

Curriculum Evaluation

General Education Program: Introduction to English for Grade 1 and Grade 2

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I. Curriculum Information

Name: General Education Program – Introduction to English for Grade 1 and Grade 2.

Context: This curriculum was issued by Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training in 2018.

The curriculum document includes the following components:

- The purpose of the program: to introduce English as an optional subject for Grade 1 and Grade 2 students (ages 6–7) before English becomes a compulsory subject in Grade 3.
- Goals: to help students develop cultural awareness through learning English and to build the four language skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking.
- Content: linguistic knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar), linguistic skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking), and topics (colors, animals, toys, school objects, family, shapes, locations).
- Teaching pedagogy: Total Physical Response, task-based learning, and project-based learning.
- Evaluation: the purpose of evaluation and the parties responsible for conducting it.
- Explanation and instructions: information on teacher training, facilities, and learning conditions.

II. Evaluation in Detail

1. Governing Document

a. Characteristics of the Subject and Principles for Program Development

This section of the curriculum provides an explanation and rationale for the program. Its key points are summarized below.

Characteristics of the Subject

- The program introduces English as an optional subject for Grade 1 and Grade 2 students, before it becomes compulsory in Grade 3.
- It aims to help students become familiar with English naturally, focusing on listening and simple speaking skills.
- English is treated as an instrumental subject that supports communication, creativity, and lifelong learning.
- The program is designed to ensure continuity and connection with the English curriculum for Grades 3–12.
- It recognizes that children aged 6–7 learn language best through experience, play, and imitation rather than formal grammar study.
- Listening comprehension is prioritized through simple communication, stories, songs, and rhymes.
- The program consists of 140 lessons across four semesters in Grades 1 and 2.
- Assessment is integrated into classroom activities and focuses on communication and participation rather than testing.

Principles for Program Development

- Alignment with the National General Education Curriculum, following the same principles of objectives, outcomes, methods, and assessment.
- Grounding in scientific, educational, and psychological research and international English-teaching practices, adapted to Vietnamese culture and local contexts.
- A foundation in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), in which language is taught for real-life communication rather than memorization.
- An emphasis on communicative competence, with listening and speaking preceding reading and writing.
- The use of familiar, age-appropriate themes that can be repeated and expanded across grades.
- A learner-centered design that emphasizes:

- Student progress and engagement over rigid objectives.
- Active, creative learning through participation and experience.
- The teacher’s role as a facilitator who guides and motivates learners.
- Flexibility to adapt to local conditions, including urban–rural differences and resource availability.

Evaluator's Commentary

This section provides a clear foundation for the elements included in the curriculum. The emphasis on creativity and on the communicative function of language is a notable strength.

More specifically, this section addresses three critical questions: why, how, and what. With respect to why, the curriculum states clearly that the program is intended to prepare students for the point at which English becomes a mandatory subject. With respect to how, it specifies that the program will focus on communicative English through a learning-through-play environment. With respect to what, it names specific teaching methods, such as Communicative Language Teaching, that align with these purposes. Overall, this section is informative in that it establishes the general background and rationale for the program.

b. Program Objectives

This section divides the program’s objectives into a general objective and a set of specific objectives, presented below.

General Objective

The Introduction to English program for Grade 1 and Grade 2 aims to help students develop a basic awareness of the English language. It allows them to become acquainted with, explore, and experience the language in ways appropriate to their cognitive, emotional, and psychological development. The program is also intended to help students gain confidence before beginning English in Grade 3 and to foster a positive attitude toward the subject.

Specific Objectives

Upon completion of the program, students will be able to:

- Listen to and recognize the names of the letters in the English alphabet.

- Listen to and identify some basic sounds of the English alphabet.
- Listen to and understand numbers within the range of 20.
- Listen to and understand words and phrases related to activities familiar to them.
- Listen and respond nonverbally in simple, familiar communication situations.
- Listen to and follow simple classroom instructions in English.
- Listen to and respond in simple English in familiar question-and-answer situations.
- Answer simple, familiar questions about their own experiences, using single words or short sentences.
- Begin to give simple, familiar directions during basic classroom activities.
- Recognize and read aloud familiar, simple, and concrete words and short phrases.
- Write a few simple words on familiar topics.
- Begin to develop a positive attitude toward learning English.

Evaluator's Commentary

The general objective is well written and consistent with the program's stated purpose of helping students build a basic awareness of English so that they are better prepared for Grades 3 and 4, when English becomes compulsory. The curriculum's attention to students' developmental capacity is also a strength, as it can help teachers select teaching styles that avoid placing an undue learning burden on young students.

The specific objectives are detailed and expressed in simple sentences, which supports readability. However, these objectives do not fully align with the program's mission statement, which describes listening, speaking, reading, and writing as the four target skills, with speaking and listening prioritized. In practice, the specific objectives focus predominantly on listening comprehension. The curriculum would benefit from stating more explicitly how much emphasis is intended for each skill, so that course objectives—and, in turn, teachers' allocation of activities, assignments, and class time—can be designed proportionately.

c. Evaluation Measurement

This section specifies the requirements students are expected to meet by the end of the program, which serve as a measure of whether the stated objectives have been achieved.

Grade 1

- Learn 13 letters, simple initial sounds, numbers 1–10, and 35–70 familiar words.
- Listen and respond to simple instructions and classroom talk.
- Repeat short phrases and songs.
- Begin to read and copy simple words.

Grade 2

- Learn additional letters and sounds (beginning and ending), numbers 1–20, and 35–70 new words.
- Understand and use simple classroom English.
- Speak short sentences in familiar contexts.
- Read and write simple words and short phrases.

Evaluator's Commentary

These requirements function effectively as can-do statements for the classroom, and they are clearly worded in terms of what students should be able to do. Given the length of the program, however, the current statements are somewhat limited in number. Additional, more granular can-do statements for individual class sections across the school year would strengthen this section. Producing this level of detail would require considerable additional effort from curriculum designers, but it is a worthwhile investment for a program implemented at national scale.

d. Content

This section specifies the topics and skills covered in the program, summarized below.

Language Knowledge

- Phonics: basic sounds and letters of the alphabet.
- Vocabulary: 70–140 simple, concrete words related to familiar topics.
- Structures: simple sentence patterns used in daily communication.

Language Skills

- Listening: understand and respond, verbally or nonverbally, to simple classroom conversations and instructions.
- Speaking: answer short questions, repeat simple phrases, and participate in games and songs.
- Reading: read and recognize familiar words and simple illustrated sentences.
- Writing: trace, copy, or complete simple words.

Themes: Colors, animals, toys, school, family, shapes, places, daily activities, classroom activities, body parts, days of the week, clothes, transportation, fruits, food, emotions, games, and rooms in the house.

Evaluator's Commentary

This section conveys informative content regarding what will be taught in the program. The topics are well suited to students aged 6 to 8, as they reflect subject matter that is already familiar to this age group, and the language-skill tasks are appropriately scaled for young learners. These choices align with the program's goal of building a foundation for higher grades. The use of songs and games to teach speaking is a particularly creative and developmentally appropriate strategy.

e. Teaching Methods

This section describes the teaching methods used in the program and provides instructions for teachers.

The program adopts a communicative approach intended to help young learners develop basic English skills naturally through fun, interactive activities.

Teachers are expected to guide and organize learning using methods such as Total Physical Response, experiential learning, task-based learning, and project-based learning, with a focus on natural language use across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers are also expected to respect the Silent Period, introduce reading and writing gradually, and use songs, games, and stories to make learning enjoyable.

Students, in turn, are expected to learn actively through play, songs, and storytelling, discovering language patterns naturally. Listening and nonverbal understanding are expected to precede simple

speaking, with encouragement and positive feedback used to build learners' confidence and motivation.

Evaluator's Commentary

The curriculum states its teaching approach explicitly, which can meaningfully support teachers in implementation, and this approach is consistent with the program's stated goals and objectives. One of the curriculum's strengths is the internal consistency among its mission, learning objectives, teaching methods, and teaching approach.

With respect to teacher training, however, the document does not provide procedural detail, which may create difficulties for local schools and teachers responsible for implementation. It is recommended that the curriculum describe the training process in greater detail so that local schools and authorities can conduct training effectively.

f. Assessment and Feedback

The curriculum addresses assessment only briefly, in a single statement near the beginning of the document: "Assessment is integrated into classroom activities, focusing on communication and participation rather than testing."

This statement suggests that teachers are expected to rely on informal assessment—that is, observing students during class activities rather than administering formal tests.

Evaluator's Commentary

This approach has the advantage of reducing pressure on students, which is consistent with the program's broader goal of minimizing stress, and it may also reduce the time teachers spend creating and grading tests. However, relying on a single assessment method raises concerns about reliability. First, teachers' observations can be subjective, since teachers may hold varying expectations of students and may lack consistent criteria for judging progress toward the curriculum's stated goals. Second, informal assessment is more difficult to track over time, as it depends heavily on whether and how consistently teachers record their observations.

A more balanced approach would incorporate a variety of assessment types, including formal tests, observation, and project-based assessment. The curriculum's position that testing is inherently stressful for young learners is also debatable: testing can be made low-stress when teachers avoid

placing pressure on students—for example, by pairing tests with light incentives such as small prizes for completion. Such approaches can make testing feel less stressful while still providing a more reliable measure of students’ progress.

2. Evaluating the Process

a. Analysis

Student Analysis

Although the curriculum does not explicitly describe its needs-analysis process, the program appears to reflect consideration of what students want, need, and lack. The curriculum acknowledges the difficulties young learners may face when they reach higher grades in which English is compulsory, and it is designed to build the linguistic foundation that helps students become more comfortable with the language over time. Its emphasis on the learning experience, rather than on formal grading, and its repeated attention to the psychological needs of young learners in the teacher-training guidance both indicate meaningful effort toward understanding students’ needs.

Needs analysis for young learners necessarily differs from that of adult learners, since older learners typically have a clearer understanding of their own motivations and needs, whereas young learners are not yet cognitively developed enough to articulate their learning purposes. Consequently, assumptions and classroom observation play a larger role in identifying what young learners want, need, and lack.

Environment Analysis

The curriculum appears to give limited attention to environmental factors that affect implementation. Language programs in public schools are often less effective when environmental factors, such as the availability of qualified teachers and learning materials, are not adequately considered. Many teachers are not yet fluent English speakers, which makes it challenging for them to provide the communicative, interactive environment the curriculum calls for; in practice, this can lead teachers to fall back on more traditional methods, such as reading, repetition, writing, and memorization.

A second concern is the substantial geographic disparity across regions. Because the curriculum is applied at a national scale, these disparities cannot reasonably be overlooked. Students in large cities generally have greater access to authentic materials, such as books, television programs, and bookstores, whereas students in rural areas often have far more limited access to comparable resources, including libraries and books. These disparities raise questions about the feasibility of implementing a single, uniform curriculum nationwide.

A regionally differentiated version of the curriculum, tailored to local conditions, would likely improve feasibility. Although developing such versions would require additional effort, it would help ensure that students across regions are treated equitably and are able to learn in a manner suited to their circumstances.

b. Implementation

A curriculum can appear well designed on paper, yet present considerable challenges once implemented in practice. In this case, the curriculum's components are generally well aligned, with few apparent internal conflicts; nonetheless, several challenges are likely to arise in the process of applying and practicing this curriculum within Vietnamese educational contexts.

A primary concern is the shift toward communicative language teaching, which may be difficult to implement in many schools—particularly public schools where teachers continue to rely heavily on traditional methods. Adapting to a communicative approach takes time, and it first requires that teachers themselves be proficient English speakers, which is not yet the case for many teachers in Vietnamese public schools.

A related concern is the shortage of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas. If this shortage persists, achieving the goals and objectives set out in the curriculum will be difficult. Greater investment in analyzing existing conditions would help policymakers design a curriculum that is more feasible within the Vietnamese context.

Several additional recommendations follow from these concerns. First, rather than relying on one-off training sessions, the government should support teachers through continuous professional development, mentoring, and long-term training, which would allow for a more gradual transition to communicative methods. The government should also expand opportunities for teachers to improve their own English proficiency through structured upskilling programs.

Given the substantial differences between urban and rural areas in Vietnam, a single, uniform curriculum is unlikely to be realistic. Greater flexibility in pacing or materials would allow different regions to implement the curriculum more effectively. Because communicative teaching also requires appropriate materials and resources that many schools currently lack, providing free digital resources, sample lesson plans, and low-cost teaching aids would meaningfully support teachers.

Finally, strengthening monitoring and feedback mechanisms and conducting pilot programs prior to nationwide implementation would give policymakers a clearer picture of the challenges teachers face and would allow the curriculum to be adjusted accordingly.

III. Summary

This evaluation examined the General Education English Program for Grade 1 and Grade 2 in Vietnam. Overall, the curriculum is well organized, and its goals, content, and teaching methods are largely aligned. Its focus on helping young learners become familiar with English in a natural, low-stress manner, together with its support for creativity and communicative learning, is well suited to the needs of young children.

At the same time, several issues merit attention. The specific objectives focus disproportionately on listening, even though the program is intended to develop all four language skills. The assessment section lacks sufficient detail, and reliance on informal assessment alone raises concerns about reliability. The curriculum also does not fully address the differences between urban and rural areas, particularly with respect to resources and teacher proficiency, and many public-school teachers continue to rely on traditional methods and may lack strong English proficiency—both of which pose challenges for implementing communicative teaching.

In light of these issues, it is recommended that the government invest further in analyzing real classroom conditions; provide continuous teacher training and support for improving teachers' English proficiency; develop flexible, regionally adapted versions of the curriculum; and expand available teaching materials. Pilot programs and stronger feedback mechanisms would further help ensure that the curriculum is realistic and effective for implementation nationwide.