

# Historical Overview of the English Language Curriculum and the Present English Language Curriculum of Upper-Secondary Education in Mongolia

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*This article attempts to provide a historical overview of the English language curriculum in Mongolia as well as the development of the present upper-secondary English language curriculum. The history of the English language curriculum is an important but often overlooked topic in the literature. Thus, the paper attempts to reduce the gaps and deficiencies with recent data in the literature. It focuses on the experiences of educational reforms in the English language curricula in the past as well as the present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education. The study utilises document analysis as the methodological approach to scrutinise materials contributing to the development of knowledge supporting the discussions presented.*

**Keywords:** English Language Education in Mongolia, English Language Curriculum of Upper-secondary Education, Foreign Language Curriculum, Curriculum, Upper-secondary Education

## *Introduction*

Mongolia is a landlocked country with a population of 3.3 million (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019a). It has a rich and long history that has shaped the education system as well as national curricula. In terms of its historical timeline, the Mongol Empire was the largest contiguous land empire in history in the 13th and 14th centuries. Then, Mongolia declared its independence from Manchus in 1911, and Bogd Gegeen was declared Bogd Khan. The roots of the modern Mongolian education system can be approximately traced back to this phase. Following this autonomous period, The Mongolian People's Republic was established in 1921 as a result of the victory of the People's Revolution, with the assistance of the young Soviet Republic (Baldayev, 1959). As a result, the Soviet Union exerted significant influence over Mongolia. Subsequently, the Mongolian revolution of 1990 led to the severance of any connections to the former Soviet Union. Mongolia's social and political situation had been changed from a centrally planned system to a free and market-oriented one (Pastore, 2010). Along with a new Mongolian constitution in 1992, a new education system was formed. Thereupon, new curricula have been developed, phasing out heavy Soviet influence and

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communist ideology and reviving Mongolian national heritage (Robinson, 1995), national culture, customs (Galsan, 2008), and science and technology (Spaulding, 1990).

At the present time, the country is divided administratively into 21 provinces, including the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, which has independent administrative status. Further local subdivisions include some<sup>1</sup> and bags<sup>2</sup> (Yembuu, 2010). The education system is a 12-year system. Primary education is five years, lower-secondary education is four years, and upper-secondary education is three years. The Mongolian government has made an immense effort to develop the education sector at all levels since its transition to democracy. Russian was the most significant foreign language before 1990; however, the number of younger people learning English has grown in the last three decades as it increases the chances of obtaining employment overseas and getting access to more opportunities, including travel and communicating with people from different countries.

Mongolia has made significant efforts to reform the curriculum. However, due to the unpredictability of the reform process and the short-term nature of the reforms, it still faces some challenges, such as difficulty in effectively implementing, updating and evaluating the curriculum. The major changes in policy and institutional reforms in Mongolia's education sector have intensified since the 1990s; the 10-year system shifted to an 11-year system in 2006, and the 11-year system shifted to a 12-year system in 2008. Through the education reform, the following changes have been made in the curriculum. In this regard, national standards and programs could be referred to such as 'The standards for the content of primary and lower-secondary education' of 1998, competency-based 'Primary and Secondary Education Standards' in 2004, 11-Year Content Framework for the general education of 2006, 12-year curricula for general education and curricula of mathematics, natural science and English language that meet international standards from 2009 to 2012, curricula for primary, lower secondary and upper-secondary education from 2013 to 2018. However, there is no specific assessment of the implementation of the curriculum and standards except the evaluation in 2009 on primary and lower-secondary education adopted in 2004, which is a major problem facing the continuing development of the curriculum. Due to these continual reforms and changes in a short period, English language curricula for all levels of education were also modified based on new policies and regulations.

This article delineates English language education in Mongolia since the democratic revolution of 1990. It consists of two main parts. The first part is a historical overview of the English language curriculum, which describes the appearance of the English language as a foreign language in the Mongolian education system, the development of the English language curriculum in primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education and reforms and changes in the curriculum. The second part particularly narrows down to the upper-secondary education English language curriculum. It focuses on the historical background of the development of the curriculum and a brief description of its characteristics.

An essential but frequently ignored subject in the literature is interest in the history of the English language curricula. Thus, the research attempted to fill in the gaps by using the latest data. Using a historical research perspective, this paper presents a twofold aim: 1) to explore the changes and reforms of English language curricula in the past and 2) to describe the historical background of the present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education. In accordance with these aims, this article aims to answer the following research questions.

1. Small district in the countryside (Yembuu, 2010)
2. Sub-districts in the countryside (Yembuu, 2010)

1. What are the changes and reforms of English language curricula historically?
2. What aspects influenced the alteration of the present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education?

By responding to these research questions, this study hopes to provide an insight into the historical overview and present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education in Mongolia, which is an important but often overlooked topic in the literature and attempts to reduce the gaps and deficiencies in recent data in the literature. By delving into this understudied area, the research aims to fill a notable gap in scholarly discussions, offering fresh insights into the evolution, challenges, and transformations of recent data within English language education in Mongolia. The nature of the research on the historical overview and present English language curriculum in Mongolia adopts a document analysis methodology to examine the evolution of the curriculum over time comprehensively. The researcher utilises publicly available primary sources such as curricula and secondary sources such as reports, articles, and guidelines to shed light on aspects of the history of the English curriculum in Mongolia. Moreover, the research seamlessly integrates the 'Asia as Method' framework, emphasising the importance of incorporating Mongolian perspectives and experiences into academic discourse moving beyond Western-centric references and using more Mongolian references to offer a more nuanced understanding of English language education in Mongolia.

### *Literature review*

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English language education in Mongolia has undergone significant transformations over the years, shaped by historical, cultural and socio-economic factors. Understanding the evolution of English language education and the current state of the curriculum in upper-secondary schools is essential for assessing its impact on students' linguistic proficiency and educational outcomes. This literature review aims to explore the historical development of English language education in Mongolia and provide insights into the present English language curriculum in upper-secondary education. Before the 1990s, Mongolia's education system was heavily influenced by Soviet educational models. Russian language held primacy as being primary foreign language in schools. With Mongolian, Russian language was forming the core of the secondary school curriculum (Pritchatt, 1974). The Cyrillic alphabet, introduced in the 1940s, underscored the close ties between Mongolia and the Soviet Union (Krueger, 1961). However, following the democratic revolution of the early 1990s, Mongolia embarked on a path of political and economic liberalisation, leading to a shift away from Soviet influence. The collapse of the Soviet Union catalysed a shift in Mongolia's linguistic landscape, with English emerging as a prominent foreign language in schools and universities (Dovchin, 2017). The economic and social significance of English as a global lingua franca prompted the Mongolian government to prioritise its inclusion in the national curriculum (Marav, 2022). Consequently, English replaced Russian as the premier foreign language taught in schools, reflecting Mongolia's aspirations for international integration and economic development (Cohen, 2005). The post-Soviet era witnessed sweeping educational reforms aimed at modernising Mongolia's education system and aligning it with global standards. The passage of new education laws in 1992 and 1995 heralded significant changes in curriculum design, pedagogical approaches and administrative structures (Robinson, 1995; Chojjoo, 2013). English became a compulsory subject in secondary schools, reflecting its pivotal role in fostering educational and economic opportunities for Mongolian students (Batchuluun, 1996). The transition to a market-oriented economy prompted the Mongolian government to revamp its education system, including the development of standardised curricula and content standards. The introduction of content standards for foreign language education in 1998 marked a shift towards competency-based teaching

and learning (Nookoo, 2016). Subsequent revisions in 2003 and 2004 further refined the curriculum, emphasising communicative and constructivist approaches to language instruction (Namsrai, 2004; Bayangol, 2006). In 2006, Mongolia embarked on a comprehensive educational reform initiative, culminating in the adoption of a 12-year education system (Nookoo, 2016). This shift aimed to align Mongolia's education system with global practices and enhance students' academic preparedness and competitiveness (Government of Mongolia, 2006). The curriculum for the 12-year system reflects continuity with previous frameworks while incorporating updated standards and cross-curricular linkages (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019c). Following this reform, in pursuit of educational excellence and global competitiveness, the Mongolian government partnered with Cambridge International Examinations to modernise the English language curriculum (Nookoo, 2016) in 2011. This collaboration aimed to introduce modern pedagogical approaches and assessment standards, aligning Mongolian education with international best practices. The Mongolia-Cambridge Education Initiative (MCEI) was established to reform education in Mongolia, leveraging the expertise of Cambridge Assessment International Education and the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018). This joint initiative aimed to build an education system based on internationally recognised standards and practices. Mongolia's 12-year education system encompasses primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education, with English language education introduced from grade 5 (Marav, 2022). The curriculum emphasises student-centeredness, group activities and hands-on learning, aligning with global best practices (Ragchaa, 2020). The collaboration between Mongolia and Cambridge International Examinations has played a pivotal role in transforming English language education in Mongolia. By leveraging international expertise and best practices, Mongolia has developed a curriculum aimed at enhancing students' communicative competence.

## *Research Methodology*

This study utilises document analysis as the methodological approach to scrutinise materials contributing to the development of knowledge supporting the discussions presented. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material. He further narrates the specific uses of the documents as follows.

First, documents can provide data on the context within which research participants operate, a case of text providing context. Second, the information contained in documents can suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research. Third, documents provide supplementary research data. Information and insights derived from documents can be valuable additions to a knowledge base. Fourth, documents provide a means of tracking change and development. Where various drafts of a particular document are accessible, the researcher can compare them to identify the changes. Fifth, documents can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources (Bowen, 2009, pp. 29–30).

As the paper explores the historical changes in the curriculum, the researcher has embraced the document analysis method. It provides an opportunity to investigate history as stated by Bowen (2009, p. 31) 'documents may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten the details'.

The study entailed the following Creswell's (2009, p. 172–176) steps of qualitative data analysis and interpretation to analyse the documents. 1) organise and prepare the data for analysis 2) read through all the data 3) begin detailed analysis with a coding process 4) generate categories and themes based on the codes 5) rep-

resent themes in the qualitative narrative 6) interpret and explain the meaning of the data. Following this direction, the researcher utilised publicly available primary and secondary sources, including curricula, reports, articles, guidelines for the curricula, and documents that shed light on the history of the English curriculum. The information from articles, reports and documents by Mongolian authors have been coded into several themes, namely, soviet influence in foreign languages, challenges, embrace of English after the soviet era, education law, educational reforms, competency-based education, and categorised into periods of time which marks the important shifts and changes. As a result, the two main themes, 1) historical overview of the English language curriculum and 2) Historical background of the present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education, were sorted out and produced from the document analysis.

Furthermore, the study is seamlessly incorporated into the framework known as 'Asia as Method', which Chen (2010, p. 223) describes as 'multiplying frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview through the unique histories and cultures of Asian societies while acknowledging the West as constitutive of Asian subjectivity'. 'Asia as Method' offers a new conception of study that extends beyond a constant reference to the West toward alternate viewpoints, with Asian history, politics, and culture as main points of reference (Zhang et al., 2015). In this way, the study employed the concept of 'Asia as Method' to underscore the significance of incorporating Mongolian perspectives and experiences as integral components of the study. This approach allows the researcher to 'move beyond' (Zhang & Chan, 2023) Western references. Aligned with Chen's recommendation to move beyond Western references in academic research, this chapter employs a discourse that integrates non-Western references and sources. The majority of the literature informing this discussion is sourced and referenced mainly from Mongolian-authored articles, documents and publications.

### *Historical overview of the English language curriculum*

In the early 1990s, Mongolia's social and political situation had changed from a centrally planned system to a free and market-oriented one as a consequence of the democratic revolution. The economic transition from plan to market in Mongolia began in 1990 and broke old trade links with the former Soviet Union (Pastore, 2010). Before 1990, the influence of Russia was strong in the education system (Wolff, 1970), and the Mongolian school system is more or less patterned on the Russian system (Krueger, 1961). For instance, an alphabet based on Cyrillic was employed in the 1940s Field (Krueger, 1961). Pritchatt (1974) claimed that when he visited Mongolia in 1971, the curriculum in secondary school involved the Mongolian language and Russian language as the language subjects along with Mongolian literature, algebra, geometry, physics, general history, the constitution of Mongolian People's Republic, biology, chemistry, geography, technical drawing, physical education, woodwork or metalwork. Furthermore, he stated that the Russian language was studied as a foreign language, and there was barely any evidence of another language.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia embraced linguistic and cultural diversity and English and other foreign languages have replaced the once-popular Russian language (Dovchin, 2017). Until 1990, Russian had been the premier foreign language taught in secondary schools and universities across the country (Cohen, 2005). The English language is closely linked to educational and economic opportunities, employability, personal development and social mobility in the country (Marav, 2022). Thus, English became pivotal in the country, and the Mongolian government prioritised the English language.

The new law on education in 1992 presented educational reforms that influenced all levels of education, restructuring, management, organisation, policy, and the curriculum in terms of its content and teaching approaches. Along with the new education system, new curricula have been developed, phasing out heavy So-

viet influence and communist ideology and reviving the Mongolian national heritage (Robinson, 1995), national culture, customs (Galsan, 2008), and science and technology (Spaulding, 1990). English became an obligatory subject in secondary schools (Batchuluun, 1996) from the academic year 1992-1993, and the official decision to teach English as a primary English language at all levels of educational institutions from the academic year 1997-1998 was made by the Mongolian government in 1997 (Marav, 2022). The reform brought more 'educational and economic opportunities, employability, personal development, and social mobility' (Cohen, 2005 cited in Marav, 2022, p.1). Additionally, new approaches to teaching and learning are being sought, using more activity-based and participative learning to replace the customary transmission-of-knowledge mode and formal class teaching most often found (Robinson, 1995). It is also important to note the reform was not implemented as smoothly as it was intended. Along with more opportunities provided to the people, certain challenges had arisen. One of the major drawbacks during the reform was that 'English was rarely studied in Mongolia previously, teachers were virtually non-existent when English began to spread throughout the country.' The major issues included 'the needs of English language teachers, the lack of substantial funds, in-service training and the provision of adequate materials' (Cohen, 2004, p. 9).

The law on education was revised in 1995 and introduced the policy of democracy and openness in educational administrative structures, decentralised the administration and financing of all public schools, transferred the management of schools to local governments in the provinces, increased the autonomy of colleges and universities and enabled the establishment of private educational institutions (Choiwoo, 2013). Additionally, the education law of 1995 affirmed that the education system consists of 10 years: 4 years of primary education, 4 years of lower secondary education and 2 years of upper secondary education (Galsan, 2008). Nookoo (2016) asserted that the first content standards and core curricula were implemented in 1998. Until then, the English language curriculum was not standardised and 'teachers were unable to properly ascertain their students' levels based on explicit criteria' (Cohen, 2004, p. 12). The standard was applied to preschool, primary, lower and upper secondary education levels. It was the first time that standard-based education was introduced. It determines the minimal content of English education that must be mastered by students at certain education levels, its assessment, the teacher's professional level and basic requirements for educational institutions.

The curriculum standard for the foreign language, which is titled the content standards of foreign languages, was revised in 2003 and intended to be implemented officially starting 1 January 2005. It is noteworthy to mention that Russian and English languages are considered foreign languages nationally.

- The aim of the standards for Foreign language education is to plan the curriculum which enables each learner to get the intended education, implement it and evaluate the quality of monitoring activities and further develop them (Namsrai, 2004)
- All testing and evaluation will be based on these competencies. Learning through the communicative and constructivist approaches will be emphasised. The teaching of grammar should be integrated and tested with the four skills and not taught as a separate subject (Cohen, 2004).
- The content standards target the set of competence of foreign language education and specific skills. They are expressed by content domains that reflect the features of learning activities at a particular level of education and the relations with other components of the education content (Namsrai, 2004).

The comprehensive revision of the national educational standards in 2004 is another significant action taken by the government and played an important step in implementing competency-based teaching and learning. It is now understood that the main priority of the new standard is to develop pupils' competence in

such a way as to promote life skills and help them to be able to apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively in their lives (Bayangol, 2006).

Competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge is composed of facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories that are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject. Skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use existing knowledge to achieve results. On the other hand, attitudes describe the disposition and mindsets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations. Gaining the skills and competencies needed for personal fulfilment, health, employability, and social inclusion helps to strengthen people's resilience in a time of rapid and profound change. Thus, it ensures the ability to adapt to change (The Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 7).

The content standard marked a shift from teacher-centred education and replaced it with a student-centred approach. However, it should be noted that this concept and the standards are still valid (UNESCO, 2020). The learning and teaching process is based on the development of pupils' competency, and UNESCO's four pillars of core competencies: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together were selected as the basis for the review and reform of the national educational standards (Nookoo, 2016). Based on these four pillars of competencies, the educational standard for the English language consists of four domains - listening, speaking, reading and writing - with expected knowledge, skills and competencies. On the basis of the four pillars of learning, the researchers have formulated the essential competencies. The competencies of upper-secondary education for the English language are exemplified as shown in Table 1.

Four pillars of learning	Codes	Competencies	Four domains
Learning to know	3FL1:C1	Recognise and distinguish discourse markers	Listening
	3FL2:C1	Use language knowledge correctly in speech	Speaking
	3FL3:C1	Find the logical sequence of information within the topic, understand the meaning, sort, interpret, generalise	Reading
	3FL4:C1	Sort and plan your ideas in writing	Writing
Learning to do	3FL1:C2	Transform the information you hear into another format	Listening
	3FL2:C2	Express your ideas in an orderly manner	Speaking
	3FL3:C2	Identify the meaning of words and sentences within the context	Reading
	3FL4:C2	Organise your ideas in a logical order and edit what you write	Writing
Learning to be	3FL1:C3	Predict the meaning of what is being heard in an unfamiliar situation	Listening
	3FL2:C3	Be critical of any issue based on evidence	Speaking
	3FL3:C3	Use your knowledge creatively to explain the meaning of what you read	Reading
	3FL4:C3	Select the necessary facts and information from the materials and write your idea	Writing
Learning to live together	3FL1:C4	Encourage others to listen and respond appropriately	Listening
	3FL2:C4	Communicate, convey what others said and able to present	Speaking
	3FL3:C4	Enhance knowledge of life, history, culture and traditions of your country and other countries within the context.	Reading
	3FL4:C4	Use and choose the right form of writing with others	Writing

Table 1. *Competencies of the English language in upper secondary education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, 2003)*

Every composition of secondary education English language standard has been coded. For example, the code 3FL1:C1 means the first competence of the first domain of the English language in upper secondary education standards. 3 means upper secondary education, and FL means Foreign language. However, a foreign language is the English language in this circumstance. 1 means the first domain of the contents, C means the competence, and 1 first competence of the particular domain (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, 2003).

The following year, the education system changed from a 10-year education system to an 11-year one in 2005. Thus, the curriculum was developed based on the educational standards of 2004 (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019e). Galsan (2008) claimed that the 11-Year Content Framework for primary, lower and upper secondary education was developed as a sample and published in 2004, discussed by teachers and educators and piloted and evaluated in certain schools. Moreover, the 11-Year Content Framework was initiated in line with the educational standard for subjects in all grades. Hence, it incorporated a few requirements, including being developed based on the knowledge and skills defined in the educational standards, considering cross-curricular links of the content. The content for 1st grade deepens and expands as it es-



calates. It conforms to the hours of a program plan. In 2006, the Government of Mongolia approved the Master Plan 2006-2015, which defined the overall goals and development indicators, implementation strategy, required resources and funding opportunities from multiple sources. Under this strategy, the government decided to switch from an 11-year education to a 12-year system (Nookoo, 2016). The plan is considered to be the first in Mongolia to be developed utilising a sector-wide approach. The Master Plan places a high priority on the expansion of the school system and seeks to bring it in line with global practices (Choiwoo, 2013). It aspires to renew educational standards and curriculum at levels and renew standards, policy, strategies, and regulations systematically to be pursued in order to ensure demands and needs to reveal and develop talents, to learn continuously responsibility and ethics of living independently in society, to work, live a quality life and make choices (Government of Mongolia, 2006). The transition of schools to a 12-year education system began in the autumn of 2008 and was planned to be completed by the academic year 2014–2015 (Nookoo, 2016). The 12-year education system consists of primary education (five years), lower secondary education (four years) and upper secondary education (three years), as shown in Table 2. Primary education caters to children starting at age six. The curriculum for the 12-year system was developed that has consistency and continuity with the previous curriculum (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019e).

Age					
	Doctor's degree				
	Master's degree				
18	Bachelor degree (4-6 years)	Diploma (Institution and college)	Technical education (3 years)	Technical education (1.5 years) Vocational education (1 year)	Technical education (1.5 years)
15	Upper secondary education (3 years)				Vocational education
11	Lower secondary education (4 years)				
6	Primary education (5 years)				
2-5	Pre-school (kindergarten)				

Table 2. 12-year education system in Mongolia (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019a)

Above all, it can be seen that the educational system in Mongolia has undergone many reforms over the last three decades. Improvements were made in the educational standards, curriculum, and teaching methodology in the past. The improvement of the curriculum is shown in Table 3.

Year	Characteristics of the curriculum	Purpose of changes
1992	The curriculum has been developed, phasing out heavy Soviet influence and communist ideology and reviving Mongolian national heritage (Robinson, 1995), national culture, customs (Galsan, 2008), and science and technology (Spaulding, 1990).	The new constitution, which stated that Mongolian citizen has a right to learn and that general education is provided at no cost, was approved.
1998	The content was flexible and suggested alternative content in view of the pupils' particular interests and needs.	The arrangement of the education system was restructured to 4+4+2, and a standard-based core curriculum was introduced.
2005	The 11-year content framework was initiated in line with the educational standard for subjects in all grades, and it incorporated knowledge and skills defined in the educational standards.	In 2004, the competency-based standard was launched and followed by this year, the education system shifted from 10 years to an 11-year arrangement.
2008	12-year curriculum that provides succession and incorporates correlation of an 11-year content Framework.	In 2006, the master plan 2006-2015, which is a long-term strategic policy, was developed. Consequently, it was prioritised and prepared to transfer to a 12-year system from the 2008-2009 academic year.
2013	Competency-based curriculum which embeds knowledge and skills that meet international standards.	The Government of Mongolia decided to adopt and use the Cambridge International teaching methods and assessment standards in Mongolia, with the aim of training a globally competitive, skilled labour force.
2019	Updated the curriculum by revising the content and learning objectives.	Revised curriculum on the basis of the research "Implementation of National Core Curriculum of General Education and the Factors Influencing the Implementation" conducted in 2019

Table 3. The main changes that influenced the alteration of the curricula

### *Historical background of the present English language curriculum of upper-secondary education*

English, as the most influential foreign language, has been learned on a large scale in Mongolia (Batchuluun, 1996) following the democratic revolution of 1990. English now has an immense role in both institutional and non-institutional contexts (Dovchin, 2017). The curricula of the English language were developed for primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary education levels. The current English language curriculum of upper-secondary education can be traced back to cooperation between the government of Mongolia and Cambridge English Language Assessment, Cambridge International Examinations and the Cambridge University Faculty of Education.

The Government of Mongolia decided to adopt and use the Cambridge International teaching methods and assessment standards in Mongolia, with the aim of training a globally competitive, skilled labour force. In 2011, the Government of Mongolia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) for cooperation on the reform of standards and curricula for elementary and secondary education (Nookoo, 2016).

The curriculum needed to be modernised, and the government wanted to introduce a new, more modern and interactive pedagogical approach. The aim was to develop a system in which high-quality education was available across the entire country, where every child could flourish and realise their individual talents. The Mongolia-Cambridge Education Initiative was formed. The goal of the Mongolia-Cambridge Education Initiative was to undertake a joint collaborative program to reform education in Mongolia using the combined skills and knowledge of the Mongolian government, Cambridge Assessment International Education, Cambridge Assessment English and the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018). The long-term project goal is to build a world-class education system incorporating internationally recognised best practices and standards. The collaboration project also includes teacher training, capacity building, performance and quality assurance, and development (Khalifa & Brooker, 2018, p. 12). In order to introduce this program, a pilot study was undertaken in Mongolia (Nookoo, 2016) from 2011 to 2016. The first phase, covering curriculum reform and a new assessment model, was piloted by over 40 schools across the country and resulted in a national rollout starting in 2014 (Khalifa & Brooker, 2018, p. 12). The scope of the reform in the curriculum was English, Mathematics, and Science for primary education and English, Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry for secondary education (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018) that will be adjusted to Cambridge International standards. It is considered to be one of the most reputable teaching and testing programs globally. The main prerequisite for the successful achievement of the learning objectives is to have a detailed 'Scheme of work', which provides clear guidance to schools and teachers on how to implement the standards. This Scheme of work includes detailed guidelines for teachers regarding the learning objectives and the methods to be used in the teaching process (Nookoo, 2016). Nookoo (2016) highlighted that heated public discussion and debates are still going on about whether English curricula can be borrowed and adapted for national schools or whether such curricula should be developed purely based on national traditions.

The election happened, and the new government took office in 2012. The government started 'working towards the implementation of the Education Quality Reform policy and Educated Mongolian Citizens national programs' (Nookoo, 2016). Within this framework, the curriculum was revised and decided to be expanded to all schools nationally. Based on the decision by the Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, committees were created for all subjects to develop curricula accordingly. From 2012 to 2017, the committee developed a curriculum to develop cognitive, social and behavioural attitudes, bring the national education content, methodology and system up to international educational standards, and teach a self-study approach. Learning guidelines for its implementation have been developed for each level of education and subject (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019e). The curriculum was reformed and implemented according to the following stages, as illustrated in Table 4.

Year	Education level
2014	Primary education
2015	Lower secondary education
2016	Upper secondary education – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade
2017	Upper secondary education – 11 <sup>th</sup> grade
2018	Upper secondary education – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
2019	Revised and updated all curricula

Table 4. Timeline of implementation of competency-based curriculum (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019e)

Mongolia currently has a 12-year education system. There are 5 years for primary education, 4 years for lower-secondary education and 3 years for upper-secondary education. From 5th grade, the English language has started being taught in public schools beginning with A1 level, and the students graduate with low B1 level as shown in Table 5.

Primary education (English language is taught starting from the 5th grade)	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	working toward A1
	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Low A1
Lower-secondary education	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	Mid A1
	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	High A1
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	Low A2
	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	Mid A2
Upper-secondary education	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	High A2
	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Low B1

Table 5. Language levels of English language curriculum in Mongolia based on the CEFR (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019b)

Public schools implemented the National Curriculum for English Language Education, which was designed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) English levels of A1–B1 in 2015 (Marav, 2022). CEFR encourages a communicative approach to teaching, but it is not broken down by grade level. Thus, each country has to create lessons, textbooks and assessments based on the framework. Mongolia has created core curricula, identified which level corresponds to which grade and formulated its learning objectives and assessment criteria based on CEFR standards (Ragchaa, 2020). These learning objectives are introduced to the students through the curricular topics. According to Mongolian Institute for Educational Research (2019d), the upper-secondary English language curriculum has common themes in the curricular topics including daily life, individual and social life, environment, education, employment, business world, information communication, external world, arts, cultures and creative thinking.

The curriculum emphasises student-centeredness, group activities and hands-on learning (Ragchaa, 2020). Cambridge English is supporting the development of an English language curriculum, making sure it conforms to Mongolia’s educational values and beliefs and also meets the specific needs and demands of the country’s education system (Khalifa & Brooker, 2018, p. 12). Locally written textbooks, designed within the framework

of the curriculum for every grade at the primary and secondary levels, are used by Mongolian public schools (Marav, 2022).

According to Mongolian Institute for Educational Research (2019b), the English language curriculum in Mongolia has been developed as the CEFR's learning objective-oriented for English education. The aim of English language teaching is to provide learning conditions for students to achieve communicative competence in social contexts, including family, school, local community, country and global world, and environmental issues studied through curriculum content given in a levelled form graded according to difficulty. The English course for each grade aims to fulfil learning objectives and develop students' English language skills, such as listening and speaking, reading and writing with some relevant vocabulary and pronunciation patterns within social contexts. Some learning objectives have been reformulated in accordance with the cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy to assess and evaluate the student's knowledge and abilities.

Along with this general aim, the aim of the upper-secondary English language curriculum was developed, and its aim is that students learn the skills to utilise information and further use foreign language knowledge creatively and communicate in accordance with needs and interests within the framework of society, culture, science and life (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, 2019). The curriculum content is given in a levelled form graded according to difficulty (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019b). Moreover, the scope of the curriculum is to develop skills and knowledge to international standards and formative assessment practices where teachers can evaluate their students' skills as well as subject content (Mongolian Institute for Educational Research, 2019b). Overall, the curriculum aims to enhance students' communicative English language skills.

In the upper-secondary education level, The English language curriculum is divided into two parts: compulsory and elective content. Each part delineates the speaking, writing, listening, reading, and use of grammar skills (Nyamkhuu et al., 2021). The teachers focus on developing students' listening and speaking skills in the 11th grade and reading and writing skills in the 12th grade (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports, 2019). Students receive three classes of English per week as a mandatory subject in each grade of their school year. Each class consists of 40 minutes (Marav, 2022). The number of classes increases to six if students choose English as an elective subject in grades 10–12. According to the curriculum, the goal of English education in each grade is to develop students' four language skills. Those are speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills along with English Usage, which is particularly intended to improve students' English grammar and vocabulary through student-centred ways of teaching.

## *Conclusion*

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It is now understood that the Russian language played an important role as a foreign language until the Mongolian democracy of 1990. However, it was replaced by the English language, and over the last three decades, the number of people wanting to learn English has increased at a higher rate than that of any other foreign language. This is because it brings more opportunities for employment and access to the world. English language education and curriculum already have thirty years of history within the Mongolian education system. It has marked its importance and become an in-demand language in Mongolia. Therefore, the government acknowledged its significance and improved it through the course of history.

English is the mandatory language to learn besides Russian in public schools. Thus, the Mongolian government paid and is paying a lot of attention to English language education by implementing different programs, standards and curricula and introducing international projects and international assessments (Ragchaa, 2020).

The major changes in policy and institutional reforms in Mongolia's education sector have intensified since the democratic revolution. Due to political change, curricula have been changed several times, and because of this change, continual reforms and changes were also made in a short period in relevance to English language curricula for all levels of education based on new policies and regulations. There were four sets of improvements and reforms to the curriculum in 1998, 2008, 2013, and 2019 (UNESCO, 2020). The arrangement of the education system was restructured, and a standard-based core curriculum was introduced in 1998; the 10-year system shifted to an 11-year system in 2006, and the 11-year system shifted to a 12-year system in 2008, and all the curricula were updated by revising the content and learning objectives in 2019. These modifications also influenced the upper-secondary English language curriculum along with other curricula. The core decision that influenced the alteration of the English language curriculum of upper-secondary education was that of the Mongolian government, which decided to adopt and use the Cambridge International teaching methods and assessment standards in Mongolia with the aim of training a globally competitive, skilled labour force and to adjust to Cambridge International standards. The aim of an upper-secondary English language curriculum is that students learn the skills to utilise information and, further, use foreign language knowledge creatively and communicate in accordance with needs and interests within the framework of society, culture, science and life. In upper-secondary education, teachers focus on developing students' listening and speaking skills in the 11th grade and reading and writing skills in the 12th grade, and it is intended for the students to achieve mid-A2 level in 10th grade and high-A2 level in the 11th grade and graduate with a low-B1 level. I would like to conclude by mentioning that the B1 level enables the student to understand the main points of certain texts that they are familiar with. It still remains a question as to why English language education has developed slowly in Mongolia and why our students still cannot be fluent in speaking and writing or in the underlying listening and reading skills compared to other Asian countries, especially China, Japan and The Philippines (Ragchaa, 2020). I, as a researcher and English language teacher, agree with Ragchaa and have concerns about students' English language proficiency after they graduate. However, it does not relate to the aim and research questions of this paper, but it is noteworthy to highlight and think about.

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## *Az angol nyelvi tanterv történeti áttekintése és jelenlegi tanterve a felső középiskolában Mongóliában*

Tanulmányunkban megkísérlünk történelmi áttekintést nyújtani a mongóliai angolnyelv-oktatás tanterveiről, valamint a jelenlegi felső középfokú angol nyelvi tanterv kialakulásáról. Az angol tanterv fejlődése fontos problémakör, ám a szakirodalomban gyakran figyelmen kívül hagyott téma. Írásunk a szakirodalomban fellelhető hiányosságokat igyekszik pótolni a legújabb adatokkal. Módszertani megközelítésként dokumentumelemzést alkalmaztunk a felső középfokú angolnyelv-oktatás és az angol nyelvi tantervre vonatkozó adatok szintetizálása érdekében.

**Kulcsszavak:** angolnyelv-oktatás Mongóliában, a felső középfokú angolnyelv-oktatás tanterve, idegen nyelvi tanterv, felső középfokú oktatás.