

## **Professional Qualifications of Teachers for English for Primary and Secondary Education – A Brief Comparison between Hong Kong and China**

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Entry to the teaching career in most education systems nowadays is based on academic qualifications and professional credentials. The requirements and trainings for teachers of English vary in different regions and countries. This short review presents the professional preparation of pre-service teachers of English and the English language qualification examinations for teachers in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Hong Kong has been a British colony for over 100 years and it has become the special administrative region of China since 1997. English has always been an important language in the city for business and other commercial activities with other parts of the world. The training of teachers of English in Hong Kong could feature a double degree in education and English language, an English-related degree with a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), or a non-English-related degree with PGDE and postgraduate study in the subject knowledge. On top of teaching practices in real school settings, undergraduate programmes offer students the opportunities in immersing into English speaking countries to further polish their language skills. In order to benchmark the English ability of teachers, the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPATE) was introduced since 2000. On the other hand, English is a crucial foreign language for China in connecting with the world due to its rapid development. The normal universities in China have a long history in delivering teacher training, and students are granted the teaching licences upon graduation. In addition, the Test for English Majors – Band 8 is deemed as a high-level qualification for teachers of English and other students taking English-related subjects. The present review points out that the English language is an important subject at schools in regions like Hong Kong and China. Thus, trainings for the pre-service teachers are continuously improved and the regional testing systems are developed to ensure the English proficiency of the teachers.

**Keywords:** pre-service teachers training, language assessment for teachers, Hong Kong, Mainland China

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## 1 Introduction

Hundred years ago, teacher was considered as an unattractive and unprofessional job in Chinese villages. During the 1900s in Hong Kong, a government report surveying on the region's education situation indicated that teachers in local communities were usually quack doctors, geomancers or disappointed public examination candidates, who treated teaching a 'side line' (Hong Kong Government, 1931). Nowadays, entry to the teaching career is no longer unpremeditated and casual as a century ago, and becoming a teacher in most modern education systems is based on academic qualifications and professional credentials. Thus, training for teachers of English language should emphasize on the 3 aspects, which are pedagogy, proficiency and professionalism (Hereafter identify as the 3Ps). Pedagogy refers to the subject knowledge. Proficiency is related to the language ability of the individual. As for the entity of professionalism, it involves high-level skills that require professional training and education recognized by the professional organizations, government and society. It also refers to the knowledge on how lessons should be planned, executed and evaluated in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language in the classroom.

Teaching is one of the major duties of teachers, and educating pre-service teachers for the challenging school environment is as important. Traditional approaches in educating student teachers are criticised for disconnecting from the reality. Scholars (e.g., Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006) indicate that methods courses are disassociated from the curriculum as well as everyday practices. There are gaps among the academic course content in teacher preparation programmes, the teachers' own instructional history as learners, and the real conditions, which together pose challenges for beginning teacher learners to bridge. As a result, a number of novice teachers experience great shock in the real classroom life and are even left to survive on their own, and it could result in "washing out" of their initial inspirations and dropping out from the profession at the early stage. To tackle such situation, Farrell (2015) points out that it is essential for teachers to develop the skills and knowledge (pedagogy and proficiency), and promote their thinking and reflection skills on their teaching. Moreover, teachers would also need to develop their professional identity and position themselves well in the career. Although there is no systematic body of knowledge that determine what comprehensive teacher education programme should be, Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) suggest that teacher preparation programmes need to be responsive to the expectations, needs and practices of student teachers.

In Hong Kong and Mainland China, English is deemed as an important second language that connects the economy and society with the rest of the world. Language proficiency is considered as an essential characteristic and professional development of teachers of English. Under the

policy of ‘one country, two systems’, a number of differences exist in the society of Hong Kong and Mainland China, including the education system as well as the training and qualifications of teachers. This article aims to compare the professional training and requirements in becoming teachers of English in Hong Kong and China.

## **2 Pre-service Teacher Training and LPATE in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong, which was a British colony for over 100 years, has become a special administrative area of China since 1997. The little insignificant fishing village has developed into one of the important financial centres in the globe over the century. The majority of the Hong Kong population is ethnic Chinese, and the education system is under Anglo-Saxon influence due to its colonial background. Based on the statistics by the University Grants Committee (2016), the number of students enrolled in government subsidized academic programmes related to education is 8135 in 2013/14, 8220 in 2014/15 and 8568 in 2015/16. At present, the 5 local universities offering full-time training for pre-service teachers at the primary and secondary levels are namely The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Open University of Hong Kong and The University of Hong Kong. While most subjects are structured as 4-year undergraduate programmes, high school leavers aiming to pursue a career as teachers for English at primary and secondary schools are recommended to take the 5-year double degree track, which offered them both the Bachelor of English Language Education and Bachelor of English Studies upon graduation. During the 5-year study, the students are required to cultivate profound subject knowledge on English language, linguistics and literature; as well as language communication and acquisition.

On the other hand, it is vital for teachers-to-be to explore critically on educational issues, develop positive personal attributes and nourish their commitment to education, since these skills contribute and sustain professional growth in their future career. Also, students are offered the opportunities to gain real teaching experiences at both primary and secondary school settings, and teaching practice is a compulsory part in the curriculum. In order to broaden the students’ horizon in the native English settings, the professional core for the 5-year programme includes a one-semester language immersion overseas in English speaking countries like United Kingdom, Australia, etc.

Nevertheless, a double degree is not the only pathway for individuals to obtain the qualifications in becoming teachers for English. University graduates, who have majored in English studies or other subjects, can also study for the 1-year full-time or 2-year part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for English teaching in either primary or secondary school. The 1-year full time programme also includes teaching practices and

immersion overseas that last for several weeks. The 2-year part-time course are for those who are already working at schools and classes, and it is organized in the evening during the weekdays and Saturdays. It should be noted that professional teacher training verified by either a degree or a PGDE is compulsory for the teacher registration at the Education Bureau in Hong Kong as a qualified teacher of English. Table 1 illustrates the curriculum of a double degree programme of Arts (English Studies) and Education (English Language Education) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2016, which is one of the teacher training institutes in Hong Kong.

Table 1. The Course Curriculum of the Co-terminal Double Degree Programme of Bachelor of Arts (English Studies) and Bachelor of Education (English Language Education) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2016

Module	Content	Unit
1	Faculty package: A) Principles and implementation of curriculum and instructional design B) Child and adolescent development C) English studies: thinking creatively in a global language	9
2	Required courses: A) Subject knowledge B) Language enhancement C) Language teaching methodology D) Research project E) Educational studies F) Teaching Practice G) Immersion Experience	30 9 18 6 8 10 3
3	Elective courses: A) Subject knowledge B) Language enhancement C) Language teaching methodology D) Educational studies	12 2 6 4
Total		118

In consideration of enhancing and assuring the English ability of teachers in Hong Kong, the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers Examination (LPATE) was first introduced in 2000 by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Government. The LPATE sets as an objective reference against the language proficiency of teachers in primary and secondary schools can be evaluated (Mak, 2013). There are five papers in the LPATE, which are 1) reading, 2) writing, 3) listening, 4) speaking and 5) classroom language assessment. A scale of 1 to 5 is adopted to demonstrate the ability level of the candidate. Level 5 is the highest proficiency level, while level 1

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is the lowest. Level 3 is the required level of proficiency.

In addition, the Certificate of Merit would be awarded to candidates who obtain an overall proficiency level of 4 or above. As LPATE is the first language benchmarking examination carried out in Hong Kong, and certain flexibility needed to be allowed for the serving and pre-service teachers in the beginning. From 2000 to 2005, serving teachers could attain the benchmark status by taking the LPATE, obtaining an exemption if they possessed an English-related degree, or attending the language enhancement courses authorized by the Hong Kong Examination Authority and Evaluation with a pass in the internal assessment. After 2005, the option of language enhancement course was no longer available, and pre-service teachers could either take the centralised LPATE, or obtain an exemption from the double degree specializing in English and education or an English-related degree with PGDE for English teaching. The curriculum of such courses should align with the language ability assurance of teachers. For those without an English-related degree, they can take a recognized postgraduate programme to satisfy the requirement for subject knowledge. Table 2 shows the test contents of the LPATE for Hong Kong teachers in 2016.

Table 2. Test Content of Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPATE) in Hong Kong in 2016

Component	Task	No. of questions	Time Limit (minutes)
Writing	A) Composition on a topic familiar to Hong Kong teachers B) Correcting and explaining errors/problems in a student's composition	2 parts	90
Listening	Three or four texts, English teachers typically read for both teaching and professional development purposes.	30-40	60
Reading	Three texts of a combined word length of 1,500 to 2,000 words, and they represent types of text that English teachers typically read for both teaching and professional development purposes.	40-50	90
Speaking	A) Individual prose reading B) Individual presentation C) Group discussion	2 parts	30
Total			c.a. 4.5 hours

### **3 Pre-service Teacher Training and TEM-8 in Mainland China**

On the other hand, there is a high demand of human capital proficient in English language in Mainland China, due to its rapid economic and social development since the Open Door Policy for attracting foreign business and investment in 1978. In China, the training of pre-service of English teachers are executed by the normal universities located in different provinces. Normal universities are teacher colleges that aim to train teachers at primary and secondary levels, and some examples of the popular teacher training schools are East China Normal University, Beijing Normal University and Central China Normal University. The training of teachers specializing in English teaching takes 4 years, and the curriculum also includes teaching practices in the real school contexts. Thus, students from the normal universities are able to register as qualified teachers at the Ministry of Education upon graduation.

Table 3 indicates the course curriculum for English major students for the education programme at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Beijing Normal University in 2016. However, potential teachers for English can also be students receiving training from foreign or international studies universities specializing in English language. Graduates from other tertiary institutions can sit for the National Teacher Certification Examination organized by the Ministry of Education in order to obtain the teacher qualifications. The examination includes three written subjects and one oral assessment. The first subject is about the general teacher quality, the second is on pedagogical knowledge and ability, and the third paper focuses on the specific knowledge such as English language. As for the oral assessment, the candidates would need to show his/her ability in preparing and delivering a lesson, as well as answer the enquiries of the examiner.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education (*Hteacher.net.*, 2016), there were around 280 800 candidates sitting for the certification examination in 2011/12 at six major provinces in the country's pilot programme. However, there were already around 30,000 candidates in Beijing sitting for the examination in 2015. This indicates a rapid increase in the candidates sitting for the National Teacher Certification Examination.

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Table 3. The Course Curriculum of the Education Programme for English Major at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Beijing Normal University in 2016

Course Type	Course modules	Credits
General education courses ( 19.4% )	- Ideological and political theory	14
	- Information technology	5
	- Sports and health	4
	- Military training and military theory	2
	- University aesthetic education	2
	- Public elective	7
	Sub-total	34
Professional education curriculum ( 62.2% )	- English related disciplines	8
	- Disciplinary foundation	48
	- Professional direction	34-35
	Sub-total	88-89
Teacher education curriculum ( 18.4% )	- Teacher Education Foundation	
	Teacher education compulsory course	10
	Education research and development	4
	Education and teaching practice	11
	- Professional Belief and Cultivation Education	2
	- Research Training and Innovation Activities	0-1
	- Graduation thesis	4
	Sub-total	31-32
	Total (100%)	156

Unlike Hong Kong, there is no centralized examination benchmarking the language proficiency of teachers. Notwithstanding, Test for English Majors – Band 8 (TEM8) is an examination designed target specifically at university undergraduates majoring in English Language and Literature. The written paper of TEM8 includes tasks on listening, reading, writing, translating and proofreading, while the oral part consists of a short presentation, interpretation from English to Chinese and vice versa. Although TEM8 is not a mandatory qualification of teachers for English at the schools in China, most teachers have obtained the certification as they are English majors at university level. Moreover, TEM is used as an important benchmark of English proficiency (Jin & Fan, 2011), and many schools will adopt the TEM results as one of the criterion in selecting and recruiting the teachers. Table 4 presents the test contents of the TEM-8 in 2016.

Table 4. Test Content of the Test for English Majors – Band 8 in Mainland China in 2016

Component	Task	%	Duration (minutes)
Writing	A text of 400 words on a topic. E.g. What I have learned from my years at university (2008); if financial disparity affects friendship (2007).	20	45
Listening	A) Mini lecture: fill in the blanks	10	15
	B) Conversation or interview: multiple choice	10	20
	C) News broadcasts: multiple choice		
Reading	4-5 texts totally c. 3000 words, with a wide scope of subject on social sciences and humanities, natural science and modern technology, current affairs, as well as other fields and discipline	20	30
Translating	Chinese to English	10	60
	English to Chinese	10	
Proofreading	Error identification and correction	10	15
General Knowledge	10 questions – geographical, literature, linguistic knowledge in the English world	10	10
Total		100	
Oral	Interpreting (English to Chinese)	20	9
	Interpreting (Chinese to English)	20	9
	Presentation	20	7
Total		60	

#### 4 Challenges of the Pre-service Teacher Training System in Hong Kong and Mainland China as Well as Ways of Coping with Potential Problems

English teacher education system in Hong Kong has been well developed, which includes a variety of essential courses on teaching and learning, student development, as well as immersion experience in English-speaking countries. As novice teachers socialise in various school cultures and face students with different abilities, coaching from teacher educators of their home universities and support from experienced mentors at their serving schools are needed. Appropriate guidance and feedback are crucial for the

teacher students to reflect on their teaching in the classrooms, interaction with the students, as well as the reality at schools. As completing the teacher training only marks the beginning of one's teaching career, it is recommended to help novice students organise peer support groups or alumni association. Such group could include some passionate and experienced teachers from different schools, and the seniors can give advice and support for the young teachers in face of the challenges and problems at the start of their profession in language teaching. Moreover, universities and schools could also co-operate to establish interfaces in supporting the pre-service teachers in their serving schools.

On the other hand, China is a vast country with a huge population. The Board of Education or the Teaching and Research Division under the Municipal Education Committee at different cities and provinces have been providing various professional development activities and guidance for teachers. The practices used and the methods adopted of these trainings can vary in different regions, where English teachers in Mainland are facing a number of challenges. For example, a teacher needs to teach over 40 students in one class, the teaching contents of English are still exam-oriented, and shadow education as well as e-learning have brought new requirements for traditional English education. The Board of Education would need to provide the support for frontline teachers based on research of the current system.

### **5 The Way forward of the Teacher Training System and the 3Ps in the Training of Teachers of English Language**

Most of the critics on teacher education are about the disconnection between the theory stated in the curriculum and practices in the real classrooms. The problems in traditional teacher education lie in the curricular division between foundation and methods, as well as separation of coursework and clinical experience. The “gap” or “reality shock” in actual classrooms can be detrimental for the initial development and the career progress of a novice teacher of English. Teaching in reality is a complex practice occurring mainly in classrooms, where instructional activities and interactions happen. In view of this, scholars like Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald (2009) point out that teacher education should be organised around core practices that are well defined. For the teaching of English, student teachers would need to learn about student understanding, and coaching from experienced educators should be provided to novice teachers in trying out new routines, along with specific feedback. On the other hand, researchers from the Netherlands, Australia and Canada (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006) suggest a number of fundamental principles in teacher education to prepare teachers to meet with the ever-changing demands, as well as to require a view of knowledge as a subject to be created. The focus of teaching should be shifted from the curriculum to the learner, and meaningful relationships between

schools, universities and student teachers need to be established. Moreover, teacher research, and teacher educators' application of the teaching and learning skills can also enhance the learning. As a student teacher will have to face the challenges and polish their skills in the real classroom contexts, Farrell (2015) advocates that teacher learners have to be given the opportunities to practice reflection during their courses.

English language is an important median that connects Hong Kong and Mainland China with the rest of the world. In Hong Kong, English has long been made one of the official languages in the region due to its colonial background. The proficiency in English has facilitated the development of the backward fishing village into a global financial hub. On the other hand, China is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and high English capability in the population, especially in the big cities like Shanghai and Beijing, could strengthen its connection in different aspects with the other countries. There are a number of good practices in educating teachers for English in the existing literature, and the training of teachers of English evolves in the 3Ps – pedagogy, proficiency and professional in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The training of teachers of English take the form of double degrees in English and education or an English –related degree with a postgraduate diploma in education in Hong Kong; while in Mainland China, one has to complete their degrees at the normal universities, or study an English related subject and attain a pass in the National Teacher Certification Examination. The universities and the certification examinations ensure teachers have gone through the professional training and studies with necessary pedagogical skills and subject matter knowledge. Furthermore, the English language proficiency is verified by the LPATE and TEM-8 in Hong Kong and Mainland China respectively, and schools might adopt these examinations results as benchmarks in deciding the English language ability of the teachers. Although the professionalization of teachers for English in Hong Kong and Mainland China have been developing at different pace and stage, both Hong Kong and China have established measures ensuring the language proficiency of teachers for English in order to ensure quality English education can be delegated at the school level.

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