possessing both specialised subject knowledge and teaching experience in schools over the years have boosted their confidence in teaching EL within the framework of the new EL syllabus.

From the above, we can infer that for secondary school teachers, experience alone has not given teachers the confidence needed to deal with the rapid changes taking place in the syllabus and perhaps also in the profession. Teachers needed to have both good subject knowledge and rich teaching experience to teach confidently. The difference in this regard between secondary and primary school teachers, however, is worth noting.

The pattern of teachers' knowledge of EL teaching might also have been influenced by the teachers' pre-service training experiences or qualifications. About 82% of primary school English teachers are GCE "O"- or "A"-level holders, with only 8.4%

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possessing a diploma in English Language and 8.3% a Bachelor's degree in English Language. Even among the secondary school EL teachers, the proportion of them having GCE 'A'-level qualifications is quite high (43%), with 46% of them possessing a diploma or a degree in English Language.

The 18 teachers interviewed felt that the new syllabus was a sound document and that it was a motivating factor for doing a good job:

Excerpt 2.1

Ah... the first thing is because I see the good point of the syllabus. And because of that, I do value and see how useful it can help the students. And because of this belief as well, I put it into my teaching. And how I teach students, I follow the syllabus closely where I can. Ah... because of that also, it is actually easier to say that it is achievable.

Only 11 of them, however, felt they were truly confident to implement its requirements. Some of those who did not express confidence felt that they needed time to fully understand its requirements.

Excerpt 2.2

Maybe it'll take me another 2 more years... because if you look at it superficially, maybe it's possible, but ... if you really want to work out the aims and the goals, and the achievements, the outcomes, it'll take a while for the teachers to achieve it.

Others, on the other hand, did not feel confident because of the challenges they faced and the apparent mismatch between the stipulated learning outcomes and what they felt was realistically achievable. A secondary school teacher reflected on this issue:

Excerpt 2.3

Erm, not really, because in neighbourhood schools – I think this new syllabus will be very good for ... good schools where the students come in with er an above average knowledge of the language and they can use it quite competently. However, in our neighbourhood schools, many of these students don't have that level of comprehension, you see and it becomes a little bit difficult in implementing syllabus lah, because it's so structured.

On the whole, teachers who were confident about implementing the new syllabus could have felt so because of a combination of reasons. Although their reported knowledge about different aspects of teaching was uneven, many of them had at the time of the study received training in teaching text types and grammar. The high profile of the Cambridge grammar course in the media as well as the mandatory attendance at the course had almost certainly influenced teachers' understanding of the requirements of EL Syllabus 2001. When teachers were asked, in the study, to write down what they thought was the main innovation of the new syllabus, more than two-thirds of them (70.35%) identified text types and grammar. Given the fairly high level of self-reported knowledge about grammar, reading and writing as well as their recent attendance at the grammar course, it is not surprising that many of the teachers felt they had sufficient knowledge and confidence to implement the new syllabus.

While the twin features of text types and grammar are indeed important features, the present syllabus is in many ways a continuation of the previous one, particularly where the teaching of language skills is concerned.⁵⁴ Skills such as speaking and listening have been given more prominence in EL Syllabus 2001. Given the

perceptions about the requirement to teach text types and grammar, and the association these two features have with literacy development, oral communication skills seem destined to suffer a similar fate it had in the last ten years when the 1991 syllabus was used. The perceptions of the greater importance of grammar and literacy are further reinforced by public examinations which continue to be weighted heavily towards these aspects of language learning and use. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, many teachers are concerned about their students' oracy development, but precious lesson time has to be devoted to developing literacy skills as a result of the backwash effects of examinations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented the major findings on teachers' knowledge and confidence with regard to teaching the new syllabus. On the whole, about six in ten of the 2,700 odd teachers surveyed in the study reported that they had sufficient knowledge and confidence for the implementation of the new syllabus. Correlation analyses showed that confidence was linked to many factors; knowledge about what was to be taught was only one of them. The other factors that correlated with confidence were years of teaching experience, age and qualifications in English. Academic qualifications in general did not correlate with confidence, indicating that confidence is not linked to having a degree if that degree was not in English. Confidence to implement the new syllabus was not strongly correlated with all knowledge about specific theoretical and pedagogical concepts. It was linked to knowledge about grammar, reading, vocabulary and writing, but not listening and speaking. This indicates that teachers perceived

these three aspects of language learning to be important features of the new syllabus, and having less knowledge about the teaching and learning of oral communication would not impede their implementation of the new syllabus. Implications of findings from this chapter are discussed in the last chapter.

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in Ang, 2000, p. 7.
- ² Quoted in Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2001, p. 3.
- ³ Lim, 2002.
- ⁴ Quoted in Lim, 2002, p. 91.
- ⁵ Quoted in Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2001, p. 3.
- ⁶ Quoted in Lim, 2002, p. 92.
- ⁷ Quoted in Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2001, p. 7.
- ⁸ Quoted in Lim, 2002, p. 92.
- ⁹ Quoted in Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2001, p. 7.
- ¹⁰ Ward, 2003.
- ¹¹ Richards & Renandya, 2002.
- ¹² Ward, 2003, p. 120.
- ¹³ Quoted in Lim, 2002, p.88.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Richards, 2002, p. 153.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Lim, 2002, p. 93.
- ¹⁶ Ellis, 2002.
- ¹⁷ Urquhart & Weir, 1998.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Ward, 2003, p. 121.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Mitchell, 2000, p. 291.
- ²⁰ Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 64.

- ²¹ Flower & Hayes, 1981.
- ²² Quoted in Zamel, 1983, p. 165.
- ²³ Quoted in Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p. 10.
- ²⁴ Seow, 2002.
- ²⁵ Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987; Derewianka, 1990.
- ²⁶ Callaghan & Rothery, 1998; Derewianka, 1990.
- ²⁷ Callaghan & Knapp, 1989.
- ²⁸ Quoted in Cheah, 1996, p. 218.
- ²⁹ Lim, 1995.
- ³⁰ Gough, 1972.
- ³¹ Goodman, 1968.
- ³² Urquhart & Weir, 1998.
- ³³ Smith, 1971; 2004.
- ³⁴ Urquhart & Weir, 1998.
- ³⁵ Carrel, 1983.
- ³⁶ Ridgway, 1997.
- ³⁷ Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991; Zhang, 2000; 2001.
- ³⁸ Bygate, 1987.
- ³⁹ Bygate, 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Goh, 2003.
- ⁴¹ Levelt, 1989; Levelt, Roelofs & Meyer, 1999.
- ⁴² Garman, 1990.
- ⁴³ Goh, 2003.
- ⁴⁴ Bygate, 1998; Hughes, 2002.
- ⁴⁵ Wolvin & Coakely, 2000.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Rubin, 1994; Goh, 2000.
- ⁴⁸ Anderson, 1995.
- ⁴⁹ Goh, 2002; Lynch, 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Shulman, 1987.
- ⁵¹ Grenfell, 1998.
- ⁵² Norman, 1992; MacLure, Phillips & Wilkinson, 1988.

⁵³ Chang & Wells, 1988; Griffin, Hemphill, Camp & Wolf, 2004.

⁵⁴ Ang, 2000; Lim, 2000.

3

Beliefs and Practices

Examining Beliefs and Practices

The term ‘beliefs’ used in the context of educational research refers to “ideas and theories that teachers hold about themselves, teaching, language, learning and their students”.¹ Beliefs are a part of teacher thinking and “reflect the knowledge or information they may have of specific aspects of their work”.² These ideas, theories and perceptions that teachers hold can be seen as the principles that guide their teaching. Such principles may be shared by other teachers and may or may not be based on theoretical concepts about language learning and teaching.³ Nonetheless, beliefs about teaching and learning have been shown to have a significant influence on teacher practices in the classroom. Moreover, the relationships between beliefs and practices are also often complex, mediated by many factors.⁴ These include “how teachers were taught themselves, how teachers were trained and the content of that training, teachers’ colleagues and the administration, exposure to new ideas, materials available, the type of students, and personal views of learners and learning”.⁵ An understanding of teacher beliefs can be useful to those involved in monitoring the

implementation of the new syllabus. It will also be of interest to those concerned with pre- and in-service teacher development.

Many studies have been done on teacher beliefs and practices. A study of 30 English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers supports the observation that teachers' theoretical beliefs about second language teaching and learning influence their practices during literacy instruction.⁶ The research showed a consistent relationship between years of teaching experience and teachers' theoretical orientation, which determined the methodological approach in the ESL classroom. Further, the formation of the teachers' theoretical beliefs was shown to be closely related to the methodological approaches that were prominent when they were beginning teachers.

Similar conclusions about the influence of teachers' underlying beliefs and assumptions about second language teaching on their classroom practice were reached in other studies. These beliefs play a central role in influencing their instructional decisions, curriculum and lesson tasks design, as well as interpretations of language curricula.⁷ The success of recommended approaches to teaching also depends heavily on teachers' knowledge of the relevant theory and confidence in its efficacy for teaching and learning, as was the case of using the genre-based approach in an Australian classroom.⁸ On the other hand, studies have also shown that when teachers do not subscribe to a specific pedagogical theory on learning, their teaching will not be changed even when a particular approach has been officially advocated. A study conducted in Japan revealed such disconnectedness between public language policy and private

classroom teaching of 876 Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.⁹

Another study surfaces the conflict between the officially advocated approach to teaching English and the actual classroom practice of teachers in Guangxi, China. Like their Japanese counterpart, the National Education Commission advocated the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) but the students were still being “spoon-fed with grammatical rules”.¹⁰ The research revealed that the teachers encountered numerous difficulties in implementing CLT, one of which being inadequate training. The teachers were also unable to see the link between CLT and everyday activities in the classroom; hence, the reluctance to change.

Although many studies have examined the link between beliefs about language teaching and classroom practice, few have investigated the influence of beliefs or perceptions about learning environments and learner needs. One such study conducted in Singapore examined teachers’ perceptions about assessment, teaching and the examination culture.¹¹ This study concluded that teachers believed in the role of assessment but were mostly unconvinced that tests and public examinations accurately reflected learners’ communicative competence. More importantly, teachers “were highly aware of tests as a major influence on their teaching” and therefore called for “a broader approach to assessment”.¹²

The studies mentioned above and numerous others conducted in the last two decades to surface teachers’ belief and knowledge systems have contributed to our present understanding of the complexity of the classrooms and the ways teachers conduct

their lessons. To examine teacher beliefs in our study, we elicited teachers' self-reports through questionnaires and interviews which focused on learner needs, problems and motivation, and their teaching environments. Close- and open-ended questions were asked in the questionnaire. For the former, responses from the entire sample (over 2,600 teachers) were analysed. For responses to open-ended questions, 300 completed questionnaires were randomly selected for coding. In addition to obtaining data from the questionnaire, we also interviewed 18 teachers (nine from primary schools and nine from secondary schools), representing different levels of experience and departmental involvement.

Besides examining teacher beliefs, the study also investigated teachers' reported practices with regard to broad issues such as planning and conducting lessons. Close-ended questions were asked about teachers' use of class time and practical considerations when planning lessons. In the interviews, teachers were asked further questions related to these aspects of their work as well as their perceptions of their learners, the syllabus and their teaching environments. These interviews provided more in-depth information on the interaction between beliefs and practices in the context of teaching the EL Syllabus 2001.

Through teachers' self-reports, it became clear that the teachers' attempts at implementing the new syllabus were affected by their perceptions of their pupils, particularly their learning needs and problems, as well as their perceptions of different aspects of their teaching environments. The next part of the chapter presents these results before implications of such thinking and behaviours for syllabus implementation are drawn.

Learner Needs

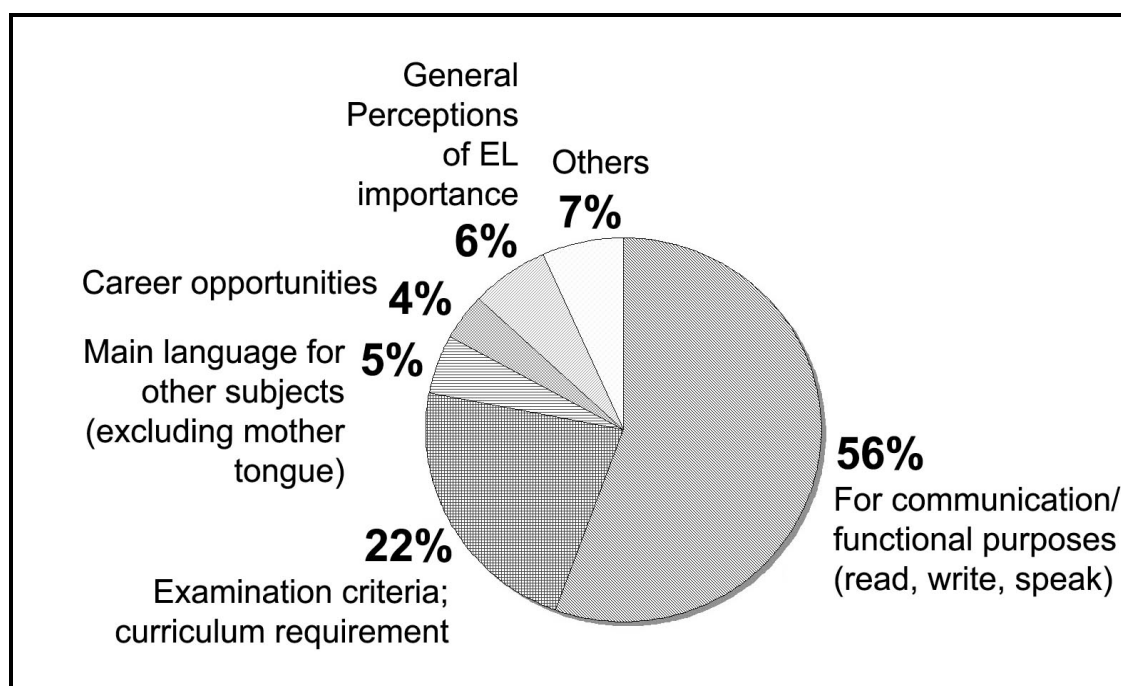
To investigate teachers' perceptions of learner needs, several questions were asked in the questionnaire and during the interviews. Teachers were asked to base their responses on their experience with one class which they had to specify. Questions were also asked about factors that influenced some aspects of their lesson planning and teaching to investigate how these might have been affected by perceptions about learner needs.

Pupils' Purpose For Learning English

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked the open-ended question "What do you see as the most important reason for your pupils learning English?" The two most common perceptions of Singaporean pupils' learning needs were for communicative/functional purposes and meeting examination/curriculum requirements. (See Figure 3.1.)

The results show that the teachers held a pragmatic view with regard to why their pupils needed to learn English. The view that English is learnt for its communicative purpose closely reflected the Ministry of Education's explicit emphasis on English as a functional tool, for gaining "access to information and knowledge from around the world".¹³

Figure 3.1 Teachers' perceptions of pupils' reason for learning English



The perception that the most important reason for learning English is to pass examinations is a particularly interesting one. It not only reflects the examination-oriented culture in Singapore but also highlights sociolinguistic factors that influence the learning and use of English in the country. Like many adult Singaporeans, Singapore pupils have many languages to communicate with one another in. Besides the languages of the ethnic groups, there is of course Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) or Singlish,¹⁵ which most if not all Singaporeans are familiar with. Besides being the language that many pupils in school use, there are also indications that it is used in the classroom in some types of teacher-pupil interaction.

SCE has many linguistic features that differ from Standard English used in Singapore and English-speaking countries.¹⁶ It is also different from the variety of English that is taught in schools.¹⁷

Many pupils have acquired SCE as a language from home¹⁸ and thus need to develop the standard variety for English in schools where the English curriculum outlines clearly the requirements of Standard English in writing and strongly implies the same in speech. For pupils who have not acquired Standard English in their preschool years, they have to learn another variety of English which is valued in formal education.

There are, however, setbacks in this endeavour resulting from myriad reasons, such as weak linguistic abilities, learner attitudes and lack of supportive informal learning environments. The process of learning Standard English is, therefore, not always a smooth one for pupils and is often fraught with practical problems for their teachers. However, given the importance of English, many teachers have to ensure that pupils do well or at least pass the subject in order to gain access to the next level of education or, in some cases, jobs.

The view that “meeting examination requirements was the most important reason for learning English” was expressed by teachers from different levels and different school environments. It was, nevertheless, more prevalent among secondary school teachers. This suggests the increasing importance given to examinations as pupils go through various levels of education, a view that was summed up by one teacher during the interview:

Excerpt 3.1

Ahh... I try to be as good as I can, but I am teaching the graduating classes... as a teacher, our school has to remember I have these kids, I need to get through for these kids... it's not just the exams I have to think of, where they are heading to next, I cannot...forget that... and they need the minimum pass for English to get to the next stage of

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their education, so... ahh... that is a very big responsibility for me, so I try to do that, but I try to do... to do justice to the syllabus at the same time.

Inferring from the above quote, the perception that examination is paramount to pupils' learning needs also has an effect on the way teachers implement the requirements of the new syllabus.

The above conclusions are corroborated by another set of data from the questionnaire responses. Teachers were asked to report the degree to which eight external factors influenced their lesson planning decisions. The three most important factors are presented in Table 3.1. The rest of the factors were decisions by principal/ HOD/ Senior Teacher/ senior colleagues, syllabus specifications, textbooks, scheme of work, and available supplementary materials, all of which were considered moderately important.

Table 3.1 Three most important considerations when planning lessons

	not important	somewhat important	important	very important	extremely important	Mean	SD	N
	<i>(in percentages)</i>							
Primary								
PSLE, 'O'/'N' level exams	0.9	5.0	29.7	38.8	25.6	3.83	0.90	1727
Value of skills or knowledge	0.3	1.8	26.4	46.1	25.4	3.94	0.78	1738
Pupils' profiles	0.3	4.1	27.2	42.9	25.5	3.89	0.84	1760
Secondary								
PSLE, 'O'/'N' level exams	0.3	5.4	26.5	38.4	29.5	3.9	0.89	910
Value of skills or knowledge	0.1	2.2	27.9	45.6	24.2	3.9	0.78	901
Profiles	0.5	4.8	30.4	43.0	21.3	3.8	0.85	912

The teachers were unanimous that government examinations were an important factor, while at least six out of ten teachers considered it to be very or extremely important. (See Table 3.2.) The proportions for both primary and secondary school teachers might have been even higher if they all had been teaching upper level classes. It is possible that respondents teaching lower primary or lower secondary school pupils felt less pressure to consider the demands of examinations.

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Another factor, the value of language skill/knowledge to pupils' communication needs, was also reported as important by most of the teachers, while seven out of ten teachers considered it very or extremely important. This suggests that teachers were mindful of the importance of English for meeting their pupils' communication needs. These two factors also had two of the highest mean scores. (The other factor with a high mean score is pupil profile, a point we will return to later in the chapter.)

Therefore, on the level of beliefs, we can see that teachers considered both of these learning needs to have substantial influence on their teaching. This may appear to be very good news for the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001 which is based on key areas of language use. In practice, however, when deciding which aspects of the syllabus to teach, teachers often reported experiencing a tension resulting from the perceived mismatch between real-life communication needs (as expressed through the syllabus) and examination requirements.

The factor that appeared to have the single most powerful influence on practice, however, is examinations. One teacher summed it up this way:

Excerpt 3.2

No, what I am saying is what drives people in schools is not so much the language syllabus, but what at the end of the day, the purpose it's going to be assessed on. So you may have many learning outcomes in this syllabus, but I think a lot of people would take a more pragmatic approach, because we are ultimately going to be assessed to the test papers. It's not just the kids, it's me and my principal, everybody you know. So that really drives everything out because that, again, is the sad part in the sense that some learning outcomes would not be given the necessary time and emphasis in schools. And the real document that most

people will be looking at is no more the syllabus, no more the language syllabus, but the examination syllabus.

The reality of the backwash effect of public examinations on teaching is borne out by findings on distribution of available class time for the language skills and other important aspects of language development. Table 3.2 shows that time allocated to the teaching of English reflected the weighting of the respective language skills and features in PSLE and GCE 'N'-'O'-level papers.

Listening and speaking, which had little or no examination weighting, were often neglected. On the other hand, reading and writing, which combined to carry the greatest weighting, especially in secondary school examinations, were given an exceptionally high priority in the use of class time. Self-reports from teachers during interviews further supported this finding from the questionnaire.

Excerpt 3.3

There is a lot of reading, there is a lot of writing and there is a lot of grammar work.

Excerpt 3.4

I feel that time is very limited in the class, and I have to spend a lot of time in reading and writing.

Table 3.2 Allocation of available class time according to skills and areas

	not important	somewhat important	important	very important	extremely important	Mean	SD	N
	(in percentages)							
Primary								
Listening comprehension	1.9	24.3	48.9	19.9	5.0	3.02	0.85	1760
Oral activities	0.6	12.3	46.2	32.4	8.6	3.36	0.83	1761
Oral presentation	1.6	19.7	46.7	26.9	5.1	3.14	0.85	1757
Pronunciation	0.6	10.2	46.2	33.2	9.8	3.41	0.82	1758
Phonics	1.9	17.7	47.5	25.1	7.8	3.19	0.88	1755
Reading aloud	0.9	16.3	49.8	26.2	6.8	3.22	0.83	1757
Reading comprehension	0.1	2.5	26.4	48.6	22.5	3.91	0.77	1759
Composition writing	0.0	2.7	31.5	46.8	19.1	3.82	0.76	1758
Grammar	0.0	0.6	15.9	44.5	39.1	4.22	0.72	1766
Vocabulary	0.1	0.7	20.0	48.0	31.2	4.10	0.73	1762
Secondary								
Listening comprehension	10.7	42.9	36.7	7.7	2.0	2.5	0.86	913
Oral activities	0.7	18.4	50.9	24.6	5.4	3.2	0.80	913
Oral presentation	1.1	19.3	48.6	25.7	5.2	3.1	0.83	915
Pronunciation	1.5	21.0	50.1	22.4	4.9	3.1	0.83	914
Phonics	8.0	34.1	42.4	12.8	2.7	2.7	0.89	913
Reading aloud	4.1	26.0	49.9	17.2	2.9	2.9	0.83	912
Reading comprehension	0.2	2.8	22.2	45.7	29.0	4.0	0.80	916
Composition writing	0.0	0.3	14.6	50.2	34.9	4.2	0.69	915
Grammar	0.2	0.5	19.4	46.5	33.3	4.1	0.74	916
Vocabulary	0.3	1.4	23.6	47.7	27.0	4.0	0.77	916

There are, nevertheless, some slight differences between secondary and primary school teachers. One such difference is in the reported use of class time for listening. Compared with 73.8%

primary school teachers who felt that listening was important, only 46.4% of secondary school teachers thought that listening comprehension was important at all. The means for primary and secondary were 3.02 and 2.5 respectively. The low priority given to listening comprehension activities was most likely because listening comprehension was not tested in the GCE 'O'ⁱ-level examinations, unlike the PSLE examinations where listening was still compulsory for all candidates. Another possible reason was the prevalent view among many language teachers that listening was something that can be 'picked up' or developed incidentally through the teaching of other aspects of the language.¹⁹ The following reflection from a secondary school teacher illustrates this:

Excerpt 3.5

... with the three components and the lack of time, I tend to focus on the three, not that I totally can't, but I always see listening skills have been part of these three that I teach. I will not explicitly teach listening skills.

A further examination of the data revealed that even among primary school teachers, listening was still less important compared with other aspects of the syllabus. Less than 25% actually felt listening was either very or extremely important. On the other hand, about 75% of all teachers felt that reading comprehension, composition writing, grammar and vocabulary

ⁱAt the time when the questionnaires were administered, the new examination format had not been revealed.

were either very or extremely important. A similar trend can be observed among the secondary school teachers.

Besides listening, oral language proficiency was also given less emphasis when planning lessons. In primary schools where talk is an important vehicle for learning, only 41 % of the teachers considered oral activities to be very or extremely important. Other related areas of oral proficiency such as presentations, pronunciation, phonics and reading aloud were also considered less important by the majority of the teachers. In secondary schools, the trend was the same, if not more accentuated. Only 30% of the teachers considered oral communication activities to be either very or extremely important. In a situation where project work was an important part of the curriculum, the teaching of oral presentations was given high priority by only 30.9% of the teachers surveyed. Even less importance was given to the teaching of pronunciation and the related activity of reading aloud.

Like listening, oral language proficiency activities have been eclipsed by reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary learning. Almost all the teachers surveyed agreed that it was important to devote class time to writing. Grammar and vocabulary also had two of the highest means probably because of the perception that the mastery of these two skills would contribute to good grades in composition writing. Composition writing was undisputedly *the* main focus of English lessons in secondary schools. It had the highest mean ($M=4.2$), the lowest standard deviation ($SD=0.69$), suggesting the highest degree of congruence in response, and had the largest percentage of teachers who considered it to be either very or extremely important (85.1%).

These figures provide empirical support for previous small-scale studies and bear out what is also known anecdotally – that in general, Singapore teachers teach to examinations. The reality of examinations appears to have once again constrained teachers to spend more time on developing the pupils' knowledge and skills in the written language (writing and grammar) and neglect oral communication (listening and speaking) in the process. One primary school teacher had this to say about the situation:

Excerpt 3.6

I would say that listening or oral not be of greater percentage as compared to the main paper and each level is of different weightage... we follow by the PSLE and the streaming criteria. ... more people would put emphasis on paper two elements because that is where is tested. Then paper one is essential because we have set a quota like how many they have to write per term. As for listening and oral that is where it has been compromised.

This is supported by another set of results which reported what teachers believed were the problems that their pupils faced. Poor reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar were high on the list. More than 70% of the linguistic problems that teachers identified were related to these aspects of language development. Writing was also considered to be a problem. Similar trends can also be observed among secondary school teachers, but even greater emphasis to writing and grammar was found. These perceptions most likely resulted from the teachers' concern for examinations. Many teachers also mentioned poor reading comprehension skills as their pupils' problems. Interestingly, there were few comments on students' inability to express themselves orally.

To end this part of our discussion on learner needs, we shall briefly consider other less common perceptions reported in the 300 responses to the open-ended question, “What do you see as the most important reason for your pupils learning English?” English was seen by a smaller group of teachers as serving other purposes. These include helping pupils learn other subjects and improving career opportunities. These needs were almost exclusively identified by teachers from government schools. Developing an appreciation of the language was mentioned by a handful of primary and secondary school teachers. Interestingly, this observation was made about some primary school pupils. When it referred to secondary school pupils, the observation was based entirely on pupils from independent schools.

As mentioned before, many pupils in government schools come from homes where English, and more specifically, Standard English, is not the first language. These pupils will therefore have to develop mastery of the language almost entirely in school. A good grasp of the English language will also help them do better in other subjects, thereby increasing their chances of doing well in examinations as a whole and securing a place in tertiary education. For pupils coming from independent or some government-aided schools, there might be less of a worry of not landing good jobs because of poor English proficiency. Pupils from independent schools, in particular, are assumed to proceed to universities as the next logical step in the educational ladder and that they will get good jobs because many are probably adequately bilingual. They are also the ones probably perceived as possessing the ability to learn English for its intrinsic value and not for instrumental worth.

It is worth noting that when teachers were asked what they thought were their pupils' priorities in learning English, their answers closely reflected their own priorities when allocating class time. For example, the four areas which primary school teachers allocated more teaching time to were reading comprehension, composition writing, grammar and vocabulary. These were also the areas that they felt were their pupils' own learning priorities. The same can be observed for secondary school pupils.

Clearly, there are links between teachers' perceptions of learners' needs and learning priorities and their allocation of time to teaching various aspects of the syllabus. However, given the similarities between these aspects and the types of knowledge and skill assessed in public examinations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the teachers' perceptions were heavily influenced by the latter and the pragmatic values they held.

Excerpt 3.7

Ahh... I try to be as good as I can. But I am teaching the graduating classes. As a teacher, our school has to remember I have these kids, I need to get through for these kids. It's not just the exams I have to think of, where they are heading to next, I cannot...forget that. And they need the minimum pass for English to get to the next stage of their education. So... ahh... that is a very big responsibility for me. So I try to do that, but I try to do... to do justice to the syllabus at the same time.

Teachers were aware of time constraints and therefore had to be selective about which aspects of the syllabus to focus on, as this primary school teacher reported:

Excerpt 3.8

I suppose it's adapting, do whatever that you think you can, that is necessary, rather than take on everything. And we have to be very selective. ... and make some compromises ... in terms of time, because sometimes, examinations would have to take precedence over everything else. So sometimes it would be a matter of preparing the children for exams, and certain things would have to be cut short because of that...

Although a very high percentage of the responses identified communication (in particular oral communication) as an important need for their pupils, the allocation of class time to teaching listening and speaking clearly did not reflect this concern. Listening and speaking were neglected in the need to prepare pupils to pass or excel in public examinations. As a result, some teachers felt they were not sufficiently preparing pupils for effective communication in the real world, as one secondary school teacher pointed out the dilemma with speaking:

Excerpt 3.9

Speaking, because of time constraint, ah really, it takes a lot of time to even organize a proper speaking lesson, to have that to carry out, more often than not, we have to do it outside the curriculum time, so I tend to compromise on that aspect, even given the chance, I would ... I always think the speaking component is lacking...

Learner Problems

In addition to identifying perceptions about their pupils' learning purpose and priorities, the study also examines teachers' perceptions about learner problems. Teacher responses were elicited from questionnaires and interviews. 300 responses to an

open-ended question “What problems do some of your students face when learning English?” were examined. Teachers’ responses were coded and categorised under three broad areas: linguistic problems, learning environments and learner attributes.

About 50% of all the problems reported were associated with poor language skills and knowledge. A general problem noted was a weak foundation in English that hindered the learning of English at school. Primary school teachers found that their pupils did not have adequate language development during preschool while secondary school teachers felt their pupils had not mastered the language adequately by the time they reached secondary school.

Some teachers also pointed out that some young pupils were not ready for the English syllabus in Primary One because of poor foundation and so found the learning of English to be a struggle, thus leading to other problems of learning. The following observations were made by two primary and secondary school teachers:

Excerpt 3.10

Syllabus not catered for pupils who are ‘illiterate’ when they first enter school.

Excerpt 3.11

K1 & K2 syllabus does not prepare the lower ability groups or the p1 syllabus.

Excerpt 3.12

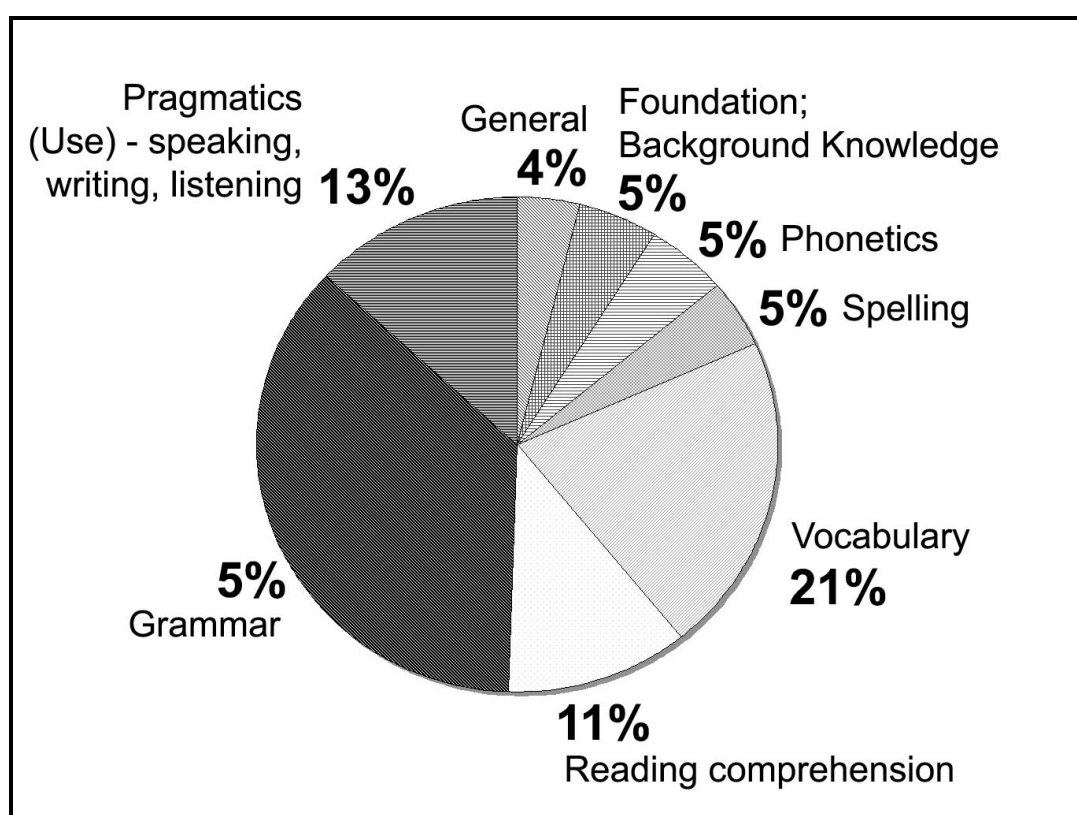
No proper grounding in pri school affects learning in sec.

Excerpt 3.13

Weak foundation since primary school.

On the whole, there was general consensus about perceived major areas of weaknesses, namely vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. Figure 3.2 shows the combined responses by secondary and primary school teachers.

Figure 3.2 Pupils' problems with language



Primary school teachers also noted that many pupils have poor phonological awareness and phonics background resulting in low decoding abilities and inaccurate pronunciation. “Poor spelling abilities” was also a common problem among primary school pupils. A problem that was reported frequently was pupils’ lack of vocabulary for expressing and comprehending even simple ideas –

a situation observed among both primary and secondary school pupils. Another very common problem was low reading comprehension abilities due to text difficulty, inadequate background knowledge or schema and poor reading skills, such as inferring and summarising. Also mentioned were problems related to all areas of language use, particularly poor speaking and writing abilities. Pupils' inability to use Standard English in speech and writing was a concern for many teachers too.

The most frequently mentioned language-related problem, however, was poor grammar knowledge. The problem with grammar occurred at both clausal and textual levels. Basic grammar knowledge such as the use of articles, concord or subject-verb agreement and verb inflections was frequently mentioned. There were also problems related to coherence and text structure. It was noted that pupils' lack of grammar knowledge also hampered their understanding of written texts. In addition, many teachers also reported that their pupils were inconsistent in applying grammar rules. Some teachers also attributed this problem to the nature of English grammar which made it difficult for their weak pupils to learn it:

Excerpt 3.14

Grammar rules are difficult to grasp.

Excerpt 3.15

Fuzzy rules of grammar.

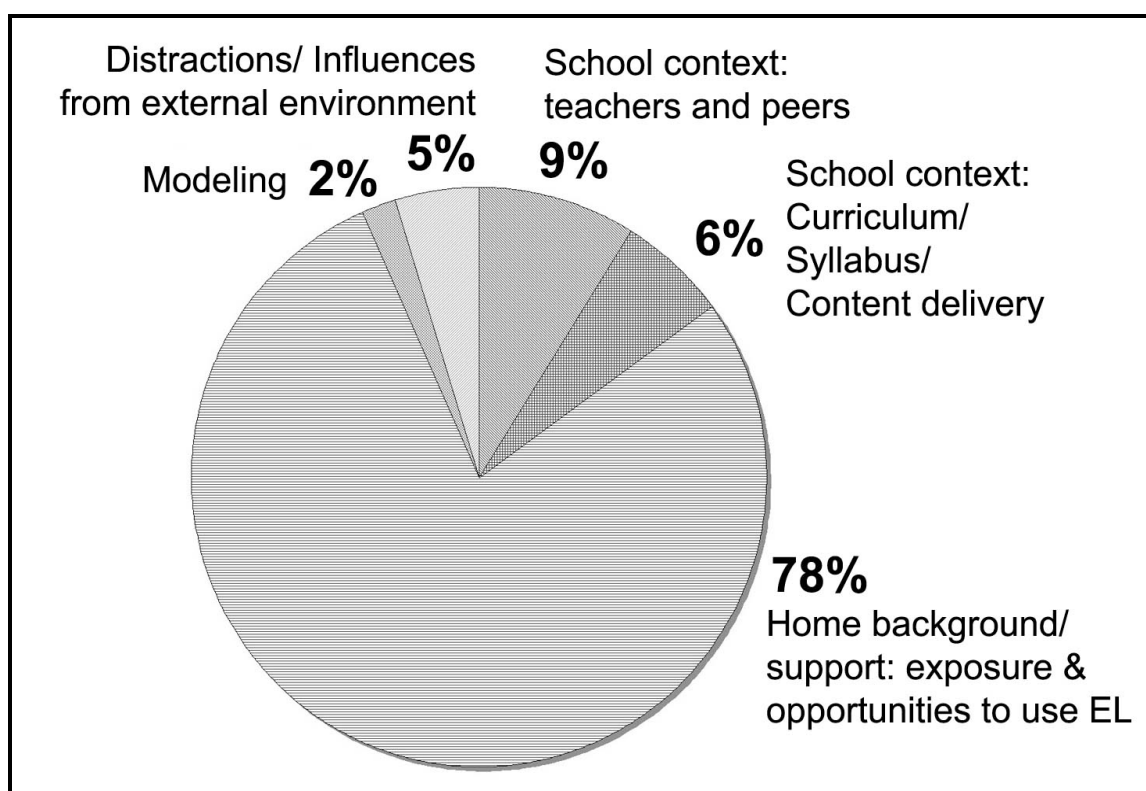
Excerpt 3.16

Can follow the grammar rules but can't understand when there are exceptions to the rules.

Interestingly, comments about poor grammar knowledge were made about pupils not only from government or government-aided schools, but also independent schools.

The second most commonly reported problem (30% of all responses) was a lack of conducive environments or conditions for learning Standard English at home and in school. (See Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Environmental factors that hinder pupils' language development



Most of these observations were based on secondary school Normal stream pupils with some referring also to pupils from the Express stream.

Many teachers noted that a main negative factor was that people their pupils interact with regularly used mother tongue languages and Singlish, as these teachers observed:

Excerpt 3.17

Lack of exposure & practice due to non-EL speaking home background (natural inclination to speak in MT).

Excerpt 3.18

Lack of emersion in EL outside EL classroom.

The prevalence of these languages in the mass media, in particular the radio and television, also meant that pupils can have access to information and entertainment without the need to know or use Standard English. Pupils therefore lacked sufficient motivation and opportunities to use Standard English. Problems were also related to the influence of language used for SMS and MSN/IRC/chatrooms. In addition, many teachers also identified peer pressure to use Singlish as a problem for older pupils. The use of Singlish in speech was seen to be particularly problematic because it influenced pupils' written language.

Another problem that teachers identified was home environment. A high percentage of the responses from primary school teachers stated that pupils did not have enough exposure to EL at home or that they have learnt a non-standard form. This hampered them from developing standard structures and other more advanced forms of literacy. Some also felt that the syllabus required a great deal more than some pupils could realistically learn in the short time frame because of their poor English

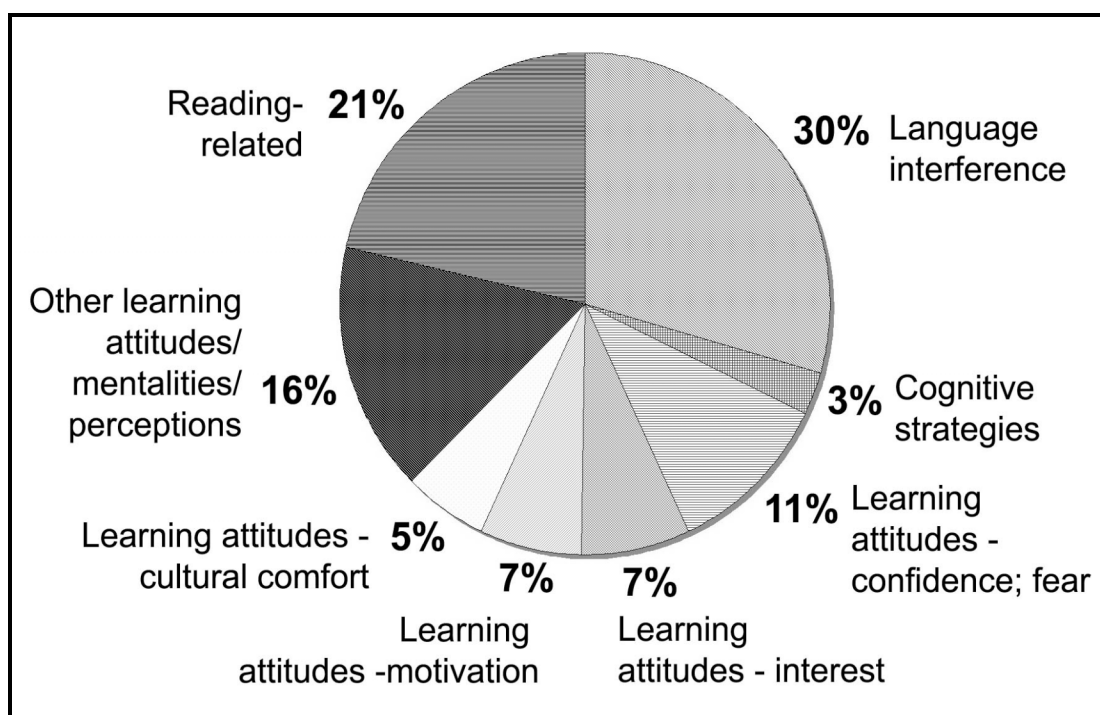
language foundation from home, as this teacher reflected on her weak primary school class:

Excerpt 3.19

This new syllabus requires the child also to be exposed ... to the environment, so in other words, we have to tap a lot on their prior knowledge ... and most of our kids are ...this is a neighbourhood school, so most ... at least half a band are not that exposed to the language ... they've not travelled that much or they have been exposed to a large extent, so it does become a battle after a while ... because the new syllabus is quite ... open in that sense and they are trying to integrate a lot more skills – text types, like I mentioned, so after a while you really wonder whether they understand what's going on or they're just simply writing down answers that the teachers have provided.

Besides language problems and a lack of conducive learning conditions, the third area of problem reported was learner attributes. Learner attributes that hindered successful language learning included several characteristics. (See Figure 3.4.)

Figure 3.4 Learner attributes that hinder language development



One characteristic that affected both primary and secondary school pupils was the presence of negative emotions such as fear and anxiety. It was felt that pupils' fear of making mistakes and negative judgements by others, as well as a lack of confidence to participate in class was a great stumbling block. Many secondary school teachers also observed a lack of interest, complacency and unwillingness to work hard among both express and normal stream pupils. "Poor reading habits" was a frequently mentioned problem. On the whole, it is interesting to note that secondary school teachers mentioned twice as many learner attribute problems compared with primary school teachers. This is most likely due to the age groups that their pupils fall into. The secondary school teachers most likely had to deal with many challenges of adolescence that have crept into language learning.

Learners' profiles, in particular their problems, were an important consideration when teachers plan their lessons. (See Table 3.1 on p. 67 again.) Because many teachers want to respond to their pupils' learning needs and problems, they sometimes have to be highly selective of which aspects of the syllabus to cover. Teachers dealing with weak classes may face problems that have a direct impact on the success of implementing new syllabus requirements. Several secondary school teachers reflected on this issue:

Excerpt 3.20

I think whatever it is, how we teach, whether we use text type or not, the basic weakness I have noticed in the students is that they don't have the fundamental basis, like fundamental base of grammar, a particular type of grammar, they don't

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have it. So whatever we are teaching, whatever text type, it won't help because they just don't get it.

Excerpt 3.21

But I feel my hands are tied because there is a lot to be done in the language syllabus. But I feel, with the kids we have, we may not have the kind of luxury to do everything in the syllabus, in the language syllabus, because kids we have are... perhaps slower academically and they need to be pushed in various areas.

Excerpt 3.22

Things like you have to achieve certain reading strategies with the normal tech students is really not so easy. For the less able students, you are just concerned with them being able to read and comprehend one sentence.

Many teachers also found themselves in a situation where they had to abandon their plans to help pupils tackle basic problems. Instead, they decided to spend time on preparing their pupils for dealing with examinations, or at least be familiar with the task requirements, as these two primary school teachers admitted:

Excerpt 3.23

The students I have just described, in terms of problems, it would be the time, because to, to really develop them in that area would be, would require a lot of time. So sometimes, as I said, you know, exams would have to take precedence and so you have to cut short things to make sure they are prepared for the exams.

Excerpt 3.24

Teachers are expected to give qualify classes on Band 1, Band 2 and for the lower classes at least, you know ... a pass for all the children. Sometimes the exam or the test

format is slightly different from, ... the syllabus, right? So certain constraints like having to teach to the exam does come in because ... as much as we want to, incorporate all of these to make teaching so fun and, you know, meaningful. But at the end of it all, there are certain formats that they really need to be exposed to ... the way of the test and exam.

The way some teachers deal with these problems and the realities of examinations is perhaps best summed up by a young teacher from a secondary school:

Excerpt 3.25

We had a workshop recently by a very senior teacher and he said something which I think is very true. He said it's all a game and you are the coach in this game and if you want the team to win you've got to you know, start playing by the rules and start being a tactician really. You know that letter writing is going to come out. You know that report writing is going to come out, then please forget the rest.

Learner Motivation

Another aspect of teacher perceptions and their possible influences on practice was explored through the open-ended question: "What factors motivate your pupils to learn English?" Teachers' responses showed that a fairly large number of them, mainly secondary school teachers, believed their pupils were motivated by extrinsic factors such as examination grades, further studies, communication and better job opportunities. (See Figures 3.5 and 3.6 for a comparison of primary and secondary school pupils.)

Figure 3.5 Factors that motivate primary school pupils

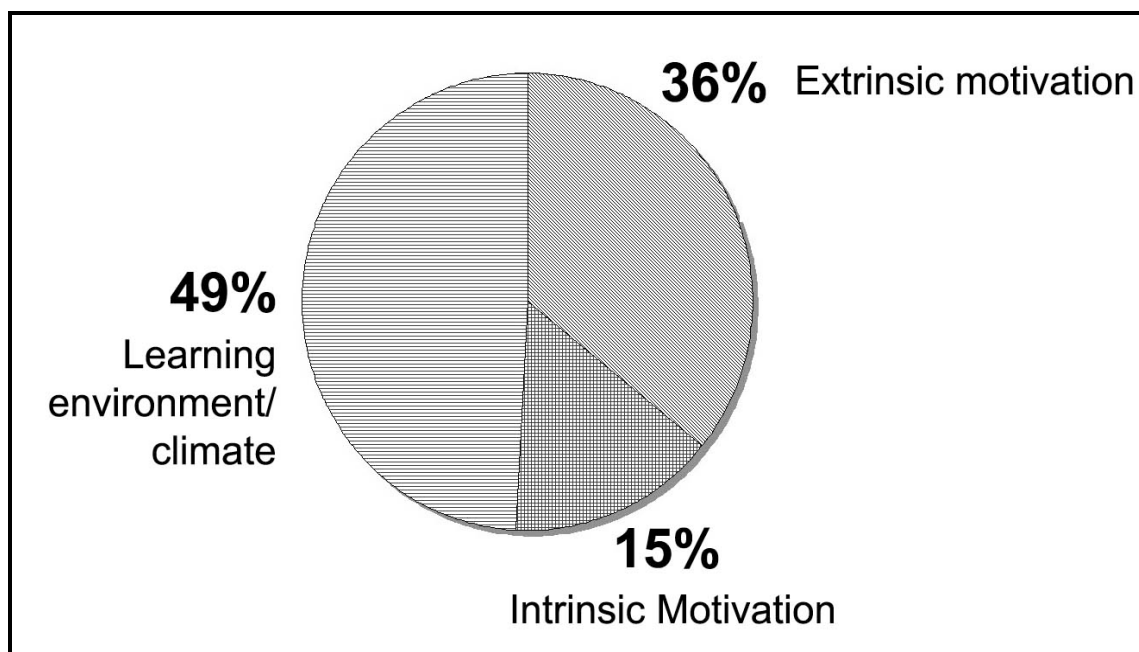
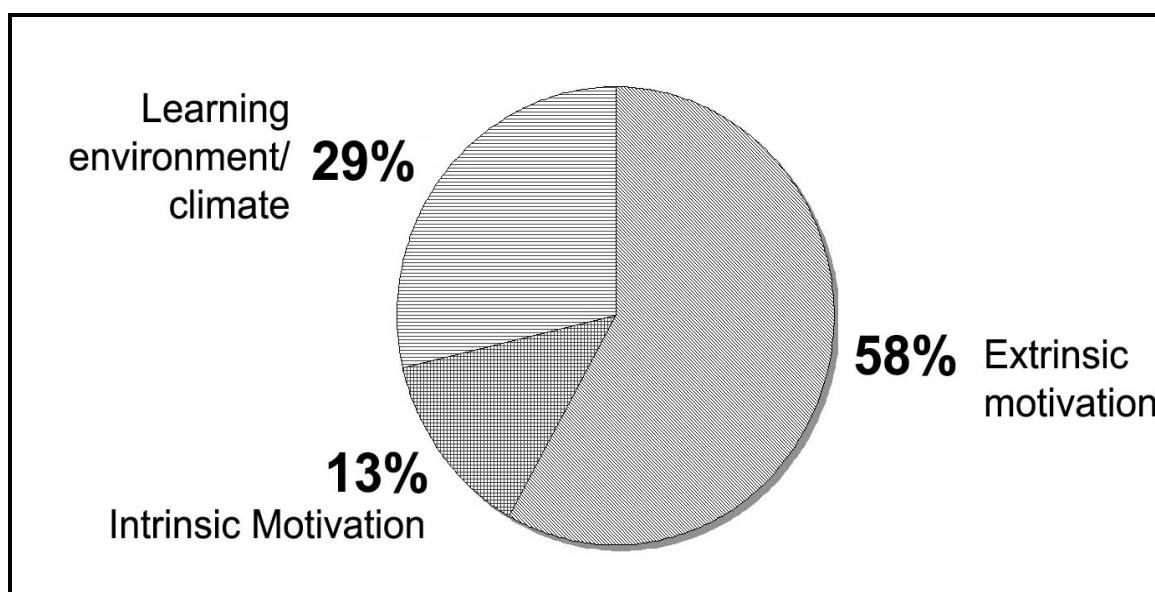


Figure 3.6 Factors that motivate secondary school students



In comparison, fewer teachers thought that their pupils were motivated intrinsically. Some primary school teachers, nevertheless, believed that their pupils wanted to learn English so that they could read storybooks or other interesting materials independently.

Another source of motivation that teachers identified was the learning environment. This included school, lesson delivery, teachers and resources. The largest number of responses was from primary school teachers. In particular, the teachers believed that pupils were motivated to learn when interactive and challenging learning activities, such as singing and poetry, were used in the classroom. In contrast, fewer secondary school teachers gave such responses. While 134 responses were made by primary school teachers about the importance of learning environments, only 61 were given by their secondary school counterparts. In fact there was a very interesting inverse trend being observed here, highlighting one of the key differences between the perceptions of the sources of learner motivation between primary and secondary school teachers. (See Table 3.3.)

Table 3.3 Number of teacher responses for two key sources of learner motivation

Pupils are motivated by:	Primary	Secondary
Examination and grades	43	109
Learning activities in class	97	51

It appears that many secondary school teachers expected pupils to work hard for extrinsic factors such as obtaining better examination grades. Teachers might therefore teach according to

examination requirements starting from Secondary Three because in secondary schools, the stakes for examinations are higher. In contrast, primary school teachers, especially those from lower primary, were less concerned about examinations. To motivate pupils to learn, primary school teachers appear to place more emphasis on making their lessons interesting. It could be that in primary schools, teachers have a nurturing role and the important factors for motivating students to learn EL are closely related to the teacher such as interesting classroom delivery and better rapport with the students. One similarity observed is that teachers did not see the wider school environment as an important motivating factor.

To gain further insights into the influence of teachers' perceptions on their practice, questions were posed during individual interviews. One question was "Does the kind of students you have influence your teaching approaches?" Furthermore, to understand whether the new syllabus had any impact on their reported way of teaching, two other questions were asked. These were "Have you changed the way you teach since the implementation of the new syllabus?" and "Do you face any problems when you try to teach according to the new syllabus?" Teachers' self-reports showed that on the whole, their teaching was influenced more by what they believed would motivate their pupils to learn and the pedagogical values that they held than any specific way of delivery that they thought the syllabus required.

Primary school teachers reported several general considerations when they taught the new syllabus and these approaches were very similar to the ones for motivating students: making lessons meaningful by contextualising their materials and

activities, using a variety of novel activities, such as games and story-telling and IT-related activities (CD Rom/Internet/movies); providing visual stimuli (mind maps/graphic organisers); exposing students to different text types; allowing room for creative expression (poetry/drama). There was no explicit mention of the key features of the syllabus, such as grammar and text types in relation to their teaching. While this does not mean that the teachers neglected these requirements, it suggests that what was foremost in their minds was engaging their young pupils.

Secondary school teachers' reports showed that the most popular way of motivating students was the use of supplementary reading materials. Seven of the nine interviewees reported using articles from Readers' Digest, newspapers and magazines.

Excerpt 3.26

Um, I find the textbook very boring so I don't use it. We have Readers' Digest that comes in regularly. I like to use that a lot.

Excerpt 3.27

I use authentic material. To get material from other sources, I ask the students to read and bring brochures from home and we talk about them...

Excerpt 3.28

I try to vary resources. I look from books, try different magazines, and sometimes I supplement text types with my own experiences, a book I have read, a conversation with my friend, the topic and how you can relate to a text type.

Other ways of motivating secondary pupils include using IT-related activities. Group work and interactive activities were also popular with the teachers interviewed to involve students who would otherwise be passive and to promote communication:

Excerpt 3.29

So most of the time, ah, I like to do group work. For classes who are more able and, because in the process of it, I believe, through communication, more ideas, more ideas come, and they actually get to speak up, speak in English, that is very important, which is lacking in the students, yeah.

Like their primary school counterparts, most teachers said the new syllabus did not change the way they taught or their teaching styles.

Excerpt 3.30

Not consciously so ... I don't think there is anything too drastic in terms of the way I teach, everything is very much the same.

Nevertheless, they reported being more conscious about incorporating the key features of the syllabus:

Excerpt 3.31

... we have more components of teaching on grammar, and then text type, like you said text types, and then, we have to do ... project work. And then we try to implement text type into project work, whether we are doing project, information retrieving account, or writing expository.

Conclusion

English language teachers in this study shared a number of common perceptions with regard to pupils' needs and motivation. There were also similarities in teachers' reported practices regarding allocation of time for teaching, and the use and evaluation of textbooks. A main similarity was found in the problems that teachers perceived among their weaker learners. They felt that for pupils who had poor foundation in the language, achieving the learning outcomes for their designated levels would be a real challenge. One of the differences between primary and secondary school teachers was their perceptions about the role of the immediate learning environment. While most primary school teachers felt that it was a key source of motivation for learning, many secondary school teachers were of the view that national examinations drove learning.

On the whole, the results to this part of the study strongly suggest that teachers adopted a pragmatic approach towards the teaching of English. This appeared to be largely the result of the need to teach to examinations. An analysis of teachers' self-reports on teaching priorities further corroborated this observation. These findings as well as those in Chapter 2 demonstrate the privileging of the written word in the teaching of English in Singapore, often at the expense of the development of speech. While the privileging of reading and writing did not always resonate with teachers' own beliefs about the purpose of language learning and use, many felt that they had to be realistic and prepare pupils for examinations. This sometimes resulted in a dilemma for the teachers.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 541.

² Quoted in Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996, p. 355.

³ Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 1998.

⁴ Fang, 1996.

⁵ Quoted in Crookes, 1997, p. 67; Freeman & Freeman, 1994.

⁶ Johnson, 1992.

⁷ Smith, 1996; Woods, 1991.

⁸ Hammond, 1996.

⁹ Gorsuch, 2002.

¹⁰ Quoted in Li, 2003, p. 65.

¹¹ Pelly & Allison, 2000.

¹² Quoted in Pelly & Allison, 2000, p. 93.

¹³ Quoted in Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 2.

¹⁵ Low & Brown, 2004.

¹⁶ Gupta, 1994; Goh, 2000; Low & Brown, 2004.

¹⁷ Foley, 1998.

¹⁸ Gupta, 1994; Goh & Silver, 2004.

¹⁹ Brown, 1990.

4

Challenges and Support

Large-scale changes in the curriculum through a centre to periphery,¹ or a top-down approach, are ambitious endeavours. Curriculum innovations by central agencies (primary change agents) are often communicated to teachers through intermediary change agents, such as in-service teacher trainers and writers. Language teachers are then expected to carry out new ways of teaching in their schools and classrooms. The effectiveness of such methods of disseminating change has often been called into question, but in situations where large-scale change is necessary, it is often the quickest means of reaching the large number of teachers.

In many cases of top-down syllabus change, resistance by teachers has also been well documented. This was often a result of one or a combination of the following key factors: heavy demands made by the change on school in terms of resources and time, teachers' long-standing attitudes and beliefs, and the complex relationships between agents and the receivers of change.² Besides issues such as mismatch of values and ideological goals,³ teachers might resist or slow down change due to inaccurate and incomplete understanding about the change, inadequate training and a lack of ownership.⁴ While change is sometimes desirable and necessary,

teachers will not be effective implementers of change unless they understand and accept the rationale for the change, are equipped with new teaching skills and feel that they have a stake in the change. More importantly, to encourage teachers to implement the change, there must be perceptible improvements to their working lives.⁵

One of the most effective strategies for change in human affairs is for change agents to encourage individuals to participate in their own re-education and be engaged in a ‘clarification and reconstruction of values’.⁶ To encourage individuals to persevere in their intention to act in a certain way, there must also be positive influence from peers and superiors, and a sense of control over the change.⁷ In the case of language syllabus change, in-service courses should be a time when teachers are encouraged to examine their theory of learning in the light of innovative features in the syllabus. In exploring their values alongside those of the trainers, and working through conflicts together, hopefully, they will be convinced of the rationale for the change. At the same time, they will also recognise the added value of the required training in their professional development. To encourage teachers to change their ways of teaching, support from fellow teachers, HoDs and principals is crucial. Collegiality and positive influence from opinion leaders in a department is an essential element in successful curriculum innovation.⁸

The introduction of a new language syllabus is changing teachers in two senses: it requires teachers to change their teaching strategies, and in the process of implementing the new syllabus, teachers themselves experience changes as professionals.⁹ The rest of this chapter discusses key issues related to the management of

syllabus change in Singapore. Interestingly, unlike many cases of change, there was little overt resistance to the introduction of EL Syllabus 2001. A likely reason is that teachers were expecting it, as it is the practice of the Ministry of Education to review and change the English language curriculum every ten years.¹⁰ Thus, teachers appeared to have accepted the change as a matter of course. Although there was little overt resistance, teachers reported many problems they faced when tasked with teaching the new syllabus. While these cannot be interpreted as covert resistance, left unaddressed, they could become stumbling blocks in the path of implementation.

Data for this part of the study was mainly from 300 responses to open-ended items in the questionnaire and results of interviews with 18 teachers. The findings are further discussed in the light of information regarding beliefs and practices, some of which have been reported in the previous chapter.

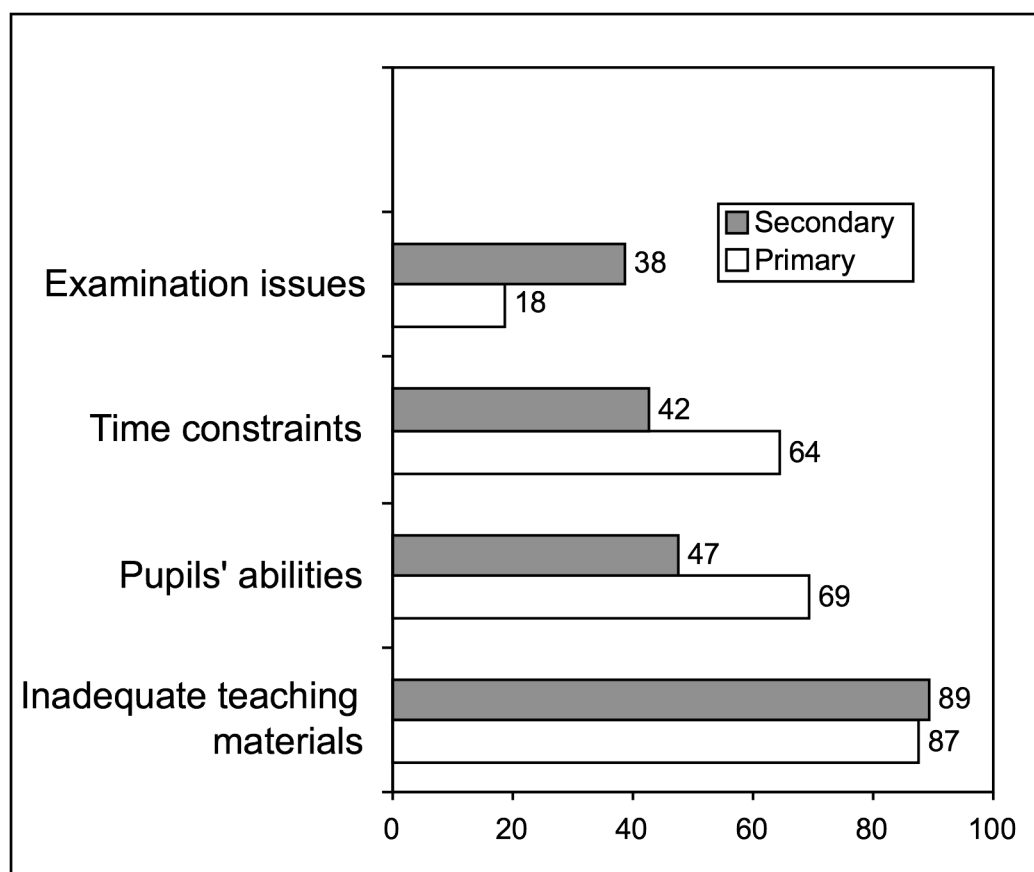
Teachers' Challenges

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked a series of questions relating to their implementation of the new syllabus. One of these was: "What problems do you face in teaching the new syllabus?" A key question was asked during the interviews: "Do you think you have taught according to the requirements of the new syllabus?" Based on the interviewees' response, constraints and problems they faced were further explored.

Teachers reported various problems in the questionnaire. These could be categorised under four broad areas, namely unsuitable/inadequate teaching materials such as textbooks, pupils' attitudes and abilities, time constraints and examination

concerns. The number of mentions for each category is found in Figure 4. 1 below.

Figure 4.1 Problems faced when teaching the new EL syllabus



Teaching Materials

The most frequently reported problem was a lack of useful teaching materials. These included textbooks which some perceived as being inadequate for meeting the demands of the classroom and supplementary materials that were readily available. Some common problems were a lack of suitable materials for the various text types and for various levels of pupils, insufficient supplementary worksheets for further practice, model test materials were hard to come by, and a general lack of resources

that could be used in the classroom. Secondary teachers were particularly concerned that they did not seem to have sufficient materials to be used as models for teaching pupils to write in the different text types.

There were also some comments that aimed directly at the new textbooks that were introduced. Some noted that the textbooks used were not well-organised; the pictures or illustrations were sometimes confusing and misleading; higher order questions were insufficient and coverage of language skills was uneven. Referring to specific textbooks for the new syllabus, some teachers wrote:

Excerpt 4.1

Too many grammar & vocab components under one unit alone.

Excerpt 4.2

Workbooks are not helpful in supporting text-type teaching.

Excerpt 4.3

Grammar exercises given in text book are not appropriate most of the time.

Excerpt 4.4

Uninspiring with uninteresting passages.

Excerpt 4.5

Workbook full of grammatical errors. Insufficient grammar practice.

Excerpt 4.6

Some of the texts are quite difficult to understand. Teachers end up trying to explain difficult words as used in the contextual level.

Excerpt 4.7

The text/passages do not seem to land (sic) itself well when teaching text types. The exercises given are rather conservative in nature (one that does not involve reader response).

Some teachers were also concerned about the attention given to text types and the effect this would have on learner motivation, as illustrated by this teacher's observation:

Excerpt 4.8

All new textbooks are boring ... tediously focused on text-type (flavour of the time) and forget that children still are motivated by themes/issues/topical material.

On the whole, primary school teachers appeared to be more concerned with the relevance and usefulness of the English textbooks. In the main survey, 80% of primary teachers thought textbooks were an important consideration when they planned their lessons; this corroborates findings in another study on Singapore teachers.¹¹ In contrast, only about 50% of secondary school teachers felt the same way, suggesting that they were less dependent on textbooks. For primary school teachers, textbooks are a valuable tool for specifying grammar items and skills to be taught. As primary school pupils are tested on specific skills, discrete grammar items and vocabulary knowledge, systematic presentations of each aspect would be beneficial for teachers.

Pupils

Pupils' attitudes and abilities were also another source of challenge for teachers.

Many primary school teachers felt that the weak Primary One and Two pupils could not cope with the demands of the syllabus. Many of the comments about low language abilities were similar to those discussed in the previous chapter. The following written comments highlighted the problem in relation to the new syllabus:

Excerpt 4.9

It's targeted at the high flyers. It kills the children's interest in learning English. The average & below average – a phobia for English.

Excerpt 4.10

Pupils' ability does not match up to the requirements of the new syllabus sometimes.

Excerpt 4.11

Pupils' inability to comprehend the text types and their difference.

Some teachers also felt that their young pupils were not ready to write as required by the syllabus:

Excerpt 4.12

Most of the areas in the new syllabus require a lot of writing. The middle and low ability groups will have difficulty in completing the tasks. As a result, I end up

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correcting grammar & sentence structure rather than the content.

Excerpt 4.13

A lot of exercises require the pupils to write on their own (free expression).

Excerpt 4.14

Weak pupils cannot cope.

Secondary school teachers also found their pupils' poor language foundation a challenge when they attempted to teach the new features in the EL syllabus. Like their colleagues in primary schools, some teachers were concerned that the weaker pupils might not have an adequate language base to build on. The following written comments are representative of the views expressed by others with similar concerns.

Excerpt 4.15

Poor foundation (from primary schools) – grammar.

Excerpt 4.16

Sometimes students may not be able to understand the genre.

Excerpt 4.17

The ideas for writing in the NT (books) are very good but cannot be applied as the classes are too weak.

Excerpt 4.18

Weak students are not able to appreciate it.

Excerpt 4.19

The new syllabus is more difficult & my students are borderline Express and weak in English Language.

Excerpt 4.20

Pupils get confused over grammar, difficult to internalise and apply grammar rules.

Excerpt 4.21

Students take a long time to familiarise themselves with the different text types (around 1 year).

Excerpt 4.22

Our type of students have problem with the expository/ argumentative type (to learn all 7 text types well is not possible).

Excerpt 4.23

Cannot progress fast because of the pupils extremely low proficiency in the basics of EL.

Secondary school teachers' concern about the gap between learners' language abilities and syllabus requirements is a valid one, as the learning outcomes for the secondary language programme include many aspects of advanced literacy development. Although such areas of development can be expected of adolescents growing up with Standard English as a dominant language, they present a real challenge for those who have not acquired the basic aspects of English. In the same way, we can also

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see the dilemma faced by primary school teachers. Pupils who come from non-English speaking homes have problems even with using English orally. In addition, some may not have had many rich literacy experiences from home or the preschool centres they went to.

Time Constraints

Another problem that teachers reported was time constraints due to factors such as the scope of the syllabus and the competing demands of other aspects of their work.

Excerpt 4.24

Scope is too broad. Good if pupils are read widely as many are struggling to cope.

Excerpt 4.25

Too many thinking skills do not allow us to focus on certain areas and insufficient time to complete all activities.

Excerpt 4.26

A lot of time is taken for the completion of worksheets by the pupils. As a result the teaching strategies can only be adopted in an ad-hoc basis.

Excerpt 4.27

Too overwhelmed by the amount of worksheets that I have to cover.

Excerpt 4.28

Too much to cover in too little time.

Excerpt 4.29

Too much to cover in too short a time. Consequently, skim the surface only instead of a good understanding and foundation.

Excerpt 4.30

Scope too much and too wide at times – covering too many skills within time constraints.

Teachers also pointed out that weak learners who needed more attention generally suffered as a result of teachers' time constraints:

Excerpt 4.31

Time factor in meeting the demands of workbook, class worksheets and computer based lessons. It is difficult to do individual corrections with them where you can point out their errors to them.

Excerpt 4.32

Lack of time to focus on weak areas in lesser ability pupils.

The pressure of time to complete what was in the textbooks or prescribed worksheets also had a knock-on effect on the quality of lessons. This was a concern among many teachers, particularly those from secondary schools. Here are some comments:

Excerpt 4.33

Time element: overload in other areas such that I invest little time in lesson planning.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

Excerpt 4.34

Insufficient time for practice and revisiting the areas of emphasis.

Excerpt 4.35

More thinking/planning time needed.

Excerpt 4.36

Insufficient time to gather suitable teaching materials on resources needed to teach the different types of text.

Excerpt 4.37

Lack of time to cover all the different genres as required in the syllabus since identification and exploration of each genre is required for learning to be adequate.

Excerpt 4.38

Need more time to complete one unit of work as text-types are new to the pupils and there are many aspects to certain text-type. Pupils need more practice too.

Teachers felt they needed time to learn and adapt themselves to teach according to the requirements of the new syllabus as they had never been taught such a wide variety of texts during their own school days.

Part of the problem of time constraints had to do with the requirements of individual EL departments. These requirements were most often linked to the need to prepare pupils for examinations.

Excerpt 4.39

Not enough time to experiment with new materials because of department requirements.

Excerpt 4.40

Not enough periods per week if teachers are expected to give 'enough' compositions and comprehension exercises. More time has to be spent as examining texts before students complete their tasks.

The constraints of time that teachers faced could explain why most of the teachers did not make use of professional development materials such as teacher periodicals that are widely available in Singapore. These include *Teaching English Language & Literature (TELL)*, *Guidelines, Teaching and Learning*, *Review of Educational Research and Advances for Classroom Teachers (REACT)* and *Society for Reading and Literacy (SRL) Magazine*. These materials often provide excellent teaching ideas, ready-to-use class materials, as well as short reviews of research and best practices. Less than 15% of all the teachers surveyed reported reading *TELL*, an MOE publication, frequently. The figures for the rest of the publications were even lower.

Six out of nine interviewees mentioned that time constraints and heavy workload were problems preventing them from sourcing new teaching for materials. Although textbooks were meant to be teaching aids, six out of nine interviewees saw the new textbooks they had as inadequate in helping them to teach according to the new syllabus. This is a matter of concern because as one teacher put it, 'When you say new syllabus, my direct relationship to that is the textbook'. Five out of nine interviewees said that the lack of resources was a problem they faced. As the textbooks were

perceived to be inadequate, teachers felt they needed other teaching resources, but these were not readily available. Some would argue that teachers could develop their own resources, but, to quote one teacher we interviewed, this was ‘a very time-consuming painful activity’. Four out of nine interviewees also said that they were selective when deciding which aspects of EL Syllabus 2001 to cover because they were constrained by the demands of examinations.

On the whole, many teachers expressed the desire to do a better job if they had more time to plan their lessons, be familiar with the revised syllabus and give special attention to the pupils who most needed it:

Excerpt 4.41

More time with kids and less initiatives piled up. How to give attention when racing with time?

Excerpt 4.42

Stabilise for a few years and have less changes in terms of syllabus.

Examination Issues

As we saw in the previous chapter, helping pupils pass examinations was at the top of many teachers’ priorities. It is therefore not surprising that some issues related to formal assessment and evaluation were perceived as challenges to teachers’ successful implementation of EL Syllabus 2001. At the time when the survey was administered, MOE had not made official the examination format that was to be introduced in 2004.

This created a great deal of anxiety among teachers, especially those in secondary schools.

One of the major concerns expressed by many teachers was the apparent mismatch between the requirements of the revised syllabus and the existing examination format.ⁱ

Excerpt 4.43

Since results are very important, the format of the exam gets priority and esp in term 4, pupils are ‘trained’ according to the format of the exam.

Excerpt 4.44

Assessment and new syllabus do not match. What we teach and what are tested are different.

Excerpt 4.45

Clash of requirements of syllabus with requirements of exams/school policies.

Teachers also saw an added dimension to this challenge, namely parents’ expectations.

Excerpt 4.46

Having to reconcile teaching the skills and areas of use of a language according to the new syllabus and the parents’ expectations of “drilling” their children for the exams.

ⁱ The new examination formats introduced in 2004 attempted to address this mismatch.

The constraints mentioned are illustrated by the comments of the interviewees from secondary schools. Six out of nine interviewees said that examinations and the need for accountability were obstacles to completely implement the new syllabus. Ultimately, teachers ‘take a more pragmatic approach’, according to an interviewee:

Excerpt 4.47

What I am saying is what drives people in schools is not so much the language syllabus but what at the end of the day, the purpose is going to be assessed on’.

From the teachers’ self-reports, it is clear that they faced many challenges in their day-to-day teaching of the English language. This appeared to have a knock-on effect on the implementation of the new syllabus. Many teachers had problems with pupils with weak foundation whom they felt were not ready for the learning outcomes expected of them. From the reports, we could infer that they felt that this was an externally-imposed problem beyond their immediate control. Although pupils had basic problems with key aspects of the English language, teachers still had to prepare them for the next stage of assessment in the education system. As other parts of this report have shown, secondary school teachers experienced a greater urgency to do this.

The internal problem that teachers faced had to do with their day-to-day planning of lessons which they felt would meet the requirements of the new syllabus. Juggling pupils’ needs and problems, and time constraints, teachers required good support in terms of teaching materials. Many teachers relied heavily on

textbooks. Lessons were taught directly from the units or chapters in the books. Problems arose when teachers found their textbooks inadequate but at the same time were unable to prepare sufficient supplementary materials. The high frequency of reports about time constraints may also partially explain the added pressure that teachers felt. Although they realised the shortcomings in the textbooks that they used, teachers did not have enough time to look for or adapt supplementary materials.

The problems that teachers reported were mainly related to their environments. It is worth noting that they rarely mentioned a lack of knowledge or ability to teach the new syllabus. There may be two reasons for this. Firstly, as we have seen in Chapter 2, there was a general sense of confidence among the teachers surveyed with regard to teaching according to the requirements of EL Syllabus 2001. Many perceived few major changes in the new syllabus except for the innovative features of grammar and text types. The grammar courses that the Ministry of Education organised for the teachers could be largely responsible for giving the teachers a sense of preparedness to deal with these innovations.

In addition, confidence was closely linked to teaching experience, as earlier findings demonstrated. Older and more experienced teachers who had been through previous syllabus renewals might have felt that they had the necessary skills to deal with another new syllabus. This tendency to equate experience with ability can also be seen from the perceptions of some HoDs that many young teachers lacked the skills and experience to implement the new syllabus. There was also a concern that some of

these younger teachers themselves lacked the language proficiency needed to teach English.

Managing Implementation

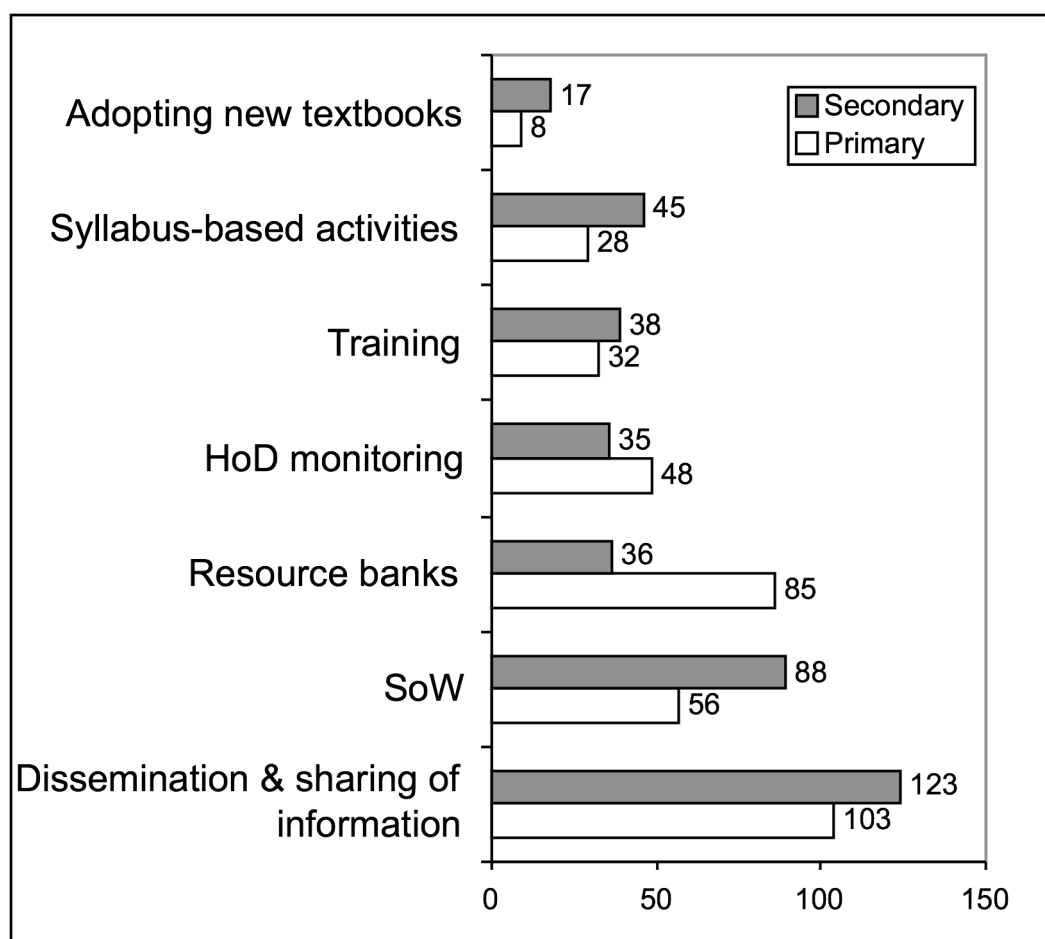
These findings about teachers' problems can be further examined in the light of what EL departments were doing to manage the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001. In the questionnaire, two open-ended questions were asked: "What does your department do to ensure that the requirements of the new syllabus are implemented?" and "What does your department hope to do in the coming year to ensure that the requirements of the new syllabus are implemented?" In the interviews, HoDs were asked the question: "What specific steps have you taken to ensure that the teachers follow the requirements of the new syllabus?"

Questionnaire responses from both primary and secondary school teachers showed that many similar measures were taken to ensure that the requirements of the syllabus were followed. Teachers' responses during the interviews showed a similar pattern. The measures reported have been categorised as follows:

- dissemination and sharing of information
- resource bank
- Scheme of Work (SoW)
- monitoring by HoD
- training
- syllabus-based activities
- adoption of textbooks

Of the above, the first three measures were the most frequently reported ones. (See Figure 4.2.)

Figure 4.2 Steps taken by EL departments for managing syllabus implementation



Dissemination and Sharing of Information

As Figure 4.2 shows, this was the most frequently reported step taken by EL departments to orientate and prepare teachers to teach the new syllabus. These included meetings and professional sharing sessions at level and whole department meetings. Regular meetings held to disseminate information about the new syllabus was a commonly reported measure taken, as one teacher reported:

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Excerpt 4.48

Departmental meetings are held as often as possible to disseminate/discuss important issues regarding the implementation of the new syllabus.

Excerpt 4.49

HOD shares the key points in new syllabus and encourages infusion into SOW.

Excerpt 4.50

Teachers are given a session about the new syllabus by the HOD.

There were also sharing sessions where teachers reported effective methods of teaching carried out in class, especially by those who had graduated recently from the National Institute of Education (NIE). As one interview participant observed:

Excerpt 4.51

When it comes to colleagues, we have a group of young teachers ... who always have creative ideas. So we would share, we share teaching points, definitely share teaching materials. And even when it comes to co-ordinating, tests and things like that, there is a lot of sharing.

From the various responses, it was clear that HoDs played a crucial role in the dissemination of information, as illustrated in the following self-reports:

Excerpt 4.52

Will be taking teachers through the syllabus at the end of the year. Teachers hardly or never refer to syllabus □ they teach from.

Excerpt 4.53

Briefings were conducted on the requirements of the new syllabus.

Excerpt 4.54

Explanation by the HOD, e.g. on the curriculum cycle and the genre approach/process-writing approach, reading strategies etc.

Excerpt 4.55

Departmental meetings are held as often as possible to disseminate/discuss important issues regarding the implementation of the new syllabus.

Scheme of Work (SoW)

Schemes of work lay out the contents or units of work to be covered for a class within a specific time frame. Many teachers identified schemes of work as an important way by which their EL departments ensured that the requirements of the new syllabus were met. Teachers also perceived SoWs as important for planning their lessons. (See Table 4.1.)

From the following written comments, we can further see that SoWs are accepted as legitimate interpretations of the syllabus and contain crucial information on how English should be taught.

Excerpt 4.56

The scheme of work includes the components required in the new syllabus.

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Excerpt 4.57

We have held a mid-year workshop to try to address the new requirements of the syllabus. We have worked out a new SOW.

Excerpt 4.58

The scheme of work is planned to incorporate the various genres and to reflect each genre covered.

Excerpt 4.59

Strict adherence to the scheme of work that is planned with the new syllabus in mind.

Excerpt 4.60

SOW planned by experienced teachers/SH/LH/HOD to ensure that every teacher understands the syllabus.

Excerpt 4.61

SOWs which incorporate necessary learning outcomes.

Excerpt 4.62

Schemes of work with certain “non-negotiable” sections and other sections for teachers to be creative/innovative in their teaching.

Excerpt 4.63

SOWs designed to cover areas of language use and giving focus to text types and development of presentation skills.

Table 4.1 Considerations when planning lessons

		not important	somewhat important	important	very important	extremely important	Mean	SD	N
		<i>(in percentages)</i>							
Syllabus Specifications	Pri	0.2	4.5	34.7	43.8	16.8	3.72	0.8	1753
	Sec	0.4	8.2	35.3	39.2	16.8	3.6	0.87	914
Scheme of Work	Pri	1	11	45.5	34.1	8.4	3.38	0.83	1756
	Sec	3.6	27.5	46.7	17.5	4.6	2.9	0.88	912
Textbooks	Pri	1.9	18.2	50.1	24.8	5	3.13	0.83	1757
	Sec	12.1	38.4	37.6	9.9	2.1	2.5	0.9	910
Supplementary materials	Pri	1.3	11	40.9	34.2	12.6	3.46	0.89	1757
	Sec	2.1	12.3	40.9	34	10.7	3.4	0.91	912

Table 4.1 also shows that teachers considered syllabus specifications to be important considerations to bear in mind when they planned their lessons. It is interesting to note, however, that the overall reported frequency of use of syllabus documents by MOE was in fact quite low. In the previous syllabus cycle, SoWs were important support for the implementation of the 1991 syllabus. For EL Syllabus 2001, various guides to the syllabus were produced to assist EL departments and individual teachers. These guides advocated some form of planning based on themes, topics, text types and areas of language stipulated in the new syllabus. Interestingly, only one teacher mentioned syllabus guides.

Table 4.2 shows that more than half of all teachers surveyed reported referring to these documents infrequently. One possible reason for this apparent discrepancy in the teachers' reports is that teachers who were not level coordinators or HoDs might not have

had access to the documents and so had to rely on other sources of information about syllabus specifications. It must be pointed out, however, that at the time of the survey, some of the teachers were still teaching the last cohorts using the previous syllabus. Nevertheless, based on earlier observations about the legitimacy of SoWs, it seems reasonable to conclude that many teachers, especially those in the primary schools, depended on SoWs rather than syllabus documents for specifying what they should teach.

Secondary school teachers, on the other hand, were less influenced by SoWs. In the last chapter, we saw that one of the most important considerations for secondary teachers was the GCE ‘O’- and ‘N’-level examinations. Nevertheless, based on the fairly high frequency of mentions (see Table 4.1), SoWs were generally perceived as an important way of ensuring that syllabus requirements were understood. In practice, however, teachers driven by examinations could have ‘abandoned’ SoWs in favour of examination requirements, as other parts of our findings showed.

Table 4.2 Teachers’ use of syllabus documents

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	SD	N
		<i>(in percentages)</i>							
EL Syllabus 2001	Pri	6.1	12.5	32.6	34.4	14.4	3.38	1.07	1521
	Sec	7	13.3	36.7	29.3	13.7	3.29	1.08	840
Guides to EL Syllabus 2001	Pri	11.7	17.1	36.7	27.1	7.4	3.01	1.1	1503
	Sec	14.6	17.8	34.3	24.2	9	2.95	1.17	830

Resource Banks

Another measure taken to help teachers teach according to the new syllabus is the provision of resources through the school or by pooling together what have been used.

This practice is, however, more popular among primary school teachers who reported twice as many instances of sharing teaching materials and other resources:

Excerpt 4.64

A pool of resource books that you could refer to.

Excerpt 4.65

Sourced for enrichment worksheets.

Excerpt 4.66

Level representative to review the syllabus and look for appropriate supporting material/resources/worksheets to supplement the syllabus.

Excerpt 4.67

Sufficient Big Books are purchased to allow classes to enjoy the stories.

Excerpt 4.68

Purchase more support materials for teaching.

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Perhaps motivated by the importance of text types in the syllabus and examinations, many secondary school teachers mentioned resources that were related to them:

Excerpt 4.69

The department is moving towards acquiring materials and texts that deal more and more with text-types.

Excerpt 4.70

Sourcing new materials as examples of text types.

Excerpt 4.71

Attempts to collate materials for each text type.

Other Strategies

In addition to the three main measures discussed above, other measures were also reported as ways in which EL departments ensured that teachers taught according to the requirements of the syllabus. One such measure was monitoring by HoDs. Besides disseminating information to the department about the syllabus and organising sharing sessions, HoDs also conducted lesson observations, obtained feedback from teachers, checked staff record books and pupils' work (exercise books and files), and tests and assignments to ensure that these met the new requirements. They also ensured that their teachers, particularly level coordinators, received training to prepare them for the task. Besides in-service courses and seminars, in-house workshops were also conducted by some departments.

Departments also planned learning and assessment activities that directly reflected the innovations of the new syllabus:

Excerpt 4.72

Compositions are now based on text types.

Excerpt 4.73

Teachers were made to revamp worksheets.

Excerpt 4.74

New table of specifications for assessment were/are drawn up.

Excerpt 4.75

Incorporating components of new syllabus into CAs/SAs & supplementary/enrichment worksheets.

Excerpt 4.76

Revamp worksheets to correlate with new syllabus.

Excerpt 4.77

Implement text-based exams instead of just using narrative text.

Excerpt 4.78

Ensure assessments meet the requirements of the assessment criteria e.g. a sample exam paper was created for reference.

Excerpt 4.79

Set tests and examinations according to the new syllabus.

A small number of teachers in the questionnaire also reported adopting new textbooks as another way of ensuring that the syllabus' requirements were met. In the light of the findings from other parts of this study, we can observe a general dependency on textbooks by many teachers.¹² CPDD had provided all EL departments with selection guidelines through the Syllabus Guides (p. A-32). In general, textbooks that provided a clear structure for conducting lessons were preferred, as a HoD remarked during the interview:

Excerpt 4.80

I try to pick textbooks that will guide them very much. I mean they provide the necessary structure, the guidance so that the teachers will be able to go to class and carry out a lesson that they can follow fairly closely, the suggested activities.

A point worth noting is that while many teachers used textbooks, they were not always convinced that it was an effective way of ensuring that the requirements of the new syllabus would be met. During the interviews, only two out of the nine secondary school teachers mentioned that textbooks were useful in helping in the implementation of the new syllabus. As for the primary school interviewees, only one mentioned it. The majority of the interviewees mentioned explicitly the inadequacies of the textbooks they were using. Some of these have already been reported in the early part of this chapter.

In the questionnaire responses by 300 teachers, the textbooks that were introduced had ‘mixed reviews’. (See Table 4.3.)

Table 4.3 Percentage of ratings for textbooks in general

	N	Percentage
<i>Primary</i>		
Unsatisfactory	9	6%
Satisfactory	59	39%
Good	78	52%
Excellent	4	3%
Total	150	100%
<i>Secondary</i>		
Unsatisfactory	18	12%
Satisfactory	81	54%
Good	49	33%
Excellent	2	1%
Total	150	100%

Many teachers probably used textbooks extensively to help with the day-to-day teaching of English lessons due to time pressure and a lack of other readily available resources. In some departments, additional worksheets were prepared in advance to supplement the sets of textbooks selected, as the written comment below illustrates:

Excerpt 4.81

Level teachers evaluate the textbooks and decide on one. Level teachers sat down and go through the syllabus and textbooks and SOW and make the necessary adjustments to cater to their cohort of pupils. Supplementary worksheets were designed to complement the workbook.

In addition to asking teachers what their departments did, the study also asked about plans for the following year. The reports given for this question were fewer than those about measures that were in place. It could be that some teachers were not aware of what was going to be done and so did not write anything. Some teachers, mainly the new and younger ones, stated explicitly that they were not aware of any plans. On the other hand, others, mainly HoDs and level coordinators reported several measures for their departments. These were broadly similar to those currently being adopted. (See Figure 4.2.)

There were plans to “update teachers on latest developments as and when new information is received” as well as “hold discussion groups/focus meetings to discuss the problems faced and share strategies learnt.” Some HoDs still felt that it was important to explain the requirements of the new syllabus to their teachers:

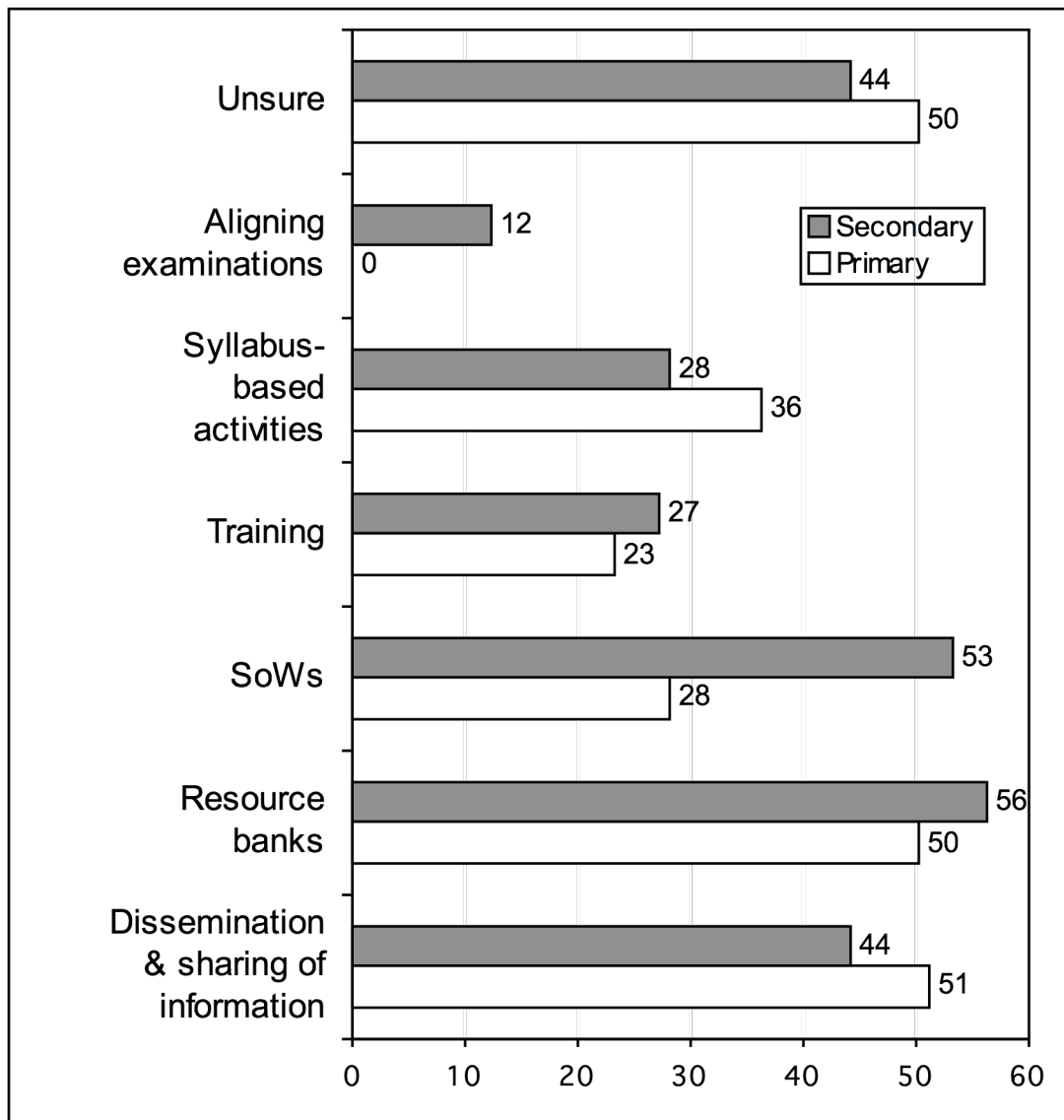
Excerpt 4.82

Will be taking teachers through the syllabus at the end of the year. Teachers hardly or never refer to syllabus □ they teach from.

In addition, training was also an important part of the plan, particularly to ensure that all teachers attended the compulsory grammar course. There were also many reports about updating the SoWs to ensure that “activities and projects are in line with the requirements of the new syllabus.” There were also more mentions of specific syllabus-based activities to be carried out in class. The most important strategy, however, was building up the resource

bank with samples of written text types, samples of test papers and worksheets. Once again, secondary school teachers' concern about public examinations could be seen from the reports. A small number of them highlighted the plan to ensure that "exam/CA papers follow the requirements of the new syllabus." No primary school teachers in the sample we analysed mentioned examinations explicitly.

Figure 4.3 EL department plans

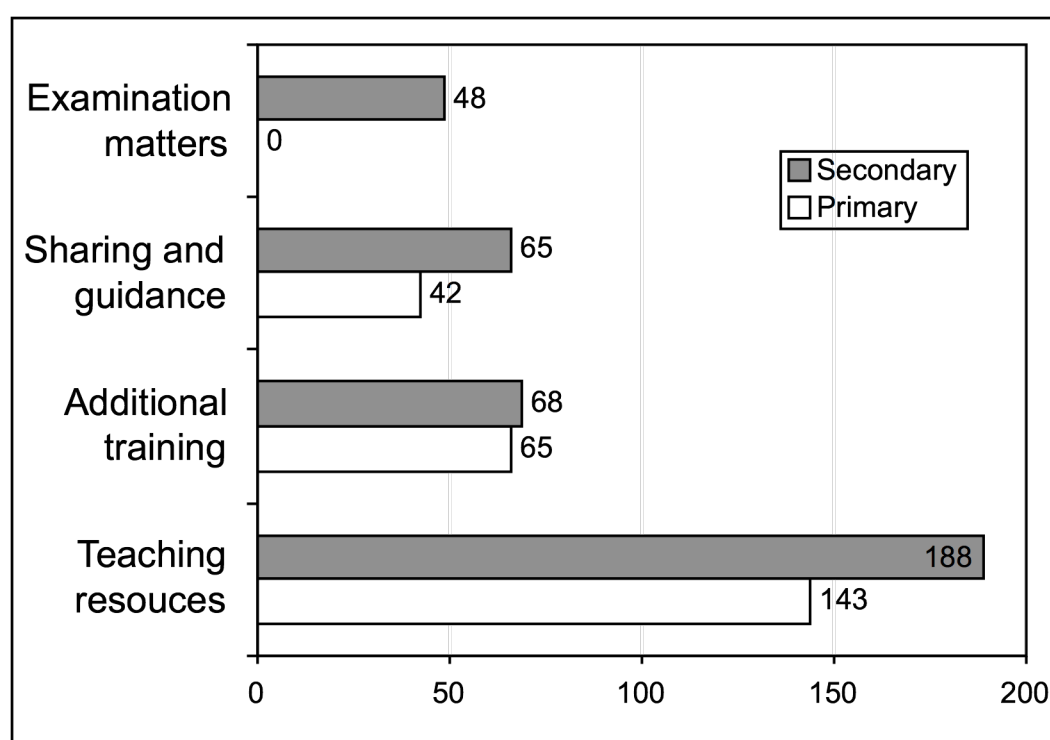


Supporting Teachers

Reports from teachers have highlighted various strategies used mainly at the departmental level for managing the implementation of the new syllabus. This section further compares these strategies with those that teachers themselves would like to see in place to support them in their teaching of the new syllabus.

The support that was most urgently needed by teachers was the provision of resources that were ready to use, teacher-friendly and comprehensive. This was followed by requests for training and in-house sharing of teaching strategies. (See Figure 4.4.)

Figure 4.4 How teachers would like to be supported professionally



Teaching Resources

Teachers asked for materials that covered all aspects of the curriculum and more resources to supplement their textbooks:

Excerpt 4.83

Accompanying interesting and interactive CD-ROMs covering the areas of language use/skills e.g. grammar, vocabulary, listening, writing.

Excerpt 4.84

More materials and lesson plans.

Excerpt 4.85

All the required resources being provided.

Excerpt 4.86

I feel that teachers should be supported with sufficient materials to cover all aspects of the learning outcome, e.g. CDs on listening, charts to complement the grammar/vocabulary items taught, suitable interesting worksheets to complement, picture cards & small books to complement the big SBA books.

In particular, some teachers asked for stringent reviews of textbooks:

Excerpt 4.87

Supported professionally in the area of better organised and written textbooks and audio materials. Feedback to publishers has not been effective. MOE should review the new textbooks before releasing them in the market. Teachers' guides to the new textbooks seem to be hurriedly written and prepared sloppily.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

Referring to a particular title, a teacher observed:

Excerpt 4.88

Not tailored according to new syllabus. So have to prepare relevant worksheets, etc.

In addition, there were requests, particularly among secondary school teachers, for samples and explanations of text types:

Excerpt 4.89

Online modules for different text types which can be accessed by teachers who want quick information within the constraints of time.

Excerpt 4.90

Resources as 'models' or examples of the 6 text-types, especially explanations, pegged at the different levels.

In light of the problems teachers reported about time constraints and the inadequacy of their textbooks, it is not difficult to understand why many teachers have specifically asked for ready-to-go materials:

Excerpt 4.91

Have materials prepared for us because we are too busy with marking etc, to spare the time to come up with very good lessons, materials, etc.

Excerpt 4.92

On hand resources rather than giving website links or suggested readings that make it convenient for quick planning.

Excerpt 4.93

Resources that are photocopiable.

Excerpt 4.94

Supplementary materials – photocopiable worksheets please.

Excerpt 4.95

Teaching tasks and activities that can be easily adapted by the teacher for use with different types/groups of learners.

A salient pattern that emerged from the analysis of teachers' written comments about resources was the frequent occurrence of the word "worksheets", particularly in the responses of primary school teachers. There were 106 such occurrences in their responses compared to only 21 occurrences for their secondary school counterparts. This provides further evidence of the 'worksheet culture' that other authors have observed among Singapore primary school teachers.

In addition to materials, teachers also asked for just-in-time help from resource personnel:

Excerpt 4.96

Someone we could call regarding any problems with the teaching of the English language.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

Excerpt 4.97

On-line helpdesk.

Other Measures

Resources were no doubt the most important type of support that teachers requested. Although three other types of support were mentioned, these were, in general, less urgent and important. One of these types of support was additional training:

Excerpt 4.98

Perhaps workshops on strategies of teaching English could be arranged for teachers apart from the mandatory grammar course.

Excerpt 4.99

3-hour workshop to be conducted now and then, focusing on different areas in English (for each separate workshop) e.g. grammar, vocabulary, cloze, comprehension, listening, phonics, reading.

Excerpt 4.100

More sharing sessions with specialists from MOE/NIE.

There were also requests for training to help low-ability learners:

Excerpt 4.101

More relevant courses in helping weak pupils build up their language (step by step).

While some teachers asked for formal systematic training for dealing with the new syllabus, there was also some resistance towards additional training:

Excerpt 4.102

Just supply us user friendly materials. Don't eat up our afternoons, weekends etc.

The third type of support teachers requested was to have professional meetings with colleagues from other schools where they could share with one another materials and strategies used:

Excerpt 4.103

Sharing of lessons and materials by teachers from other schools.

Excerpt 4.104

Sharing of good practices/strategies by successful schools.

Excerpt 4.105

Training and sharing sessions among cluster schools.

Finally, teachers also asked for support regarding examination matters. The survey was administered just before information about the new examination format was available. The lack of information was clearly a concern for many secondary school teachers.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Syllabus Implementation

Excerpt 4.106

Let us know the examination format for 'O' level (new syllabus)– so that we can train those pupils who are under the new syllabus.

Excerpt 4.107

We need more directions, clear guidelines. For example, what is the 'O' level 2004 paper going to be like? How far is the deviation from the old syllabus?

Excerpt 4.108

The exam format of the 'O' level exam should be made known by now. Training on the marking of exam paper if it is going to be different from the present system.

Excerpt 4.109

We want samples of the exam paper and how the pupils will be assessed and also the band descriptors. Mode of assessment – we are concerned about this.

Excerpt 4.110

The MOE must provide teachers with a better picture of the final outcome, for example, a sample of the Mid-year and End-of-year examination papers for sec 1 Express, Normal (A) and Normal (T) to sec 5, showing the types of questions and their weightage.

It is interesting to note that one of the written comments about the new syllabus above had actually referred to examinations as 'the final outcome'. This reinforces some of the observations in the other chapters about the pre-eminence of examinations in the way teachers planned and conducted their lessons. Teachers were clearly concerned that they might not have sufficient time to 'train' their pupils to answer examination questions.

The issue of examination was not mentioned by any of the respondents from primary schools. Perhaps the need to prepare pupils using the new syllabus for PSLE was less pressing compared with the secondary school pupils affected by the new syllabus. Nonetheless, this pattern in the teachers' responses further underscored secondary school teachers' concern about public examinations. The teachers' perceptions and requests for support have also suggested the influence examinations had on their interpretation of the new syllabus requirements.

Conclusion

Teachers in Singapore are both receivers and implementers of change. Tasked with teaching EL according to the requirements of the new syllabus, teachers have to modify their teaching strategies in order to change their pupils' way of learning. At the same time they are also in the process of adding on new knowledge and skills, and changing as professionals. All this takes place within the context of daily challenges that the teachers reported. For syllabus implementation to be successful, the issues of time and training, therefore, have to be addressed. In their overwhelming request for teaching materials and aids, teachers reiterated the constraints of time that they reported earlier. They felt additional workload was being piled on to them and at the same time did not get as much support from textbooks as they had hoped for.

Based on findings discussed in this chapter and the previous ones, we can see that teachers' concern for examinations appeared to be the biggest driving force in their teaching. Many were more concerned about what the new examination format would be rather than what the teaching syllabus spelled out. In some cases,

teachers who had already been introduced to the new syllabus could not clearly articulate what its aims and broad objectives were. In their concern for getting samples of types of written text, teachers can be seen to be reinforcing the continual privileging of reading, writing and grammar in the Singapore classrooms. This narrow interpretation of the EL Syllabus 2001, however, is detracting from the original aims of the syllabus which intended to provide a comprehensive basis for teaching language use in a variety of contexts and modality (written and spoken language).

Notes

¹ Havelock, 1971.

² Kennedy, Doyle & Goh, 1999.

³ Young & Lee, 1987.

⁴ Goh, 1999; Carless, 1999.

⁵ Nicholls, 1983; Fullan, 2001.

⁶ Chin & Benne, 1976.

⁷ Ajzen, 1988.

⁸ White, 1991.

⁹ Kennedy, 1999.

¹⁰ Lim, 2002.

¹¹ Silver & Steele, 2005.

5

Summary and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

In any endeavour of top-down nationwide syllabus innovation, teachers play important dual roles as receivers and agents of change. As receivers, they are required to use a syllabus in which they have offered minimal or no input. As change agents, they must deliver the prescribed changes in teaching and learning in their classrooms. To help bring about successful implementation of the syllabus, not only must they change their pupils' ways of learning and what they have to learn, teachers also have to transform professionally by adding on new knowledge and skills in order to bring about the desired changes in their pupils. In the process, they experience challenges that could deter them from carrying out their tasks. As educational changes always take place within specific social and learning contexts, the existing conditions within those contexts can heavily influence teachers' understanding of that change.

It was on these beliefs and understanding about curriculum innovation that the present study was based. The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001 through an examination of several related issues. These issues

were teachers' knowledge about EL teaching and their interpretations of the EL syllabus, their beliefs about their students, their practices in the classroom, and strategies for managing syllabus change and implementation at the school level.

In order to investigate these issues, specific aspects of teacher cognition and experience were examined, including selected aspects of pedagogical content knowledge, application of this knowledge, understanding of syllabus requirements and key innovations, priorities when planning and conducting lessons, perceptions about learners' priorities, motivation, problems and needs, influence of learning environments on teaching, use of textbooks, problems and constraints, and departmental support. More specifically, it answered the four questions identified in Chapter 1.

Data was gathered from an extensive questionnaire survey of more than 2,600 EL teachers from 150 schools. There are currently a little over 300 schools in Singapore. Attempts were also made at matching the characteristics of the sample to the population in order to achieve a high degree of representativeness. This included sampling of schools according to the current quota of government, government-aided and independent schools, as well as comparing the quota of respondents according to gender and age groups in the population. The results of these sampling decisions have been reported in Chapter 1. Based on a close matching of these variables, we believe the results of this study can be generalised.

As a further step to achieving the aims of the study, semi-structured interviews were also conducted and data from 18 of these interviews were analysed. Responses from these in-depth interviews were further collated in a collection of 'stories' to enable

readers of this research to listen to the teachers' voices directly (Some samples are presented in Appendix 1.) These stories, set against the background of each teacher's individual beliefs and experiences, can provide readers with further insights into the complex relationships between knowledge, beliefs and decision-making processes in everyday practice. This will provide an added personal perspective to an understanding of the process of implementing a new language syllabus in Singapore.

On the whole, the study found that teachers' understanding of EL Syllabus 2001 has been concerned mainly with text types and grammar as its main features. These features, however, were only one aspect of the syllabus emphases. Such a narrow interpretation of the syllabus may have been a result of the high profile mandatory 'Singapore-Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English Grammar' course for about 9,000 teachers. This course has been presented in the media and public forum as the preparation that teachers needed for teaching the new syllabus.

CPDD often stressed that grammar was not a new component of Singapore's English syllabus and that "the teaching of grammar was an integral part of the 1991 syllabus".¹ Nevertheless, the foregrounding of the place of grammar and the absence of a similar type and scale of in-service training previously have most likely created that perception among teachers.

The distinct pattern of unevenness in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge with regard to teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar is likely a result of several interrelated factors, such as the heavy emphasis on reading and writing in the national examinations, the schools' demands for in-service training to help teachers teach these skills better, the

amount of time allocated to these skills during pre-service training and the uneven coverage of various skills in units of work in textbooks. These trends in the knowledge and practice of various stakeholders in language education in Singapore demonstrate the privileging of the written language, often at the expense of the spoken language.

Findings on teachers' reported practices further illustrate this. While the privileging of reading and writing may not always resonate with some teachers' own beliefs about language learning and use, many felt they had to spend more time on teaching these skills to prepare pupils for examinations. The comparatively lower level of pedagogical content knowledge among some teachers for teaching speaking and listening would have also been another setback.

Unlike many other reported cases of centrally diffused syllabus innovations, there were few open criticisms among Singapore teachers of EL Syllabus 2001. This, however, should not be taken to suggest that the implementation of the syllabus has been a smooth one. While acknowledging requirements of the syllabus, teachers reported several problems that they thought were hindrances to achieving what the syllabus had set out to do. More specifically, there were serious reservations among some teachers that their weak pupils could ever attain the learning outcomes delineated for each two-year period.

The following sections present a summary of key findings according to the main areas of focus of the study.

Knowledge and Confidence

The findings below concern teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their understanding of the principles and main features of EL Syllabus 2001.

- a. Teachers on the whole identified grammar and text types as the innovative features in EL Syllabus 2001. The teaching of grammar was particularly high in teachers' consciousness. There was little mention of two other key features of the syllabus, which are the way language learning and teaching is organised around three major areas of language use and the specification of learning outcomes for five levels of education (Primary 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6, and Secondary 1-2 and 3-4).
- b. There was little acknowledgement of the fact that the new syllabus was in fact a continuation of the 1991 syllabus which emphasised the teaching of all four language skills, grammar and vocabulary. There was little mention of the six principles of language learning and teaching that underpin the EL programme in schools.
- c. There was uneven knowledge about the teaching of the four language skills. Teachers reported high levels of knowledge and application of concepts related to teaching reading, writing and grammar. In contrast, they were less familiar with teaching listening and speaking. Interestingly, these patterns of unevenness in favour of the written language mirrored teachers' priorities for teaching and learning as well

as the pattern of weighting given to different language and literacy skills in national examinations.ⁱ

- d. Secondary school teachers reported slightly higher level of knowledge and application of pedagogical content knowledge than primary school teachers. Teachers who reported incorporating this knowledge into their teaching also demonstrated a higher level of confidence to implement the syllabus.
- e. Confidence to teach according to the new syllabus did not correlate positively with academic qualifications. Among primary school teachers, there was a weak negative correlation, indicating that primary school teachers with a degree reported less confidence, compared with non-graduate teachers who showed a slightly higher level of confidence. Among secondary school teachers, there was no significant correlation in either direction.
- f. Qualitative data further showed that although some teachers could not accurately articulate the key principles and main features of the syllabus, they still felt confident of implementing it.

ⁱ The new examination syllabuses introduced in 2004 increased the weighting for spoken language, but the overall emphasis is still clearly on reading and writing.

Beliefs and Practices

Teachers' beliefs about their learners and learning environments are summarised below. The findings also include teachers' reported practices regarding allocation of time for teaching, and the use and evaluation of textbooks.

- a. Majority of the teachers believed that their pupils needed to learn English for one or both of these two reasons: communication and passing examinations. Their overriding concern, however, was getting their pupils through examinations. This was particularly the case with secondary school teachers who saw examinations as their pupils' main learning need.
- b. When asked about their teaching priorities, teachers considered reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary as "extremely important" and allocated more class time to teaching these. Speaking and listening were considered "important" but given much less instruction time. The backwash effect of examinations can be observed from the attention being paid to the teaching of literacy skills, often at the expense of oracy development among pupils. (See also point c. in the previous section.)
- c. Teachers perceived the importance of learning environments differently. Primary school teachers in particular felt that immediate learning environments (e.g. learning activities, lesson delivery, teachers, classrooms) were important motivating factors for their pupils to learn English. This was

identified by some secondary school teachers but it was not what most teachers felt motivated their pupils.

- d. Secondary school teachers' main perception was that pupils were first and foremost motivated by the need to pass GCE 'O'- and 'N'-level examinations. Examinations were also seen by some primary school teachers as an important motivating factor for their pupils.
- e. Teachers cited poor language and literacy foundation from home, preschool and primary school as a key factor for unsatisfactory learning in schools. Anxiety and fear of negative evaluation by teachers and peers were also cited as problems.
- f. Informal learning environments were another negative factor identified by teachers. They identified home, media and peer interaction as uncondusive to the learning of Standard English by some pupils.
- g. Teachers reported that their priorities in planning and conducting lessons were influenced by three key factors in this order: PSLE, GCE 'O'- and 'N'-level examinations, syllabus requirements and pupils' profiles.
- h. An examination of teachers' priorities, pedagogical content knowledge, beliefs about learners' needs and motivation strongly indicates that lessons in upper secondary schools were geared towards helping pupils pass examinations

through a focus on reading comprehension and composition writing practice, familiarisation with examination formats and constant practice of these formats.

- i. Lessons in lower primary schools were reported to engage young learners in different activities that included some focus on children's speech. There were indications that the use of worksheets was a crucial part of these activities.
- j. Textbooks were a major interface between syllabus requirements and classroom implementation. They were the most important resource for many teachers even though some were doubtful about the effectiveness of the textbooks used in their schools. Less than half the teachers said they referred to MOE syllabus documents (syllabus and guides) regularly.
- k. Teachers did not report substantial modification to their teaching styles and approaches in order to deliver the requirements of the new syllabus. Changes were primarily concerned with the content of English lessons, hence, there was a strong focus on grammar and text type in schemes of work and lesson plans.
- l. In spite of the focus on text types, there was little reference to the use and learning of the English language across the curriculum. This does not say conclusively that English teachers did not consider the potential of other subjects for helping their pupils learn new syllabus features, such as the

grammar and structure of various text types. It does, however, suggest that the benefit of exploiting other subject areas directly for language learning might not have been an important consideration.

Challenges and Support

Teachers reported various ways in which the implementation of the syllabus was managed in their respective departments. They also identified areas in which they would like to be supported.

- a. The most common problem teachers reported was insufficient effective teaching materials/resources. Although textbooks had been published to assist teachers in delivering the requirements of the new syllabus, many teachers were not entirely happy with their quality.ⁱⁱ Only one-third of secondary school teachers found their textbooks to be good. More primary school teachers, on the other hand, expressed satisfaction with their textbooks.
- b. Some of the criticisms of the textbooks included unsuitable activities, unchallenging comprehension questions, poor layout, grammar mistakes, the contents did not support text type teaching, did not reflect the requirements of the syllabus, poor quality workbooks, ‘uninspiring’ passages, and too many things to cover in each chapter.

ⁱⁱ Only responses that referred specifically to textbooks introduced to deliver the new syllabus were considered. Specific titles were mentioned by teachers but have been omitted from this reported.

- c. Another challenge some teachers faced was their pupils' low language proficiency. In particular, some teachers cited writing as a problem for lower primary school pupils. While acknowledging the syllabus to be a good one, these teachers found that their weaker pupils could not realistically achieve the learning outcomes specified for the end of each two-year period.
- d. Teachers reported not getting enough time for achieving the aims of the syllabus. The lack of time was mentioned by most teachers. Based on their experience with the previous syllabus, they reported having to devote more time to focus on what was important for national examinations. Other aims, such as the development of good oral skills, had to be sacrificed along the way.
- e. On a personal level, some teachers felt they needed time to assimilate new theoretical and pedagogical orientations in the syllabus and to develop and refine the relevant teaching skills. They would like to see more time being given for innovations (e.g. teaching grammar at the text level) to take root before new ones are introduced.
- f. Various examination issues were also a concern for many teachers. These included the dilemma that teachers experienced when teaching according to the examination syllabus, which tended to be narrow in focus and might not resonate with their own perceptions of their pupils' communicative needs.

- g. EL departments shared many similarities in the way they managed the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001. The three most commonly reported measures were dissemination/sharing of information, setting up resource banks and producing schemes of work. Other measures included monitoring by HoDs, providing training to teachers, carrying out syllabus-based activities in and outside class, and using new textbooks.
- h. Teachers would like to be supported in several ways. The most common request was for reliable ready-to-use teaching materials and resources to be available to supplement their textbooks. Teachers also asked for just-in-time help from resource personnel to answer questions related to language and the teaching of English. While some teachers further asked for training and sharing among colleagues, the most important type of help was undoubtedly in terms of materials and resources. There was also some indication of unhappiness with centralised training conducted after school hours.

Recommendations

The present study has revealed a number of issues related to the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001. The key issues and their implications are summarised below. These are followed by specific recommendations for policy and practice.

Managing Balanced Syllabus Delivery

EL Syllabus 2001 clearly specified the skills and strategies to be attained in the form of learning outcomes for listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers' preoccupation with grammar and text types, however, appeared to have detracted from an accurate and comprehensive interpretation of EL Syllabus 2001 in the spirit it was intended. The lack of mention of learning outcomes and in some cases the inaccurate understanding displayed further reinforced this observation.

Furthermore, there was a distinct pattern of unevenness in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge about the various language skills. In their self-ratings, teachers reported a much lower level of knowledge for teaching listening and speaking. They also reported placing little emphasis on helping pupils develop these two skills. In contrast, they had fairly high levels of knowledge about the teaching of reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary and teachers reported spending more class time on these areas.

This is likely to have been a result of several interrelated factors that have been present for some time now, namely, heavy emphases on reading and writing in all national examinations, schools' demands for in-service training in teaching reading and

writing, the greater amount of time allocated to teaching literacy skills during pre-service training and the uneven coverage of skills in units of work in textbooks.

While this privileging of reading and writing at the expense of oracy development did not resonate with many teachers' own beliefs about language learning and use, many felt they had to spend more time on the written language in order to prepare pupils for high-staked national examinations.

Both the 1991 and 2001 EL Syllabuses emphasise both the written and the spoken language, and have respectively identified terminal objectives and learning outcomes for all language skills. The 2001 syllabus, with its explicit focus on areas of language use, is intended to further strengthen this stance on a balanced development of both oracy and literacy skills.

That teachers reported confidence to implement the syllabus even when they did not report a high level of knowledge for teaching speaking and listening reinforces two key observations in this study:

- i. Teachers' interpretation of EL Syllabus 2001 tended to be a narrow one, focusing mainly on reading, writing and grammar.
- ii. Teachers' priorities and practices have been (and will most likely continue to be) heavily influenced by examination syllabuses.

Good oracy skills can enhance pupils' learning of other subjects and personal effectiveness. Many of the desired outcomes

of education identified by the Ministry of Education can only be achieved through effective development of oracy skills for individual learning and collaborative inquiry. The importance of oracy in promoting language and literacy development is well documented. The skills of speaking and listening, nevertheless, have been continually overlooked and undervalued in the Singapore learning environment.

Establish Policy on Oracy

A policy on oracy is therefore needed to lay the groundwork for a structure that provides incentives, training and support to teachers to teach better oracy skills among school pupils. Based on the findings of the present study, the following are particularly important considerations for such a policy:

- i. Any attention to speaking should go beyond a focus on language form (pronunciation and grammar), as reflected in the ‘Speak Good English’ movement. The emphasis must include the development of skills for using speech to create, explore and discuss ideas across pupils of all ages. In order to engage actively with the world around them, our pupils need good speaking and listening skills. These can be taught from an early age.
- ii. Increase the percentage weighting for speaking and listening in national examinations. The current 20% may still not be incentive enough for teachers to spend more time on teaching these two language skills.

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- iii. Make listening examinations compulsory for all pupils. Those from the better streams should be assessed on higher order listening skills, such as critical listening, empathetic listening and abilities to draw inferences.
- iv. Review the current examination syllabuses and formats for assessing speaking and listening. The listening examination for Normal (Technical) pupils, for example, focuses too much on listening for details, not a skill most commonly used in real life interactions.
- v. Ensure that more pre-and in-service teacher training time is given to the teaching of speaking and listening. Given the history of applied linguistics and language education, these two skills have, until recently, received less attention in teacher training.
- vi. Training and awareness building are also needed to help teachers move away from highly structured teacher-centred classroom interactions to allow pupils more opportunities and freedom to engage in collaborative talk in all subjects.

Managing Perceptions for Syllabus Implementation

The Ministry of Education reviews the EL syllabus at regular periods to ensure that Singapore has a vibrant language education programme that incorporates good pedagogical practices and relevant research findings. Although the product of a top-down model of change, the introduction of EL Syllabus 2001 did not meet any overt resistance, unlike many cases of change outside

Singapore. It was nevertheless perceived by teachers as further demands on their time and additional workload.

More importantly, to encourage teachers to implement change, there must be perceptible improvements to their working lives.² This observation is relevant to our discussion given some of the results of the present study.

Review Existing Criteria for Approving Textbooks

Relevant and effective materials are crucial to successful delivery of syllabus contents. Many teachers, however, felt that the MOE-approved textbooks were inadequate and as a result they had to regularly prepare learning activities and material. The need to do this had created a great deal of pressure for many teachers who were juggling the demands of the English syllabus and other areas of their work.

Most schools adopt and use textbooks for EL programmes, it is important that only high quality textbooks are available in the market. Although teachers would still need to adapt materials to meet the needs of individual classes and pupils, a good and reliable textbook can be a great asset and time-saver. By improving the quality of materials readily available, teachers' request for more teaching materials can be indirectly addressed.

Another important reason for ensuring the quality of textbooks is the key role they have in helping teachers assimilate syllabus contents. Many teachers in our study did not have the habit of referring to syllabus documents. Instead, they relied heavily on textbooks for pedagogical guidance and direction. In view of this, it is important that all textbooks meet stringent criteria. They should demonstrate that the aims and principles of

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the syllabus have been accurately interpreted and that the main features of the syllabus have been effectively translated into practical activities for learning.

Present Revised Syllabuses as Updated Editions

Although CPDD took great pains in emphasizing that EL Syllabus 2001 was a continuation of EL Syllabus 1991, and is in that sense a 'revised syllabus',ⁱⁱⁱ teachers' perceptions appeared to be different. This perception could have been a result of media reports, physical changes to the printed syllabus document and the attention given to the 'Singapore-Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English Grammar' course.

Many teachers felt that time should be given for changes to take root before 'new' syllabuses are introduced. The notion of continuity appeared to have been lost on the teachers. Therefore, if there are no fundamental changes to the principles of language teaching and learning in the next syllabus (probably for 2010), the existing syllabus could be updated as a new edition instead.

Presenting the next syllabus as something that practising teachers are partially familiar with can minimise stress associated with perceived workload increase that inevitably comes with 'new' syllabuses. It would also allow teachers time to deepen knowledge and refine skills that they have acquired for the 2001 syllabus. Teachers too can benefit greatly from the principle of spiral progression in learning that is applied in the context of their continual professional development.

ⁱⁱⁱ The phrase 'revised syllabus' was used by CPDD officers in the email interview.

Managing the Dissemination of Change and Training

The innovation process of EL Syllabus 2001 resembled the conventional Research, Development and Diffusion/Dissemination (RD & D) model.³ According to this centre-to-periphery model of change and innovation, a central agent or committee will conduct in-depth research, planning and development. Results and products are then disseminated to the users. There is a rational sequence of activities involving various groups of stakeholders at each stage.

In the case of EL Syllabus 2001, the initial research and development was undertaken by CPDD and subsequently by textbook writers. As in most top-down approaches to change, teachers were passive receivers who had to deliver the changes in their classrooms.⁴ For change to be effectively delivered, teachers need to understand and accept the rationale for the change, be equipped with new knowledge and teaching skills, and feel that they have a stake in it.

Provide School-based Dissemination and Training

The Thinking School and Learning Nation (TSLN) and School Excellence Model (SEM) initiatives have allowed schools greater autonomy in directing and managing learning, and consequently principals and teachers now have greater ownership as well as responsibilities in implementing English language curriculum. In line with this, MOE could consider school-based dissemination and training of teachers for future syllabus implementation. Not only will this reduce the effects of dilution of information associated with the cascade approach of disseminating change, it can also increase ownership, uptake and collegiality, as some

studies have shown. Current technology and rich school resources can be harnessed for this purpose.

As a follow-up to dissemination and training at the early stages of implementation, schools could conduct further training. The following areas have been identified based on the findings of the study:

- i. Adapting lessons and materials for low proficiency learners.
- ii. Principles for teaching of English across the curriculum.
- iii. Team-teaching strategies for English and non-English subject teachers. (See section below.)

Managing the Use and Teaching of English across the School Curriculum^{iv}

Schools offer a wide range of subjects where the teaching of writing for the various text types recommended in the EL Syllabus 2001 can be exploited to the fullest. For example, Literature is one area where the teaching of factual writing such as explanations and expositions can be made more meaningful. It has been argued that the “Literature-in-English classroom is a most conducive environment for the teaching of such genres, as student essays generally involve writing that encompasses interpretation and argumentation”.⁵

^{iv} This recommendation does not stem directly from the conclusions of the study. Nevertheless, we feel that it is implied and should therefore be highlighted. (See also section titled *Managing the Dissemination of Change and Training*.)

History is another school subject where students encounter factual recounts regularly. Geography textbooks contain a large quantity of information reports and explanations. Science teachers employ the use of procedures and instructions in science laboratories. During Art and Physical Education lessons, students are exposed to a lot of explanations and procedural text types. Other subjects that are offered in most secondary schools also provide ample opportunities for the use and, thus, explicit teaching of the various text types. It should also be noted that while writing carried out in the EL classroom is done so for its own sake, writing done for the other subjects are done to meet specific purposes. Thus, the teaching of writing skills based on the content provided by the other subjects provides a relevant context for writing.

The teaching of English across the curriculum certainly has great potential in primary schools. Unlike their counterparts in the secondary schools who specialise in one or two subjects, most primary school teachers teaching EL also teach other subjects like Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. It is, therefore, important that EL teachers see the potential of teaching the writing of different text types.

To facilitate this, team teaching could also be considered.^v As mentioned above, teachers in the secondary schools normally specialise in teaching one or two subjects. This could potentially create a sense of inadequacy and insecurity if, for example, an English teacher were to teach the writing of an explanation in Geography lessons or a procedural text in Science lessons due to

^v This will initially require major structural considerations such as time-tabling. The authors understand that some schools have tried this as a way forward in developing pupils' English through meaningful contexts.

their inadequate knowledge in the content of subjects which are not of their specialty. On the flip side, a content subject teacher may not possess explicit awareness of the linguistic features of the specific text types commonly found in their subject areas. If these teachers cannot be persuaded to teach writing across the curriculum, the schools could consider the idea of team teaching where an EL teacher, for example, could team up with a Science teacher to teach procedural writing. Another possibility could be the provision of training in the teaching of text types to non-English Language teachers.

The above arguments in favour of teaching writing skills across the curriculum may also be extended to the teaching of speaking.⁶

In brief, schools may want to develop a strategy on the use of various spoken and written texts to improve pupils' learning in all subject areas. Once pupils can be persuaded that learning to write or orally produce a specific text type serves the important function of equipping them with the writing and speaking strategies for other subjects, they will have confidence in the relevance of the English class. Instruction based on examples of written and spoken texts across curriculum will give the English class renewed purpose and direction. This can be a tremendous boost for the implementation of EL Syllabus 2001.

Limitations of the Present Study

The aim of this study was to provide a broad profile of English teachers in Singapore with regard to their knowledge, confidence, beliefs, challenges and needs. The value of an extensive questionnaire survey to elicit self-reports and self-evaluations was evident for such a purpose. To ensure a high degree of generalisability, we attempted as much as possible to provide a representative sample of the population. (See Chapter 1.) We were, nevertheless, mindful of concerns about the validity and reliability of data elicited through such a method.

We grappled with issues that questionnaire designers typically encountered. The choices we made could be summed up this way: “There are choices, sometimes quite difficult ones, to be made between what the designer may ask with a reasonable hope of a true and cooperative response, and what might be most valid and reliable but so off-putting that few responses are yielded; between user-friendliness and accuracy; between revelation and explanation and minimizing hints about preferred answers and response bias; between length and conciseness”.⁷ We aimed to address these issues through revisions of the questionnaire and pilot testing the instrument with a similar group of teachers. We also omitted one sub-section of the open-ended questionnaire in our analysis because we suspected that many of the teachers had not understood the question correctly.^{vi}

In particular, we were aware that findings about pedagogical content knowledge were limited to the respondents’ self-ratings.

^{vi} During the pilot study, a few participants had asked for clarification of this part. Some minor editing was done to the instructions before the actual study.

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They were not the results of observing the application of such types of knowledge in the classroom. Nevertheless, given the objectives and the aims of the study, teachers' self-ratings were adequate for providing us with insights into broad patterns of knowledge distribution across the various language skills and areas. We have evidence of the reliability of the teachers' responses through an examination of the internal consistency scores for individual sections relating to the same construct. Results from the interviews with 18 teachers also corroborated the patterns derived from quantitative analyses of selected parts of the questionnaire data. In addition, further opportunities for triangulation created a consistent picture of the interrelationships between teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices. The results of our extensive questionnaire also validated some of the results of smaller studies.

A limitation of this study was that it was undertaken only about two years after the new syllabus was introduced, at a time when not all teachers were involved in teaching the new syllabus. Nevertheless, dissemination of EL Syllabus 2001 had begun prior to that through briefings by CPDD. There had also been extensive media coverage of the 60-hour 'Singapore-Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English Grammar' course as a way of preparing teachers for teaching the syllabus. As a result of these events, we were certain that even those teachers who had not begun teaching the new syllabus with their classes were aware of it. More importantly, there were at least two clear similarities between the new syllabus and the 1991 syllabus. These were the six principles of language learning and teaching, and the skills-based approach. Special care was also taken during data analysis to ensure that when the data required pertained directly to specific aspects of

syllabus implementation, such as the use of new textbooks, only the relevant responses were considered.

Finally, a point about terminologies used in the questionnaire is worth mentioning. Teachers were asked to respond to names of concepts and activities for teaching English. These included terms such as ‘top-down processing’, ‘talk as performance’, ‘text-based grammar teaching’, etc. The terms that were included in the questionnaire were those frequently found in teacher education courses as well as the syllabus documents. It may be argued that some teachers might not have recognised these terms even though they had been teaching according to the principles. We would like to argue, however, that effective language teaching is a theoretically principled endeavour. Explicit knowledge and systematic application of relevant theoretical concepts and pedagogies can contribute enormously to successful language teaching and increase the opportunities for pupils to develop their language. As most of the items included in the questionnaire underpinned EL Syllabus 2001, explicit knowledge of these terms is crucial for successful implementation of its requirements.

Notes

¹ Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2004 (email interview response received on 5 February 2004).

² Nicholls, 1983; Fullan, 2001.

³ Havelock, 1971.

⁴ Quoted in White, 1991, p. 1.

⁵ Quoted in Tan, 2000, p. 181.

⁶ Goh, 2005.

⁷ McDonough & McDonough, 1997.

Appendix 1

In this section we present the voices of four teachers sharing their thoughts about the revised syllabus, their beliefs and their practices. They have been selected to present different personal perspectives on the teaching of English in secondary and primary schools.

These snapshots have been created from interview data. Apart from removing the interviewers' questions, the data have been unedited.

Profile 1

I started in 1990, June. This is my second school. I'm teaching the Secondary 3 Express. I attended various courses for example teaching English within an IT framework. I remember taking up teaching English Comprehension at Lower Secondary. I went for my RSA course. It will allow me to teach English almost anywhere in the world. I also took the sixty-hour Singapore-Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English Grammar.

I feel that it is not easy to learn a language. The new syllabus attempts to guide the average Singapore students to speak competently to use inflections properly and to be able to identify and produce utterance according to the social context so as to be understood by English users worldwide. The new syllabus is more specific with focus on the Grammar items. So, the new syllabus, I think redefines it in terms of a linguistic approach. It is more specifically language-based.

I do feel that the new syllabus is ambitious because the students I deal with do need the basics but the demands of a particular unit in accordance to the new syllabus dictate that you should be teaching rather sophisticated grammar items like verb forms and modal auxiliaries - they are way beyond - I won't say the understanding of our kids, but it becomes very technical and our students are very much turned off by that.

I don't think all of us are very knowledgeable in terms of the nitty-gritty of the new syllabus though we were given the resource package to look at. Of

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course, within the department the Head of Department will emphasize and reiterate that there has been these changes and that we should always keep in mind all that when we teach. We are always encouraged to be open within the department and we do try to be supportive of one another.

I'm much more reliant on the coursebook. The course books have been reviewed and they are all in line with the new syllabus. It is quite exhaustive and it does try to teach the skills that are necessary for that text type. I have full faith in the course book but there is always again the adjustment that I have to make in terms of my students' needs. And within the department we decided that the students need a lot of basic grammar drills.

If there is anything apart from the course book that I use, it would be basically in terms of my sharing. I don't think there is anything too drastic in terms of the way I teach. I do feel that the students don't have enough knowledge of the world. They don't read widely enough so I go into sharing. I still tell stories because I feel that if you make the language become real in terms of you listening to a story and you trying to communicate ideas, then you are half way there because that is the essence of language anyway. I've not really looked at the reference books as much as perhaps I should because you do need time to look at the material. You do need time to review it and see whether you can incorporate it. Most of the time I would have group work.

What is lacking is the total approach to language learning. I wish I have more of an equal weightage for all these skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing but there is always the writing emphasis because ultimately the exam system is very much like that still. We do have the oral component. We still have the Listening Comprehension part but those are relatively minor as compared to the written part. I'm not using enough of the Listening Comprehension component of the course book because the CDs are not available. We are not given free copies. We need to purchase them. I need to achieve balance in the sense that I do need to do what I think is necessary for the students, but at the same time show the department that I am doing enough in terms of the expectation that is imposed on me.

When you talk about a language, it's just not a language to be learnt. It defines us in many different ways. I'm very much aware that communication is the essence here and if real communication must take place within the

framework of their mother tongue, then so be it. Flexibility is needed. Language learning is different for every individual. It would be good actually if English is taught as a first language because I think it can bridge the different communities. Given the kind of opportunities that we are giving to our students in using the language in the classroom, I would say I am confident that they will be able to gain a certain language competency. As our society progresses, I feel there is a need for language to be used purely for its functional purpose. Obviously there is a need to be more effective in communication and if students are aware that for them to be able to communicate effectively, they need to use something that is comprehensible to the other communities or within the framework of globalization, they will be more encouraged to learn it better, perhaps.

Profile 2

I have been teaching since July last year so it's actually less than a year. I did the English Language Teaching Course at NIE. We did four modules covering reading, writing, grammar and speaking/listening. I believe that my NIE training was done with the view of the new syllabus in mind. Last year, I did a story-telling course and debate training as well. This year, I have attended two courses. One was using songs in English Language teaching. The other was composition writing. Both were conducted by the British Council. I also attended the training for the new Normal Academic Paper. I did not attend the Singapore Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English Grammar course. Actually, last year I also attended another course which was basically introducing the new EL syllabus to schools. It was conducted by the Ministry at Singapore Polytechnic. There was a briefing on what the new syllabus was all about and then there was a workshop conducted on how to teach the new syllabus. I think the aim of the new syllabus really is to give the pupils as much exposure as possible to different types of writing and the different ways in which language is used because there is really a huge variety of ways in which language is used and up till now I think all they have been doing is personal recounts. Now the 'O' level examination has shifted in line with the syllabus. The 'O' level pupils will have two comprehension passages instead of the usual one and the passages which are based on the same theme may come in different genres of writing. There is a lot of descriptive and expository. I think the purpose is to create what they believe to be higher order thinking.

The new syllabus is genre-based. I have my reservations about the teaching of the genre based. I think that there are far too many varieties being taught. Sometimes the teacher doesn't even know what to choose. You have the interesting ones like science fiction and drama, but you ignore these in favour of journal and newspaper because that's the sort of thing that can come out for the exam. We have this constant struggle. I wonder if it's really useful to teach the facets of different genres. Will it really help them to break down the text when it comes to examinations? Within a four year scope, how many genres can you really seriously tackle and become a master of? And within one year, honestly I don't think so. In fact I think it will probably take two years

for you to master a particular genre so if you are thinking about writing in an argumentative fashion that is a skill which takes two years to develop, at least, even after two years some people don't develop it if you look at the General Paper. What's happening there? So is it achieving the outcomes? I don't think it is. I think there should be a focus on two or three core genres and three out of ten electives to be taught over the four years. We should concentrate on the relevant and focus on making them more interesting.

I don't have enough direction as a new teacher on what I'm supposed to be teaching. I don't really have anyone to mentor me in that sense because nobody really knows either. We work very independently. There is no sense of cohesion. I haven't received enough training in teaching what I consider to be the most critical modules - argumentative and expository and personal recount. I don't have enough resources. I find that I have to spend a lot of time developing my own resources and that really is a very time-consuming painful activity to be involved in. I have a very heavy time-table. Also I'm straddling three levels this past half year so that makes things really difficult. The resources I have are not structured enough. I think that the Ministry needs to come out with a better textbook and worksheets, really, highly structured worksheets for teaching different skills if they want to teach this new syllabus. I believe heavily in schema activation and structured work. I think I would require training in how to go about structuring the students' work.

I have some very high abilities students and some extremely low abilities students so that makes things difficult to plan lessons. I really have to have a system of differentiated learning. And that is a tough key because it's three times the workload in that sense if I divide my classroom into three different groups - high ability, middle ability and low ability. Different groups of students will respond to it differently, yah, so you have to select your materials very, very carefully. And then scaffolding, that's the other part of it. How much of it is a scaffold and how much of it is a crutch? What's going to matter to these kids at the end of the day is success at the exam and so I have aligned my teaching methodology in line with what this new syllabus requires. My direct relationship to that is the textbook. I equate the two. Honestly I feel quite disappointed with myself that I cannot take the time and the effort to structure and plan the lesson the way that I would like to. There are some

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lessons which have gone very well. But in truth, most of them have been sort of open the book and read.

I find the textbook very boring. Sec Fours, to be honest, the whole year I've not touched the textbook at all, zero because for Sec Fours it's ten year series all the way. And for Sec Four N A I develop my own worksheets for them for drilling. I don't explicitly teach grammar. We have Readers' Digest that comes in regularly. I like to use that a lot. There are no worksheets involved but to show my superiors, from time to time I have simple worksheets based on the passages that they read. Writing is more structured but it's also difficult to mark so I don't do it as often because of my heavy workload. Frequently students work in groups of four to five to plan an essay and do a mind map. I conduct forum sessions on a newspaper article. I also like using songs and movies.

I think that English should be taught as the first language for some students, not all. I think the students should have a choice. I think for a lot of them as far as they are concerned, English is a second language and therefore it must be taught as a second language which is highly structured. If the government really wants to improve English, there is a need for a major overhaul in the way English is taught and perceived. I think that the EL syllabus is actually a powerful tool for there is this move towards this interdisciplinary work. I have confidence in myself in achieving certain aims but I have no faith in the text running itself. It's not going to work.

Profile 3

I started teaching in the year 1964. So from 1964 to now, it's close to thirty-nine years. This is my fourth school. I am doing the Primary One. I go for in-service courses. In the last five years, I attended one on teaching Comprehension and another on helping slow learners to learn. I find the course very interesting. I also attended the 60-hour Grammar course

I am quite comfortable with the syllabus. It is focused; it is systematic in its layout. I think it encompasses all the components of the language. That means from oral interaction, to reading and comprehension, and then writing. We attended a briefing from our HOD. We were given comprehensive guidelines. The previous syllabus is a lot of drill and practice. We don't have all this guide. I should be able to handle the new syllabus. But no matter how much training I have, it's still the pupils that I am handling. I have to revise to suit the needs of the pupils

I do have pupils from different ability groups. Their learning styles are all different. I just have to observe them. I do a lot of informal interaction, just to get to know my children's background, their parents and their learning style. So when I know their learning style I will be able to plan better for them. The children come from different homes. The home background does influence a child's learning ability in a way. When I have some coming to me with different learning abilities, I have to group them. Then, under each group, we have something like a differentiating scheme of work. If they don't come from English speaking homes, that means they need a lot of reading, speaking and listening. For those who are able to read very well, what they need maybe is writing. But we are very fortunate to have this language learning support teacher in the school. She helps us with those pupils who were really very very weak.

I plan my lesson with the learning outcomes in mind. Even now in my thirty-nine years of teaching, I still look at it as a bible. Our pupils come from English speaking homes, but now with maids in the family, you do see a decline in the language because of the English they are learning. Verbally they are ok, they can interact with you, but when it comes to the written form, they still have problems with the structure. When it comes to organise in a

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complete sentence, pupils do have difficulty. So what I do with them is this, I will make them read it out, say it out, think it out, and then, when they listen, they try to see whether they are correct. It is actually the audio part that is very important. Speaking, listening, reading up. If they can do these three very well, writing should not actually be a problem.

Sometimes teachers do explain certain words using another language, which I think it should not be. It is not very useful to a child, because how many languages can you use? There are so many other races out there. So what I believe is, we bring it out in other forms. I make it into a song, I make it into a rhyme. This way they can remember. I found I use a lot of story-telling because they enjoy listening to stories. I use a lot of words flash. From the words they try to get the gist of the story. If I have to teach comprehension, I will use the words that appear in the passage, and I will encourage my children to guess what the passage is about, and to make sentences bring out the meanings of those words. I read them poems and expect them to imagine. And they respond in drawing. I use pair work more often than group work. I prefer pair work. They learn from one another better and interaction is there.

I have to make compromises. I do more oral work, oral, listening and speaking. What I think I like is penmanship. And usually I ask them to do it as homework. There is actually time constraint. And with other factors coming in, we are unable to complete the requirements for the unit. So if it overlaps with the next unit, I can integrate them so that I can save time and yet my pupils are not disadvantaged. And again, certain topic, certain grammar is not within the range of the children. So you sometimes have to drill.

We are using XX (*Textbook title*) for English. I do a lot of selecting. Because certain components, certain exercises in the textbook, I mean, in the workbook, are a bit too difficult for my year 1 students. The bridging material in the syllabus is actually very good. So we use quite a lot of IT software. We have the big books, a lot of listening tapes, songs, even rhymes, yes, rhymes. These books are made known to all the teachers. They know where they are, where they are kept. It is up to teachers to browse through, to pick up the relevant materials that are useful to her. So we have a lot of resources to help us. So far I don't have any problems. We are given all the support. Even the P is very supportive. Anything you ask, you know, for the sake of the children, it

is always entertained and looked into. We apply for courses. If we cannot we'll try to get our HOD to have it school-based and then we do termly review but we don't have to wait for the meeting. We can just discuss with our level, subject co-ordinators any time. The teachers are very supportive. We do a lot of sharing. So actually we have a very supportive environment.

I think English should be taught as the first language as it official working language. It makes communication so much easier for the different races. Language is actually a very important tool. If the language is strong, word problems would not be a problem, because they could understand. Similarly for science, some of our pupils cannot understand a certain problem or question because of the language. They must have the language before they can do well in other subjects.

I think the new syllabus is very comprehensive. It is up to the person who uses it. How we use it, how we interpret it, how we put it into use, depends very much on the user. Yes, on the user. You see, you can give me something else, I can do it in different ways, teach it in different ways. You know what I mean? And yet I am able to put it across to the pupils I am teaching. So for a teacher to use a syllabus, she must be able to know her pupils well. From there, she devises a strategy, a method or approach, making use of the learning outcomes. With that in mind, I think it should not be too difficult. And the children will benefit, definitely. And they will not be confused. If all our teachers sort of follow the syllabus, the pupils even though you don't teach them the next year, the foundation is there. The next teacher builds on the foundation. Then you will see a very great improvement in the children's language.

Profile 4

I started in 1995. So I've got 8 years of teaching experience. I graduated with BA with Dip Ed. I attended the RELC Seminar in which there was a lot of sharing on English Language teaching and learning. I attended the Grammar Course 3 years ago. Then also there is teachers' conference for the last 2 years. Last year in January the HOD English did a briefing for us in the English Syllabus. The latest for this year I attended the Reading Comprehension workshop conducted by the personnel from the Ministry. I'm the level head for the lower primary, yeah, for P1 to 4. I teach the lower primary. I teach the Primary Three children.

The old syllabus would extend from '95. At that time I was teaching mainly upper primary, P6 and P4. I think more or less the syllabuses are about the same, except that there wasn't much exposure to the text types then. In the past it was mainly exam-oriented. The new shift is really exposing the children to the various text types and making sure they also know the features of these text types. The new syllabus is very comprehensive. It stipulates that teaching and learning should be organised around three areas. One is language for information. The other one is language for literal response and expression. The third one is language for social interaction. What comes to my mind is also we need to plan grammar-focused lessons, err integration of the four skills.

I think the aim is to really develop in our young learners the ability to speak competently in internationally acceptable English. So if we inculcate in them from young, they will have the ability to be proficient writers, listeners and readers, and at the same time enjoy English for creative form of expression. It focuses on the pupil as a learner. That means we have to be very learner-centred. In our school, we band the children. The teacher can then plan activities to cater to the needs of this homogeneous group of children, so the outcomes will be more easily achieved. However, the outcomes are really based on the assumption that children are really quite good in the language. I have this class of about 40 children. 5 are really proficient but for the majority, some are middle average and some are really very weak. With the lower end it

is really difficult because they are not even ready with the basic skills of English itself.

I think they do enjoy learning English. This syllabus is really very good because it is learner-oriented. The outcomes are spelt out in this book (refer to the Syllabus). So this book has been very useful in my planning of lessons. Lesson planning is the most important. With the lesson plan in mind the whole activity for the lesson is very organised. And materials are selected to meet the objectives of the lesson. So naturally the teaching falls in place because we follow a guide that we believe is useful for the children. And when we plan our weekly lessons, we also bear in mind the NE aspect and the IT aspect. For my school, we expect every teacher to reflect on our weekly planning as well. So it takes a lot of effort in planning. We spend as much as about two hours planning our lesson.

I think in terms of learning, the children are engaged when the materials are really authentic, something they can relate to their life such as filling up a form or keeping a diary. We plan activities in such a way that the pupils' listening, speaking, writing and reading skills are all incorporated and developed. I get them to peer evaluate. And I like to share a story with them, things from the Internet and my personal experiences as a child. Sometimes we have word games on the board. We have a word bank. So whenever we hear an assembly talk and some effective words and phrases, we record them on the board and they record them down as well. And they try to use them in their own speaking and writing. We have a Read For Life Book where students record titles they have read.

I just wanted to make teaching fun for the kids, I did bring in a lot of other things as well. But it wasn't so conscious. This time round, last year and this year, I am more conscious of making sure that they are exposed to different text types. I do follow the textbook but I don't like to just read from the text and just do what are in the text. But at the end of it all, there are certain formats that they really need to be exposed to. I think we can't run away from grammar. We've got written exercises for them. We've got worksheets. Towards the end of the term, you tend to get very exam-oriented

I try my best to have a balance of both. I think they have at least about 6 weeks of real engaging English learning and being exposed to the various

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text types. I have a class of 40. So that is the constraint. Other than that, I think we have the support from the English HOD and we have our colleagues to share our resources with. At the implementation level, I would say sometimes we've got some problems. Compared to last year, we have less sharing this year because the school is going through external validation. We need a lot of time to really sit down and share what works what doesn't work. That's why I look forward to conferences and all that because that's when I really learn from other teachers, how they make use of whatever is available to make teaching more effective. But as for the syllabus on its own, I think it is really good because it's got grammar and it's got integration of the four skills. I believe these are what pupils need in order to be better speakers English Language should remain as the first language because we need it as the vehicles of instruction for all the other subjects.

Appendix 2

a) Questionnaire

Dear EL teacher,

We are staff of the National Institute of Education conducting a research project funded by the Ministry of Education. The aim of this project is to study English Language teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the teaching and learning of English in Singapore. This survey that we are inviting you to participate in is one part of that project.

The research is expected to have some implications for teachers' professional development, and possibly, for policy-making, in the future. We would therefore greatly appreciate your collaboration and honest response.

To ensure your anonymity and the confidentiality of your response, please seal the envelope when returning your questionnaire. If you should decide not to participate in the survey, we would be grateful if you could return the uncompleted questionnaire in the same envelope.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Dr Christine C.M. Goh, *Principal Investigator*

Team members:

Ms Koh Guat Hua

Ms Ng Chiew Hong

Dr Lawrence J. Zhang

b) Interview

Teachers' Knowledge and Beliefs about English Language Teaching and Learning

Agreement Regarding Interview Tapes and Transcripts

I hereby give the research team at the National Institute of Education (NIE) the right to use my taped interviews and the transcripts made from those tapes, for the following purposes: publication and use in NIE. I am also willing for other interested researchers in the Institute to be given access to these tapes and transcriptions for further research.

I acknowledge that I am participating in this interview in my personal capacity. While accepting the above arrangement, I understand that the research team will do everything in their means to ensure my anonymity and that of the school and persons I refer to in my interview.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

NRIC I/C No: _____

Academic Qualification: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3A: Correlations between Primary School Teachers' Personal Factors and Confidence
(N=1500)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Academic qualifications	1.00**	.427**	.084**	.669**	-.632**	-.614**	-.228**	-.237**	-.179**	-.175**
EL qualifications		1.00**	-.026	.184**	-.220**	-.102**	-.051*	-.054*	-.013	-.221**
Professional training			1.00**	.053*	-.060*	-.105**	-.117**	-.085**	-.061*	-.173**
Initial teacher training				1.00**	-.910**	-.907**	-.266**	-.263**	-.240**	-.237**
Age group					1.00**	.832**	.266**	.252**	.224**	.227**
Years teaching EL						1.00**	.278**	.281**	.250**	.243**
Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus							1.00**	.826**	.780**	.766**
Understand the requirements of the new syllabus								1.00**	.769**	.751**
Have competence to implement new syllabus									1.00**	.930**
Have confidence to implement new syllabus										1.00**

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1) Academic qualifications | 6) Years teaching EL |
| 2) EL qualifications | 7) Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus |
| 3) Professional training | 8) Understand the requirements of the new syllabus |
| 4) Initial teacher training | 9) Have competence to implement new syllabus |
| 5) Age group | 10) Have confidence to implement new syllabus |

Appendix 3B: Correlations between Primary School Teachers' Practice and Confidence (N=1500)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Refer to new syllabus	1.00**	.810**	.525**	.626**	.452**	.483**	.450**	.490**	.402**	.396**
Bear in mind requirements of syllabus		1.00**	.604**	.604**	.517**	.552**	.485**	.532**	.440**	.435**
Use supplementary materials to implement new syllabus			1.00**	.500**	.483**	.518**	.428**	.447**	.378**	.360**
Use Guide to English Syllabus 2001				1.00**	.459**	.475**	.441**	.475**	.393**	.382**
Plan instructional programme with Learning Outcomes as end-points					1.00**	.702**	.405**	.382**	.374**	.374**
Plan according to the 3 Areas of Language Use						1.00**	.440**	.430**	.384**	.396**
Understand requirements of new syllabus								1.00**	.769**	.751**
Have competence to implement new syllabus									1.00**	.930**
Have confidence to implement new syllabus										1.00**

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) Refer to new syllabus | 6) Plan according to the 3 Areas of Language Use |
| 2) Bear in mind requirements of new syllabus | 7) Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus |
| 3) Use supplementary materials to implement new syllabus | 8) Understand requirements of new syllabus |
| 4) Use Guide to the English Syllabus 2001 | 9) Have competence to implement new syllabus |
| 5) Plan instructional programme with Learning Outcomes as end-points | 10) Have confidence to implement new syllabus |

Appendix 3C: Correlations between Secondary School Teachers' Personal Factors and Confidence (N=850)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Academic qualifications	1.00**	.321**	-.047	.295**	-.278**	-.167**	.037	.006	.047	.057
EL qualifications		1.00**	-.216**	-.022	-.034	.088**	.163**	.129**	.171**	.154**
Professional training			1.00**	.037	-.003	-.120**	-.109**	-.121**	-.132**	-.119**
Initial teacher training				1.00**	-.902**	-.857**	-.174**	-.211**	-.151**	-.159**
Age group					1.00**	.805**	.175**	.212**	.141**	.154**
Years teaching EL						1.00**	.188**	.212**	.166**	.166**
Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus							1.00**	.729**	.796**	.784**
Understand the requirements of the new syllabus								1.00**	.689**	.699**
Have competence to implement new syllabus									1.00**	.925**
Have confidence to implement new syllabus										1.00**

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 11) Academic qualifications | 16) Years teaching EL |
| 12) EL qualifications | 17) Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus |
| 13) Professional training | 18) Understand the requirements of the new syllabus |
| 14) Initial teacher training | 19) Have competence to implement new syllabus |
| 15) Age group | 20) Have confidence to implement new syllabus |

Appendix 3D: Correlations between Secondary School Teachers' Practice and Confidence (N=850)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Refer to new syllabus	1.00**	.786**	.560**	.608**	.473**	.454**	.384**	.466**	.333**	.340**
Bear in mind requirements of syllabus		1.00**	.618**	.591**	.530**	.504**	.423**	.514**	.378**	.377**
Use supplementary materials to implement new syllabus			1.00**	.500**	.454**	.472**	.368**	.378**	.335**	.327**
Use Guide to English Syllabus 2001				1.00**	.513**	.491**	.397**	.422**	.298**	.298**
Plan instructional programme with Learning Outcomes as end-points					1.00**	.707**	.346**	.389**	.329**	.319**
Plan according to the 3 Areas of Language Use						1.00**	.358**	.357**	.334**	.329**
Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus							1.00**	.729**	.796**	.784**
Understand requirements of new syllabus								1.00**	.689**	.699**
Have competence to implement new syllabus									1.00**	.925**
Have confidence to implement new syllabus										1.00**

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

- | | |
|---|---|
| 11) Refer to new syllabus | 16) Plan according to the 3 Areas of Language Use |
| 12) Bear in mind requirements of new syllabus | 17) Have sufficient knowledge to implement new syllabus |
| 13) Use supplementary materials to implement new syllabus | 18) Understand requirements of new syllabus |
| 14) Use Guide to the English Syllabus 2001 | 19) Have competence to implement new syllabus |
| 15) Plan instructional programme with Learning Outcomes as end-points | 20) Have confidence to implement new syllabus |

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