



## CHINESE METHODS TO TEACH FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is devoted to considering the Chinese methods of teaching foreign languages at primary schools, with a focus on the integration of traditional and modern approaches. With an increasing emphasis on global communication, China has developed unique and effective techniques for early foreign language education. This analysis will highlight instructional strategies such as advanced technological integration, Chinese government initiatives in education, and integrative teaching methods.*

### INTRODUCTION

In today's diverse and fast-paced world, English is widely spoken across various countries. As a global and international language, it serves as an essential mean of communication. As a result, learning English has become a necessity in daily life, especially for young learners. In China, English courses are generally introduced in Grade 3 at the primary school level. However, English instruction often emphasizes exam preparation, as the subject is part of both the high school and college entrance examinations. Over time, this leads students to focus primarily on passing exams, causing them to overlook practical skills like speaking English. As a result, even though students begin learning English early in their education, many struggle to speak it fluently due to a lack of oral practice. Several factors contribute to this issue. First, students lack a natural language-learning environment and many feel anxious when it comes to speaking English. In class, teachers often use Chinese to teach English, ensuring that students understand the content. Naturally, this leads to students using Chinese to respond and engage with their teachers. Second, the problem of "uselessness" arises because students have few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. With no English conversations or exposure in their daily lives, they remain in a predominantly Chinese-speaking environment while studying English. Third, students are often afraid to speak English for a variety of reasons, including the fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, fear of losing face, fear of being the center of attention, and fear of not being able to follow or understand others. These anxieties may fade their willingness to speak, making it difficult for them to practice their oral skills, which in turn affects their performance. Fourth, the issue of inadequate teacher qualifications, especially in rural areas, plays a significant role. Research by Chen and Goh reveals that many teachers feel unconfident in organizing oral activities due to their low self-efficacy and insufficient skills. In some rural schools, English teachers may not be specialists in the subject, and their limited oral proficiency can negatively impact students' pronunciation and intonation. Lastly, traditional English teaching tends to focus on foundational knowledge such as grammar and sentence structures, with more

emphasis on reading and translation. This approach often overlooks the development of communicative competence, further weakening students' ability to speak English fluently.

Having said that, it is beneficial for students to develop their English-speaking skills as early as possible, as age plays a critical role in language acquisition, and learning a second language becomes more challenging later in life. Research by Sebastián-Gallés and colleagues suggests that age can impact children's ability to get the sound patterns of a new language, making it harder for those who begin learning a second language later in childhood. Additionally, early childhood is considered a prime period for language learning. For this reason, many parents now encourage their children to start learning English before they enter school. At the same time, schools and teachers should prioritize developing students' spoken English skills when they are first introduced to the language in primary school.

## **METHODS**

During this research, qualitative and secondary data analysis methods were utilized, and a number of prior scientific works were analyzed. According to the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, a "game" consists of four key elements: 1) a clear objective or goal, 2) a set of rules, 3) competition between groups, and 4) interaction between the players. As such, game-based teaching merges education with the structure of games. In primary schools, using games to teach English is an effective way to encourage students to practice speaking. Young learners, especially those new to English, may not have a strong motivation to learn, but games can captivate their attention at this stage. Therefore, integrating games into teaching helps spark students' interest in English, particularly by encouraging them to speak through dialogue and interaction. For example, if a teacher wants to introduce vocabulary related to shopping, they could create a shopping scenario using real items corresponding to words in the textbook. Students would then use the phrases they've learned in class to interact with the teacher as though they were in a real store. Through this kind of playful, real-world interaction, students practice speaking English naturally and enthusiastically. Over time, they begin to see speaking English as enjoyable rather than a stressful requirement. Additionally, game-based teaching encourages students to use English actively and creatively. For instance, in a "describing-drawing game", students pair up, with one describing an object while the other draws it, and then they switch roles. While the "shopping game" relies on using fixed sentence structures, this describing game challenges students to think and construct sentences on their own. To implement game-based teaching effectively, a few important points should be noted: 1) the design of the game should align with the teaching material and learning objectives, ensuring that games serve an educational purpose beyond entertainment; 2) the teacher should actively participate in the game to motivate students and ensure they practice the material they've learned; and 3) when grouping students, it's beneficial to mix higher- and lower-level English learners so they can support and engage with each other. From the students' perspective, games create a dynamic environment where they feel comfortable communicating in English throughout the activity.

Situational Language Teaching (SLT), as the name says, is a language teaching approach where teachers create real-life scenarios based on course content. Also known as the oral approach, SLT was developed by British applied linguists between the 1930s and 1960s. Its main goal is to engage students and encourage active participation by establishing an interesting and immersive learning environment. For example, when teaching greetings such as "good morning", "nice to meet you", or "goodbye", teachers might simulate situations like arriving at school or leaving school. This helps students quickly and effectively learn these phrases without feeling bored. The use of SLT has shown significant benefits for improving students' spoken English. It encourages students to take the initiative in speaking and helps develop their English thought processes. Additionally, SLT aids in enhancing students' logical thinking, fosters their observation skills, and stimulates their imagination and creativity. There are numerous practical strategies that can be applied in situational language teaching.

This paper highlights three specific methods that teachers can use to effectively implement SLT: game-based teaching, movie-based teaching, and role-playing activities.

## RESULTS

The implementation of innovative foreign language teaching methods in Chinese primary schools has led to significant improvements in student proficiency levels, particularly in English. Analysis of existing literature reveals a marked increase in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among students. Findings indicate heightened engagement and motivation driven by interactive learning technologies and a shift toward communicative competence. Teacher training programs have enhanced instructional quality, equipping educators with modern strategies. Successful bilingual programs have fostered confidence and proficiency, especially in rural areas, while cultural education has deepened students' understanding of the languages studied. Additionally, technological initiatives have addressed regional disparities, ensuring equitable access to quality language instruction. Overall, these advancements align with China's broader educational goals of developing globally competent citizens, reflecting a national commitment to enhancing foreign language education and preparing students for a competitive global landscape.

## DISCUSSION

One of the most significant challenges in China's past foreign language instruction was the over-reliance on rote memorization. While memorization can be useful in language learning, its overuse resulted in students who could recite vocabulary lists but struggled to apply the language in conversational contexts. In response, the Chinese education system has increasingly embraced communicative language teaching (CLT) methods, which prioritize meaningful interaction over memorization. In current classrooms, teachers are encouraged to use task-based language learning activities that simulate real-life scenarios, such as role-playing, dialogues, and group discussions. These activities focus on developing students' communicative competence and fluency, moving away from the traditional approach of drilling vocabulary without context. Additionally, immersive learning environments and project-based learning have been integrated to give students more opportunities to actively use the foreign language in practical ways, such as storytelling or solving problems in the target language. In the past, China's foreign language classrooms were heavily teacher-centered, with students being passive recipients of knowledge. This resulted in limited opportunities for student engagement and practical language use. Today, while the role of the teacher remains important, there has been a shift towards more student-centered learning. This change is reflected in the increased use of collaborative learning, peer-to-peer activities, and interactive technologies that encourage students to take an active role in their own learning. One significant innovation is the use of educational apps and online platforms, which allow students to practice language skills independently at their own pace. These tools adapt to individual learning needs, offering personalized feedback and allowing students to focus on areas they find challenging. This shift towards autonomy helps foster student engagement. Moreover, this approach moves away from the passive learning that was once common in China's foreign language classrooms. Additionally, a persistent challenge in China has been the urban-rural divide in foreign language education. Urban areas tend to have better resources, access to qualified foreign language teachers, and exposure to immersive environments, while rural areas often lack these advantages. In the past, this disparity led to a wide gap in language proficiency between students in urban and rural schools. To bridge this divide, the Chinese government has introduced several initiatives. One solution has been the implementation of online learning platforms and remote teaching programs that connect students in rural areas with native-speaking teachers from other regions or countries. These platforms not only provide rural students with access to high-quality instruction but also expose them to authentic language use. Moreover, the government has been increasing funding and resources

to improve teacher training in rural areas, ensuring that rural schools can also adopt modern teaching methods and technologies.

### CONCLUSION

The methods currently employed in Chinese primary schools to teach foreign languages, particularly English, demonstrate a significant evolution from earlier approaches, emphasizing a more effective pedagogy. China's success in foreign language instruction stems from a combination of government-driven initiatives, innovative use of technology, and a balanced integration of traditional and modern teaching methods. The early introduction of foreign languages, coupled with a national focus on communicative competence, helps students develop practical language skills from a young age. What makes China's approach unique is its centralized and systematic effort to address prior challenges such as rote memorization, over-reliance on grammar-translation, and regional disparities in educational resources. By leveraging digital platforms, improving teacher training, and promoting immersive and student-centered learning, China has managed to overcome these limitations, particularly in rural areas where access to quality language instruction has historically been limited. The introduction of bilingual teaching models, extracurricular activities, and a stronger focus on cultural competence further enhances language learning, preparing students for real-world communication. In short, the success of China's foreign language teaching at the primary level lies in its strategic blend of modern technological solutions, personalized learning, and a consistent, government-backed framework that ensures equitable access and quality across the country.

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