

Webinar series: audience questions and answers

Curriculum Comparison Project (CCP): Exploring East Asia's English language learning landscape.

During the CCP webinar series (June-August 2026), participants raised a number of insightful questions. Whilst we were unable to answer all of them during the live sessions, we have compiled the outstanding questions and our responses in this document.

As a reminder:

- **Webinar 1** introduced the project's aims, scope, research team, and methodological framework (the Comprehensive Learning System), as well as the English curriculum reforms under investigation in China, South Korea, and Japan.
- **Webinar 2** featured presentations from our expert researchers, highlighting key insights into teachers experiences of English curriculum reform, including their preparations and challenges.
- **Webinar 3** synthesised the findings to date, explored broader implications of English curriculum reform, and outlined the next parts of the project and outputs.

Webinar 1 (18 June)

Introducing the Curriculum Comparison Project

Question/comment	Project team's response
Would you share us slides? It's wonderful	Thank you for your kind comment. Unfortunately, we will not be sharing slides, but the recordings to the sessions will be available via the TeachingEnglish YouTube page, so you can see our slides there.
The project uses the Comprehensive Learning System (CLS) to evaluate how well a country's curriculum, delivery, and assessment align. From your bird's-eye view of this multi-country study, what are the most common systemic friction points that cause these three components to fall out of alignment during a major national reform?	This is a really good question — thank you. Our research suggests (so far) that some of the most common points of friction arise between the new curriculum policy and related documents and practical implementation in the classroom. While policies and frameworks may set ambitious expectations, teachers often face constraints that make these difficult to realise in practice — particularly when there are limited class hours and often large, mixed-level classes.

	The CLS advocates for a learning system to be aligned for it to be effective. However, in reality, there are a wealth of factors that influence this alignment (some to do with curriculum, delivery and assessment and some to do with the wider society or environmental changes, for example). And this may be different for different contexts, curriculum revision, people etc. As our project develops, particularly moving onto Part 3 with assessment, we may see further friction points.
What are the practical implications of this project? Do we collaborate with these governments? Thank you	Thank you for the question. By identifying areas of preparation, interpretation and implementation, the project can provide evidence-informed recommendations for future curriculum reform across the study contexts. For example, the findings are already feeding into discussions around Japan's next Courses of Study, which MEXT is expected to introduce in 2030. The next key step is engaging with curriculum developers and policymakers. As part of Part 4 of the project, scheduled for later this year, we plan to speak with these stakeholders. The project also offers practical contributions beyond the immediate contexts. Our research design provides a way of applying the CLS framework to curriculum-focused research, which could be adapted by other contexts. In addition, the similarities and differences table, one of our outputs of the project, enables educators, researchers, and policymakers to compare curriculum features across contexts in a clear and accessible way, supporting reflection, benchmarking, and future reform efforts.
I was surprised to see how late English as a subject starts in those countries, have you got any insight on any English related learning happening in early years and lower primary? Also have you got any insights on informal English learning outside schools, specially during those initial years?	Really interesting insight — thank you for bringing it to the discussion. Across the contexts we examined, compulsory English education begins in Grade 3 in both China and Korea, whereas for Japan, English becomes a formal subject in Grade 5, while Grades 3-4 focus on English as a general learning activity rather than a curriculum subject. This was a big change in Japan, with English as

	a subject beginning in elementary school, rather than junior high. Regarding your question about English learning for early primary (i.e., Grade 1-2), this was not something our study explicitly explored, as we were interested on formal learning experiences to explore the revised English curriculum. It is also difficult to generalise or capture informal learning across contexts, as children's level of exposure to English may vary between family background, school environment, region and access to English-language related resources. As such, we do not have specific evidence on learning taking place outside of school for those early years. This is perhaps something to incorporate into future research. One point to note on learning outside of school, China has implemented the "Double Reduction" policy, limiting the amount of homework and tutoring outside of class hours.
Where can I sign up for the second seminar?	We would love it if people signed up to our future webinars. Though Webinar 2 has already happened, you are welcome to view the recordings on the TeachingEnglish YouTube page once available.

Webinar 2 (13 July)

Unpacking curriculum delivery across East Asia: Findings from the Curriculum Comparison project

Question/comment	Project team's response
Why, in Japan, do students have to solve translation questions for the entrance exam? Do other countries' university examinations have such questions?	Interesting question, thank you. This relates to Part 3 of our project, which we are currently undertaking. The use of translation questions in university entrance examinations depends on the assessment used. Some universities incorporate national standardised exams, while others ascribe institution-specific tests, particularly at private universities, meaning that not all students encounter translation tasks. In Japan, translation questions remain a feature of some entrance exams, reflecting the longstanding influence of grammar-translation teaching. Although more communicative approaches have been promoted since the 1970s, translation is still often regarded as a way to assess comprehension and grammar. In other countries, translation tasks may also appear, such as A-Level French in the UK, but (according to our researchers) they seem to be less common in university entrance examinations in China and South Korea.
I wonder if there is any existing empirical research data on the alignment among textbooks, examinations, and curriculum standards?	Thank you for the question. We would like to signpost you to 'Evaluating Alignment between Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction' by Martone and Sireci (2009), and 'Curriculum Alignment Research Suggests That Alignment Can Improve Student Achievement' by Squires (2012). We have also conducted a systematic literature review for Part 2 of the project, and some papers explore potential misalignment (between the formal curriculum and delivery, as well as coursebooks, and assessment) in the learning system. It is important to note, however, that the availability and scope of such evidence does vary across contexts and educational systems. The CCP is investigating the alignment among curriculum standards, delivery, coursebooks, and assessments in China, South Korea and

	Japan — though we would be tentative on the ‘empirical angle’. We are also comparing how these relationships differ across the three contexts, with the aim of understanding how curriculum intentions are reflected in teaching materials and examinations. This comparative perspective may help identify both common patterns and context-specific features in the implementation of language education reforms.
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Webinar 3 (27 August)

Connecting evidence to action: Synthesising insights from the Curriculum Comparison project

Question/comment	Project team's response
Is the CLS model applicable to analysing university curricula?	Thank you for the question. The CLS is applicable to all learning systems, including university curricula.
What is the indicator a country should do an English curriculum reform? Like in Cambodia we recently do the English textbook reform	This is a very good question, and one that is difficult to answer definitively. The indicators that suggest a country should undertake curriculum reform are often highly context dependent. Educational priorities, societal needs, economic goals, and broader policy agendas can all shape decisions about whether reform is necessary. Across the three contexts in our project, there were some common macro-level rationales for reform. In each case, reform was motivated by a desire to improve upon the previous English curriculum and to support broader educational development goals. That said, the processes that trigger reform can differ. For example, in Japan, curriculum revision is a relatively routine process (every 10 years), whereas in other contexts reform may be introduced in response to identified needs or emerging challenges. The question of whether a curriculum should be reformed also depends on whose perspective is being considered. The impetus for reform may originate from policymakers and ministries of education through a top-down process, or it may emerge from practitioners, such as teachers and school leaders, through a bottom-up process that highlights challenges in implementation or changing classroom needs. More fundamentally, curriculum reform is typically justified when there is a recognised need to improve some aspect of the existing curriculum, whether this relates to content, pedagogy, assessment, learner outcomes, or alignment with broader societal goals. It is also important to recognise that reform does not necessarily imply radical change. In both China and South Korea, for example, revised English curricula largely built upon existing

	approaches while introducing targeted refinements and developments.
At a high level, how does Japan's skills-based approach differ from the competency-based approaches used in Korea and China?	Thank you for the question. In broad terms, a skills-based approach is one in which the curriculum is organised around the development of language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A competency-based approach is broader, focusing on the development of capabilities that learners can develop, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and independent learning, which are advanced through language learning (in this case, English). As mentioned during the webinar, our researchers identified the predominant approach adopted in each context. However, these categories (between skills-based and competency based) are not always mutually exclusive, and Japan provides a particularly good example of how elements of both approaches can coexist. For example, the 2017-19 Courses of Study in Japan draws on the CEFR (2001) and is structured around the five language activities: listening, reading, writing, spoken interaction, and spoken production. In this sense, the curriculum has a strong skills-based orientation. At the same time, these language activities are framed within three overarching competency-based perspectives which transcend subjects. Additionally, for Korea, though the curriculum is organised according to six competencies, the language skills are organised according to two domains: reception and production. Therefore, though we have categorised the curriculum approaches in this way, they are not a binary distinction.
How did you account for cultural differences in affective perceptions of preparedness across the three countries?	Thank you for this question. We hope we have interpreted it correctly. To clarify, we used the same survey instrument across all country contexts, with only minor adaptations where necessary to ensure contextual relevance. The survey data were supplemented by focus group discussions and classroom observations, allowing us to triangulate findings and develop a richer

	understanding of teacher preparedness within each context. We agree that self-report measures can be influenced by cultural norms and response styles. For example, respondents in some contexts may be more inclined towards modesty, while others may be more likely to express confidence. As a result, some of the differences observed in self-reported preparedness could reflect differences in perception and reporting rather than differences in preparedness itself. This is an important consideration and a recognised limitation of self-report methodologies more generally. At the same time, a central aim of the project was to understand preparedness within and across different cultural contexts. Our analysis therefore combines in-context and cross-context perspectives, enabling us to interpret findings with sensitivity to local realities while also identifying broader patterns. It is difficult to fully disentangle actual preparedness from culturally shaped perceptions of preparedness, doing so would require assumptions about national or cultural response tendencies that risk overgeneralisation. We have therefore chosen to focus on participants' reported experiences and perceptions, while acknowledging the potential influence of cultural factors on these responses. Ultimately, preparedness is, at least in part, a subjective construct. Although self-report data have limitations, they remain one of the most direct ways of capturing how teachers perceived their own preparedness at the time the study was conducted. The inclusion of focus groups and classroom observations was intended to strengthen and contextualise these findings beyond survey responses alone.
What is the rationale for using English as the subject area through which to develop or assess 21st-century skills? Is this intended to be cross-curricular across the wider school curriculum?	Without resorting to a broad-brush answer, it is important to recognise that the rationale for using English as the subject to develop or assess 21st-century skills or competencies can vary across contexts. For our CCP, in all contexts, English is aligned to broader educational goals. In addition, given

	its status as a global lingua franca, English is often seen as a particularly valuable medium through which students can develop and demonstrate these skills. In both China and South Korea, English is positioned not only as a subject to be learned, but also as a pathway for developing competencies linked to wider educational goals. For China, the aim is to develop four competencies for English as a subject; this includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. For instance, language ability explicitly links to English learning. In Korea the competencies are aligned with the wider national curriculum, and include self-management, knowledge-information processing, creative thinking, aesthetic-emotional, collaborative communication, and civic competency. Of these, collaborative communication is particularly closely connected to English language learning. Though Japan has been identified as taking a predominantly skills-based approach, there are three competency-based perspectives that work across grades and subjects. These perspectives include knowledge and skills, the ability to think, judge and express, and the ability to learn and human nature.
Are social-emotional intelligence and wellbeing, particularly in response to COVID-19, and sustainable development / climate-related competencies addressed within English, or elsewhere in the school curriculum?	That's a great question — thank you. We have not specifically examined social-emotional intelligence, wellbeing or sustainability on each revised English in the CCP, so we are cautious about making definitive claims. Nevertheless, some of the findings from Part 1, on the landscape of English curriculum may shed some light. For example, in China, the English curriculum centres around three core themes: man and self, man and society, and man and nature. In the man and nature theme, topics such as natural ecology, environmental protection, disaster prevention and space exploration are communicated. Additionally, with the expression skills advocated in China, it is noted that children can express personal emotions.

	In Korea, there are nine content themes, including personal life, family life, school life, social life, culture, democratic citizenship, ecological transformation, digital and artificial intelligence, and general education. Furthermore, in the values and attitudes for receptive skills, emotion is stipulated within 'sensing and empathizing with others' emotions' criterion. For Japan, with the Courses of Study for secondary, topics include (under the social and public category) natural environment, world affairs, science and technology, peace, human rights issues, spread of ICT, and energy issues. Therefore, though these emotional, wellbeing and sustainability factors were not explicitly investigated in the CCP, as English was our focus, from Part 1 of the project it can be observed that these factors have been incorporated with the revised English curriculum.
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Thank you for engaging with our webinar series. We hope to see you during the next series in 2027.
For further questions, please contact: FutureofEnglish@britishcouncil.org

AI use:

These responses were human-generated, and AI was used to improve writing coherence and spot grammatical inaccuracy.