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# Educating Supranational Citizens: The Incorporation of English Language Education into Curriculum Policies

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This study investigates the cross-national institutionalization of English as a regular school subject over the past century and discusses how the rise of English as a global language in today's curricular policy models around the world reflects an expansive conception of supranational citizenship. Our extensive comparative and historical data suggest that substantive societal characteristics of individual countries have played fairly insignificant roles in the rapid diffusion of English language education, especially in the past half century. This result sheds light on the institutionalist perspective in which the worldwide spread of English language education is understood to reflect universalistic nation-state purposes and principles of education that emphasize the empowerment of the individual in global society.

## Introduction

English language education has emerged as an important policy issue that “needs to be taken into account in its language policy by any nation-state” (Spolsky 2004, 91). In recent decades, English has been widely depicted as a useful medium of international communication in various spheres of society.<sup>1</sup> The often-used categories of the developing and the developed do not appear so meaningful when considering the perceived importance of this language in many different countries. Although the rise of the United States as the world's superpower after World War II seems to have facilitated the rapid diffusion of English language education across national education systems, the association between English and some particular Western cultures, if it still exists,

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is becoming much weaker today.<sup>2</sup> Despite challenges from other languages, English is not only the most frequently used language in various international agencies and transnational companies; it is also widely seen as the most useful language for accessing information and scientific findings (Crystal 2003; Grabe 1988).

Of course, such usefulness of English seems to be an important factor driving countries to promote the language in their education systems. Enhancing the English proficiency of future citizens has, in many countries, been conceived as a vital means for promoting national development, especially in the context of an increasingly integrated global economy. However, it is also important to understand that the virtues of providing English language education to schoolchildren have been taken for granted in most national education systems, despite varying degrees of actual utility of English depending on country-specific societal needs. Educational researchers and policy makers in non-English-speaking countries decry limited opportunities for schoolchildren to learn this foreign language, but the taken-for-granted nature of its usefulness tends to make scholars devote relatively little effort to reaching a deeper understanding of the macro-historical context involved. This study is intended to be a systematic examination of the cross-national diffusion of English language education over the past century, with special analytic attention given to its institutionalization after World War II when the nation-state system became consolidated as the world model in international institutional arrangements.

Although systematic research on the rapid diffusion of English language education across national education systems is less extensive than might be expected, conventional perspectives tend to expect the incorporation of English into the school curriculum of a country to result from an educational policy decision contingent upon the country's concrete societal condition. Despite the various ways to define the concept of societal condition depending on theoretical orientations of different perspectives, one might reasonably speculate from such perspectives that English is expected to be taught in schools

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to the degree of its substantive utility under the economic, political, and cultural conditions of a given country. Obviously, such views convey useful insights on some national variation. However, they often have difficulty accounting for the influences from the wider environment that provides institutional rules and values to which nation-states are likely to conform to promote their structural legitimacy (Meyer et al. 1997). In order to provide a more balanced analysis, we attempt to examine some competing, yet complementary, explanations through a series of empirical analyses. After examining several hypotheses derived from different theoretical perspectives, we discuss implications for educational policy and practice.

### Theorizing the Spread of English Language Education

The diffusion of English as a legitimate component of curricular content in schools around the world provides a concrete context to which different conceptual perspectives on the sociohistorical nature of the school curriculum can be applied. Three different perspectives are briefly presented here that provide useful insights into the spread of English in the school curriculum. They represent *a rational-functionalist perspective*, *a neocolonialist perspective*, and *an institutionalist perspective*. This categorization, as many taxonomic frameworks do, probably overstates the degree of difference among perspectives. We should note that exceptions and complexities abound within each theoretical approach. Despite this limitation, it will be helpful to identify the main defining qualities of different approaches and their underlying assumptions so that we may derive a set of hypotheses that can be empirically tested and further explored.

First, the most popular account of the spread of English comes from a rational-functionalist perspective, in which English is understood as a practical commodity that brings various kinds of concrete benefits to individuals and society. This perspective posits that the incorporation of English into the school curriculum of a country is a result of a deliberate policy decision influenced by concrete societal needs for it. With the increasing consolidation of the global economy and the intensification of complex economic interdependency among different countries (Castells 2000; Henderson et al. 2002), promoting English language education is widely regarded as a rational policy choice to address societal demands for international communication. For example, one might expect that *countries whose economic conditions are heavily dependent on international trade are more likely to incorporate English into the school curriculum* (hypothesis 1). English as an important medium of communication in international business is akin to a common currency whose use increases economic efficiency through reduced transaction costs (Grin 1996). Considering that the use value of a language may be sensitive to the size of its speaker population as a potential

network of communication (de Swaan 2001), the widespread use of English in international business may well motivate those countries with a strong orientation toward international trade to make efforts to join the network. In a similar vein, one might reasonably assume that *a country whose largest export partner speaks English as the national language is more likely to incorporate English into the school curriculum* (hypothesis 2). As part of attempts to boost exports, national governments might want their future citizens to be more sensitive to the languages spoken by their major export partners (Stanley et al. 1990). In addition, among linguistically diverse countries, the decision to teach English as a regular school subject has often been made in order to “avoid the problem of having to choose between competing local languages” (Crystal 2003, 85). English in those countries serves as a “neutral” means that not only unifies different linguistic groups into national citizens but also minimizes undue advantage for a particular group. In this respect, one might plausibly postulate that *the incorporation of English into the school curriculum is more likely in countries of high linguistic diversity* (hypothesis 3). Regardless of different forms of rational-functional thought, the core proposition is that the incorporation of English into the school curriculum is a result of its fitness to the economic and social conditions of a given country. A close relationship between what is taught in schools and the constituency is a central assumption of this line of thought.

Second, from a neocolonialist perspective, historical trajectories of national societies in relation to international politics account for a great deal of why a particular country’s school curriculum is in its current shape. Indeed, many newly independent countries have tended to inherit, with minimal changes, the educational system from their former colonial powers for reasons such as the shortage of educational resources and the paucity of alternatives (Altbach and Kelly 1984; Carnoy 1974). The school curriculum in the third world or peripheral areas has been influenced by the legacies of colonial education and neocolonial penetration from the advanced metropolitan center. The spread of English language education across many third-world countries is often seen as a result of deliberate policies of the advanced metropolitan center to maintain neocolonial relations with the third world (Phillipson 1992; Whitley 1971). Many neocolonialist accounts of the spread of English provide useful insights for understanding various mechanisms through which colonial discourses on English language education function to disseminate and perpetuate the image of English as a superior language. Such mechanisms have often been associated with the neocolonial development of English, not only in everyday life but also in academic and political discourse, for example (Mühleisen 2003; Pennycook 1998). The core proposition of this perspective is that the incorporation of English into the school curriculum in a country is contingent upon the colonial legacy of the country. Following the central logic of this perspective, one might reasonably

expect that *countries are likely to incorporate the language of their former colonizer, if any, into the school curriculum insofar as it is an internationally used language* (hypothesis 4). Despite a unique theoretical orientation, the neocolonialist perspective shares a central underlying assumption with the rational-functionalist perspective; both perspectives assume that there exists a close relationship between what is taught in schools and the concrete societal conditions of a given country.

Finally, an institutionalist perspective posits that “education is an institution . . . that at a deeper level is strongly affixed to global norms and rules about what education is and how schools should operate” (Baker and LeTendre 2005, 8).<sup>3</sup> Understanding education as deeply grounded in global institutional ontology and rationalization, this perspective highlights that the school curriculum is constantly influenced by institutional dynamics of the wider environment in which general models of curricular formations are constituted and elaborated globally.<sup>4</sup> Based on this perspective, the incorporation of English into the school curriculum is understood largely as an institutional embodiment of world-level educational norms and values and not simply an instrumental means of individual societies to meet idiosyncratic local requirements. With the modern nation-state model consolidated as a taken-for-granted political unit of sovereignty in the world polity, nation-state purposes have been increasingly rationalized around common principles of progress and justice (Meyer et al. 1997). Such a homogeneous cultural construction of nation-states has been an important institutional condition for rapid diffusion within the world system (Strang and Meyer 1993). Indeed, the institutional environment in contemporary world society provides solid ground for the rapid diffusion of English as a curricular subject. For instance, English language education is widely regarded as important not only to facilitate the spread of modern scientific and technological discoveries but also to contribute to the economic and cultural development of nations. The association of English with such collective meanings and values embedded in modern world culture undergirds the legitimacy of English as an appropriate curricular subject across countries. In this respect, it is reasonable to expect from an institutionalist perspective that *countries with more ties to global civil society are more likely to incorporate English into the school curriculum* (hypothesis 5). Extensive empirical evidence suggests that world models often diffuse through international linkages of global civil society with assistance from various international nongovernmental organizations (Boli and Thomas 1999). In the modern world system, where various policy discourses flow through expanding networks of global civil society, national education systems and their school curricula are likely to be quite isomorphic across countries in accordance with worldwide epistemic models of education despite pervasive “loose couplings” between official models and actual implementations (Meyer and Ramirez 2000).

## Data and Method

In order to see the global patterns of institutionalization of modern foreign languages in school curricula, we have collected and updated cross-national and historical data (e.g., Cha 1989, 1991, 2006; Cha and Ham 2008).<sup>5</sup> The accumulation of the data gathered for our prior exploratory studies conducted over the past two decades allows us to systematically examine the cross-national contextual factors that have contributed to the spread of English as the most popular foreign language in primary and secondary school curricula. Our data analysis involved five historical periods between 1900 and 2005.<sup>6</sup> In each period, countries were treated as either an adopter or a nonadopter of English as the first foreign language, both at the primary level and at the secondary level.<sup>7</sup> Since curricular standards and guidelines are susceptible to change over time, the adopters in a given period were not automatically assumed to be adopters in succeeding periods but were assessed regarding whether or not they continued to have English as the first foreign language in the school curriculum. Since we were interested in English taught as a foreign language, English-speaking countries were excluded from the sample.<sup>8</sup>

Using a series of descriptive statistics, we first traced the historical patterns of the incorporation of English into school curricula across countries. Next, differences in the historical trend of diffusion of English language education were found among countries, depending on the experience of colonization by an English-speaking country. Regional variations were also examined by analyzing the data according to world regions. Finally, we used ordered logit regressions to assess the effects of different national characteristics on the incorporation of English into school curricula. In our regressions, we were interested in the diffusion of English language education across countries that were never under colonial rule by an English-speaking country in order to examine the diffusion mechanism through which “voluntary” adoption of English language education occurred as opposed to “inherited” adoption. The dependent variable was an ordinal categorical variable indicating the degree of adoption of English language education in a given country. For this ordinal variable, we coded two for a given country in a certain period of time if English was incorporated into the school curriculum as the first foreign language at both the primary and secondary levels (i.e., full adoption); we coded one if English was incorporated into the school curriculum as the first foreign language only at the primary level or only at the secondary level (i.e., partial adoption); we coded zero if English was not incorporated into the school curriculum as the first foreign language either at the primary level or at the secondary level (i.e., nonadoption).<sup>9</sup>

Seven independent variables were entered into our regressions according to the three perspectives reviewed earlier. Table 1 presents the descriptive

statistics and definitions of the independent variables used in the ordered logit regressions.<sup>10</sup> The variables used from the rational-functionalist perspective were *international trade*, *English-speaking export partner*, and *linguistic diversity*, based on hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, respectively. In connection to the neocolonialist perspective, we used the *international language-speaking colonizer* variable to test hypothesis 4. In relation to the institutionalist perspective, we included the *global civil network* variable to examine hypothesis 5. Two additional variables, *economic development* and *recently acquired sovereignty*, were entered into the regression equation as control variables. These two control variables were added because, considering the costs involved in providing English language education for schoolchildren, most conventional perspectives would expect countries in better economic conditions to be more able to incorporate English into the school curriculum; in addition, countries of recently acquired sovereignty might temporarily prioritize establishing a solidary national community over educating supranational citizens.

## Results

### *Overall Historical Patterns*

Table 2 shows the percentage of countries teaching English as the first foreign language in primary and secondary schools over the period from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. Our historical data indicate that English was not a strong candidate for a modern foreign language as a regular curricular subject in schools before the mid-twentieth century. Less than one-tenth of independent countries taught English as the first foreign language in primary schools before 1945. Even in secondary schools, where the instruction of modern foreign languages was firmly institutionalized by the end of the nineteenth century (Cha 1989), the proportion of countries where English was incorporated into the curriculum as the first foreign language was less than one of out of three countries before 1945. However, the proportion sharply increased to 32.2 percent at the primary level and 59.5 percent at the secondary level in the 1945–69 period; the proportion finally reached 68.1 percent at the primary level and 78.5 percent at the secondary level in the 1990–2005 period.

Figure 1 provides an overall historical picture of the incorporation of English compared to French, German, Russian, or Spanish as the first foreign language. The historical trends appear to involve two dramatic changes on a global scale: one is the rise of foreign language education at the primary level, and the other is the increasing dominance of English in foreign language education at both primary and secondary levels. At the primary level, a foreign



TABLE 1

*Independent Variables with Descriptive Statistics, among Countries That Were Never under Colonial Rule by an English-Speaking Country, 1945–2005*

VARIABLE	1945–69		1970–89		1990–2005	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
International trade						
English-speaking export partner	4.663 (2.699)	71	6.164 (3.175)	80	7.070 (3.092)	106
Linguistic diversity	.375	80	.310	87	.336	110
International language-speaking colonizer	.329 (.279)	83	.350 (.281)	87	.396 (.281)	111
	.446	83	.414	87	.438	112

DESCRIPTION

International import and export divided by gross domestic product; 1960, 1980, and 1995 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively.

Is English the national language used by the largest export partner? Coded one if yes, otherwise coded zero; 1960, 1980, and 1995 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively.

Linguistic diversity index ranging from zero for no diversity to near one for high diversity; 1961, 1985, and 2000 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively.

Was the country once under colonial rule by a French, German, Russian, or Spanish-speaking country? Coded one if yes, otherwise coded zero.

Global civil network	Number of international nongovernmental organizations to which individuals or organizations belong in the country (× 100 memberships); 1966, 1980, and 1995 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively.	3.086 (3.094)	83	4.152 (3.897)	86	9.016 (8.061)	109
Economic development	Gross domestic product per capita (× \$1,000); 1960, 1980, and 1995 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively.	3.162 (4.813)	78	5.764 (8.812)	82	6.381 (10.741)	106
Recently acquired sovereignty	Independence after 1920, 1945, and 1970 for the first, second, and third periods, respectively. Coded one if yes, otherwise coded zero.	.373	83	.356	87	.196	112

NOTE.—Descriptive statistics in this table are based on countries for which data on English language education are also available at both primary and secondary school levels. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

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TABLE 2

*Percentages of Countries Having English as the First Foreign Language in the School Curriculum, 1900–2005*

SCHOOL LEVEL	1900–1919		1920–44		1945–69		1970–89		1990–2005	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Primary	5.4	37	9.6	52	32.2	115	44.2	138	68.1	163
Secondary	18.2	33	32.7	49	59.5	116	65.5	139	78.5	163

language, let alone English, was not a popular candidate for regular curricular content before 1945. The proportion of countries that incorporated any modern foreign language into the school curriculum as the first foreign language was only about one-tenth of countries in the 1900–1919 period. Although the proportion increased in the 1920–44 period, it was still only about one out of five countries. In the 1945–69 period, the proportion dramatically increased to more than three out of five countries. This sudden increase was primarily due to the noticeable increase in the percentage of countries where English or French was adopted as the first foreign language in the school curriculum. In the succeeding periods from 1970 to 2005, the popularity of French constantly diminished, but the dominance of English became clearer, resulting in overall increases in the percentage of countries where a modern foreign language was taught at the primary level.

Different yet similar historical trends appear at the secondary level. Our data show that the instruction of a modern foreign language was already an integral element of secondary curriculum models institutionalized across countries in the early twentieth century. In the 1900–1919 period, the propensity to teach French or German spread across countries, and French was the most popular modern foreign language taught in schools across countries before 1945. In the 1945–69 period, however, English began to surpass French in terms of cross-national popularity as the first foreign language, while German suddenly disappeared from being chosen as the first foreign language by any non-English-speaking country. In the periods from 1970 to 2005, less than one-fifth of countries taught French as the first foreign language, although French was the second most popular modern foreign language globally.

Figure 2 provides additional information about historical patterns of the relative status of English. Our data show that the ratio of countries that taught English as the first foreign language to those that taught French, German, Russian, or Spanish was only 0.2 at the secondary level in the 1900–1919 period, meaning that English was seldom the first choice. However, the situation dramatically changed: the ratio increased to 1.5 in the 1945–69 period and to 4.3 in the 1990–2005 period. It is thus possible to say that, in the

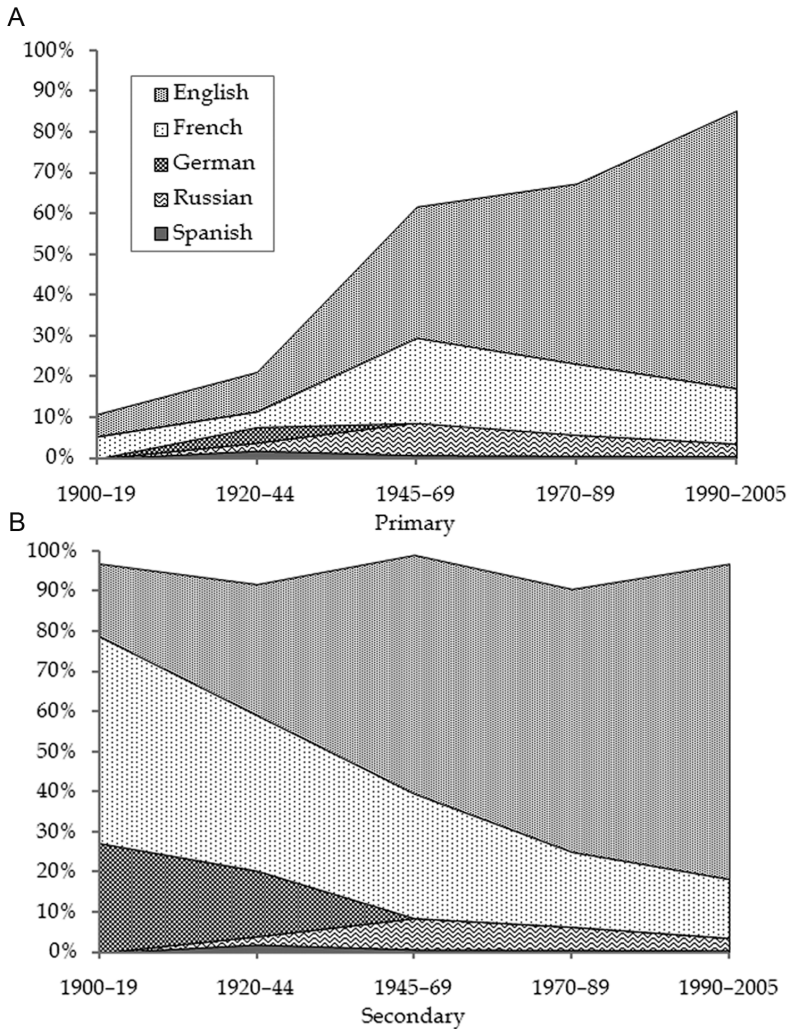


FIG. 1.—Stacked area charts for the percentages of countries having English, French, German, Russian, or Spanish as the first foreign language in the school curriculum (*A*, primary; *B*, secondary) among non-English-speaking countries, 1900–2005. For the sample sizes for each period, see table 2.

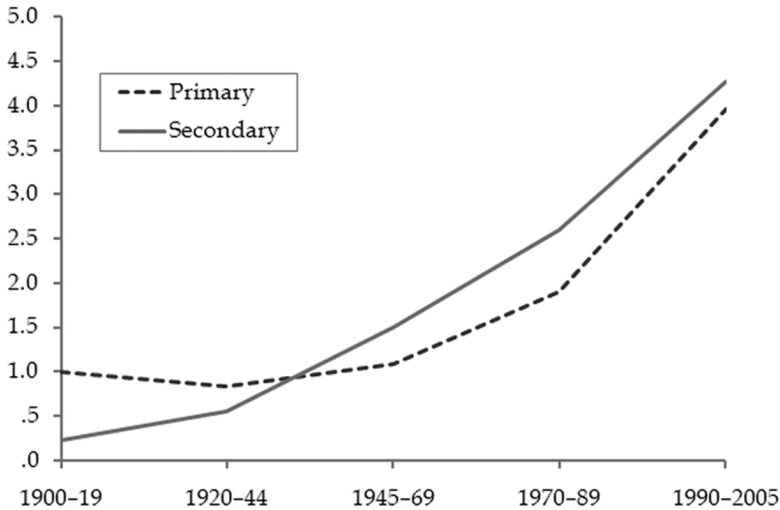


FIG. 2.—Ratios of countries having English versus one of French, German, Russian, or Spanish as the first foreign language in the school curriculum, among non-English-speaking countries, 1900–2005. For the sample sizes for each period, see table 2.

1990–2005 period, the number of countries teaching English as the first foreign language at the secondary level was more than four times the number of countries teaching other foreign languages. The situation was not very different at the primary level: the ratio was 1.0 or less before 1945 but increased dramatically from 1.1 in the 1945–69 period to 4.0 in the 1990–2005 period.

Some may plausibly suspect that the rapid spread of English language education was due in part to the addition of newly independent former British or U.S. colonies to the sample. This appears true in our data presented in table 3. Consistent with hypothesis 4, a substantial difference persisted at the world level in terms of the percentage of countries choosing English as the first foreign language in the school curriculum, depending on the experience of colonial rule by an English-speaking colonizer. Our data show that, among societies that were once under colonial rule by an English-speaking country, the proportion of countries having English as the first foreign language at the primary level was already more than four-fifths in the 1945–69 period. The proportion in the same period, however, was far less than one-fifth among societies that were never under colonial rule by an English-speaking country. The situation was not very different at the secondary level. As a proportion, more than nine out of 10 former colonies of an English-speaking country

TABLE 3

*Percentages of Countries Having English as the First Foreign Language in the School Curriculum, Depending on the Experience of Colonial Rule by an English-Speaking Country, 1945–2005*

SCHOOL LEVEL	COLONIAL RULE BY AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY?	1945–69		1970–89		1990–2005	
		%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Primary	Once under colonial rule	80.6	31	85.4	48	98.0	51
Primary	Never	14.3	84	22.2	90	54.5	112
Secondary	Once under colonial rule	93.3	30	87.8	49	98.0	51
Secondary	Never	47.7	86	53.3	90	69.6	112

chose English as the first foreign language in the 1945–69 period, whereas less than half of other countries did so in the same period.

However, it is important to note that the rapid spread of English language education has another facet. Our data clearly show that countries that were never under colonial rule by an English-speaking country have also been increasingly attentive to the incorporation of English into the school curriculum over the past half century. Notably, as the proportion of countries that incorporated English into the school curriculum increased, the rate of increase became even greater. Among those countries without any historical experience of colonization by an English-speaking country, the percentage that had English as the first foreign language at the primary level increased exponentially from 14.3 percent in the 1945–69 period to 54.5 percent in the 1990–2005 period. At the secondary level, following a modest increase from 47.7 percent in the 1945–69 period to 53.3 percent in the 1970–89 period, the percentage sharply increased to 69.6 percent in the 1990–2005 period.

A further breakdown of the data by world region in table 4 once again clearly shows that the legitimate status of English in the school curriculum is evident across most world regions, even with former colonies of English-speaking countries excluded from the sample. In particular, countries in Asia and Oceania, despite huge cross-national differences within this region in terms of history and economic development, appear to converge on teaching English as the first foreign language at both the primary and secondary levels. An illustrative case of such enthusiasm for English language education in this region is South Korea, where a variety of policy strategies have been employed to enhance the quality of English language education for schoolchildren despite controversies regarding their actual impact on educational practices in local contexts (Nunan 2003; Shin 2007). Some examples of such policy items include introducing an increasing number of English native speakers into public

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TABLE 4

*World-Regional Patterns of the Diffusion of English as the First Foreign Language in the School Curriculum among Countries That Were Never under Colonial Rule by an English-Speaking Country, 1945–2005*

SCHOOL LEVEL/REGION	1945–69		1970–89		1990–2005	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Primary:						
Africa south of the Sahara	16.7	18	9.5	21	20.0	25
Asia and Oceania	9.1	11	23.1	13	80.0	15
Central Europe and the former USSR	11.1	9	12.5	8	65.0	20
Latin America and the Caribbean	20.0	20	25.0	20	47.6	21
Middle East and North Africa	12.5	8	22.2	9	40.0	10
Western Europe	11.1	18	36.8	19	81.0	21
Secondary:						
Africa South of the Sahara	15.8	19	20.0	20	28.0	25
Asia and Oceania	50.0	12	66.7	12	100.0	15
Central Europe and the former USSR	11.1	9	12.5	8	70.0	20
Latin America and the Caribbean	80.0	20	76.2	21	90.5	21
Middle East and North Africa	55.6	9	70.0	10	70.0	10
Western Europe	58.8	17	63.2	19	76.2	21

schools as English teachers, encouraging Korean teachers of English to use only English as the language of instruction, and even setting up English-only villages exclusively for educational purposes. English is now taught as the only required foreign language in virtually every school in South Korea from the third year of primary education to the end of the upper secondary level.

Also noticeable is the dramatic increase in the number of countries teaching English as the first foreign language in Western Europe at the primary level. The rapid spread of English in this region seems largely due to the consolidation of the European Union as a supranational political, economic, and cultural entity, where English functions as *de facto* the most important working language notwithstanding the Council of Europe’s “plurilingualism” policy that celebrates linguistic diversity in Europe (Breidbach 2003; van Parijs 2001). An interesting example in this respect is Zurich, the most populous canton of Switzerland. In Zurich, where German is the official language, French had long been taught in schools as the most popular second language because it is one of the “national” languages of Switzerland along with German, Italian, and Romansh. However, the canton of Zurich decided in the late 1990s to increase the share of English in the school curriculum while reducing the share

of French (Grin 1998). Despite concerns that it might damage the Swiss model of national unity, English in Zurich's schools is now given more curricular emphasis and is even taught from an earlier age than French. Zurich's decision has recently triggered many other cantons, especially in German-speaking Switzerland, to consider similar educational plans.

It is also notable that a great proportion of countries in central Europe and the former USSR incorporated English into the school curriculum as the first foreign language at both primary and secondary levels during the 1990–2005 period. The rise of the United States as the world's unchallengeable superpower with the fall of the Soviet Union during this period seems to have contributed to this sudden increase in the percentage of countries teaching English in this region. It is an illustrative example of educational change that "all countries in central and eastern Europe in which Russian was a mandatory [foreign] language [in the school curriculum at a particular stage of compulsory education] in 1982/83 abandoned this policy from the beginning of the 1990s" (Eurydice 2005, 37).

Sub-Saharan Africa, which shows a relatively moderate increase in the percentage of countries incorporating English as the first foreign language into the school curriculum, is the only exception. This phenomenon is probably due to the fact that most countries in this region inherited, upon independence, the metropolitan languages of their former colonizers as their official languages (i.e., French, Portuguese, and Spanish as well as English). Since these languages are de facto foreign languages for the speakers of local languages, these countries may have difficulties accommodating an additional foreign language in the school curriculum. Nevertheless, it is important to note that many of these countries also teach English as a required foreign language in schools in addition to the metropolitan languages inherited from their former colonizers. Former French colonies in this region, such as Central African Republic, Congo, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo, for example, teach English as well as French as a compulsory subject in secondary schools, although slightly less curricular emphasis is devoted to English compared to French.

### *Cross-National Diffusion Patterns*

Another issue of interest here is how well the incorporation of English as a regular school subject can be explained by national characteristics. The coefficients in table 5 indicate the amount of increase in the predicted ordered log odds of moving to the next higher level in our ordinal dependent variable by a one-unit increase in an independent variable, with all other independent variables held constant.<sup>11</sup> In our regression analyses, we focused on examining the effects of the independent variables among countries without any expe-



TABLE 5

*Ordered Logit Regressions for English as the First Foreign Language in the School Curriculum, among Countries That Were Never under Colonial Rule by an English-Speaking Country, 1945–2005*

	1945–69	1970–89	1990–2005	
	(A1)	(B1)	(C1)	(C2)
International trade	-.022 (.134)	-.136 (.083)	.029 (.077)	.028 (.077)
English-speaking export partner	1.386* (.721)	.588 (.487)	.303 (.469)	.353 (.484)
Linguistic diversity	.389 (1.102)	-.469 (.916)	-2.380** (.804)	-1.533 (.874)
International language-speaking colonizer	-.534 (.606)	-.424 (.496)	-1.885*** (.485)	-2.004*** (.513)
Global civil network	-.057 (.153)	-.009 (.103)	.166** (.053)	.124* (.052)
Economic development	-.004 (.094)	.011 (.047)	-.107** (.038)	-.101** (.037)
Recently acquired sovereignty	-1.360 (.884)	-1.695** (.620)	-.733 (.578)	-.597 (.600)
Sub-Saharan Africa				-1.973** (.649)
Threshold 1	-.364 (1.130)	-1.725* (.844)	-2.044* (.847)	-2.492** (.863)
Threshold 2	1.780 (1.164)	-.114 (.822)	-.812 (.822)	-1.154 (.828)
Parallel lines test $\chi^2$	3.500	5.909	10.354	7.610
Nagelkerke $R^2$	.280	.278	.394	.462
$N$	68	80	104	104

NOTE.—Standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable is an ordinal categorical variable indicating the degree of adoption of English language education in a given country: full adoption, partial adoption, or nonadoption. Full adoption = English was the first foreign language at both primary and secondary school levels; partial adoption = English was the first foreign language only at the primary level or only at the secondary level; and nonadoption = English was not the first foreign language at either the primary level or the secondary level. For  $\chi^2$  tests of the parallel lines assumption,  $df = 7$  in all models except for model C2, where  $df = 8$ . All  $\chi^2$  values are statistically insignificant at the level of  $p \leq .05$ , suggesting that the assumption is not violated.

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

rience of colonial rule by an English-speaking country. As already shown in table 3, almost all former colonies of an English-speaking country adopted English as the first foreign language at both primary and secondary levels as soon as they became independent; since this is a ubiquitous postwar pattern, the increasing rate of transnational diffusion of English language education in the past several decades is mostly due to its institutionalization across countries that were never under colonial rule by an English-speaking colonizer.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the prevailing assumption of a tight linkage between curricular contents and country-specific conditions, the results in table 5 are quite suggestive. With regard to the effects of the individual variables, with other variables held constant, most of the independent variables describing national characteristics did not stably increase the expected ordered log odds of moving to the next higher level of incorporation of English into the school curriculum. Inconsistent with hypothesis 1, there was no statistically significant effect of *international trade* in any period from 1945 to 2005. Similarly, although the *English-speaking export partner* variable had a significant positive effect in the 1945–69 period in line with hypothesis 2, the effect disappeared in the succeeding periods. These insignificant or unstable results suggest the possibility that the diffusion of English language education around the world may have been rather independent of individual countries' actual needs for English, as expected from the institutionalist perspective.

The effect of *linguistic diversity* was also not significant, except in the 1990–2005 period, when its effect was significantly negative, meaning that linguistically more diverse societies were less likely to incorporate English into the school curriculum in this most recent period. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. One possible explanation of this significant negative association may be that many sub-Saharan African countries, where high ethnolinguistic fractionalization is normal, tend to place relatively moderate curricular emphasis on English compared to countries in other world regions, as already shown in table 4. Our further analysis in model C2 of table 5 supported this explanation. We added the sub-Saharan Africa dummy variable to our regression and found *linguistic diversity* insignificant after controlling for this dummy variable. The inclusion of this dummy variable, however, did not meaningfully alter other results. The effect of another language-related variable, the *international language-speaking colonizer*, was consistently negative in line with hypothesis 4, but it was statistically significant only in the 1990–2005 period. What this significantly negative effect in this latest period also means is that English language education has become highly institutionalized to the degree that only some countries that inherited other international languages from their former colonizers compose the majority of nonadopters of English as the first foreign language.

Overall, the results in 5 show that the structuration of national education systems often exceed—or is “loosely coupled” with—concrete societal needs

of individual countries (Meyer et al. 1997). In addition to such loose couplings, the institutionalist perspective expects countries with more ties to the *global civil network* to have a greater tendency to incorporate English into the school curriculum (Boli and Thomas 1999). Since a certain high level of English proficiency has been emphasized increasingly in world discourses as a basic literacy skill for tomorrow's supranational citizens, a country's institutionalization of English language education is likely to be associated with the extent to which a country is connected to the cultural construction of world discourses. The results in table 5 provide some evidence that supports this explanation. There was a significant positive effect of the global civil network on the tendency to incorporate English into the school curriculum as the first foreign language in the 1990–2005 period. In line with hypothesis 5, the transnational diffusion of English language education in the recent phase appears to have been facilitated by international linkages of global civil society. However, its effect was not significant in earlier periods. One plausible explanation of this insignificance may be that the prevalence of international discourses emphasizing English proficiency as part of basic literacy skills is rather a recent phenomenon. Indeed, contrasting discourses have been present concerning the prevalence of English and its impact on various spheres of society, with associated fears of linguistic domination by a particular culture.<sup>13</sup> Today's new vision of education as contributing to unlimited progress and justice throughout the world, however, appears to give increasing legitimacy to English as an integral curricular subject, whose significance in empowering the individual as a capable and responsible member of global society has become an institutionalized rule or "myth" in international policy discourses.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, we found the effects of our control variables very interesting. With regard to the effect of *economic development*, it was not significant from 1945 to 1989. In the 1990–2005 period, when this variable was statistically significant, the direction of its effect was negative. Such an insignificant or negative effect of this variable would not be expected from most conventional perspectives that expect the feasibility of an educational policy to be contingent upon the country's economic condition under which to afford the costs involved in formulating and implementing the policy. However, even the negative effect of this variable is not surprising from the institutionalist perspective because the universal meanings of teaching English to future citizens may have more intense significance for those countries that are anticipating development than for other countries already seen as economically advanced economies.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the effect of *recently acquired sovereignty* was statistically insignificant except for 1970–89 period. This insignificant result is very suggestive as it implies that newly independent societies were also very attentive to the provision of English language education to their future citizens despite the possibility that establishing a solidary national com-

munity might have been their immediate political priority, at least temporarily, upon independence.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In the modern world, an important role of schooling is to provide universal education in order to equip children with basic skills that are necessary to learn advanced knowledge and skills in the future. Today, English appears to have joined this category of basic skills in the sense that English is no longer seen narrowly as a language of particular Western countries, although it once used to be. As our data show, English is becoming a regular school subject whose legitimacy is taken for granted in most national education systems, largely regardless of individual countries' immediate societal needs. As Meyer (2006, 264) puts it, "the modern world society is built around an expansive conception of the rights and capacities of the individual human person, seen as a member of human society as a whole rather than principally as the citizen of a nation-state." Children around the world are not only learning English language skills; they are changing their identities into new ones through which they are better positioned within a larger social context beyond national borders. It seems that English language education around the world has been increasingly linked to the expanded notion of citizenship that emphasizes the centrality of the individual as a primordial member of larger civil society, rather than as a member of a bounded national territory, which we may call "supranational" or "transnational citizenship" (Meyer 2006; Ramirez 2006). That is, one of the legitimate and desirable roles that education systems around the world are expected to play involves "the construction of collective identities" (Koenig 2008, 95) that empower future citizens in global society.

Extensive cross-national and historical data analyzed in this study suggest that teaching English in schools has been becoming an institutionalized routine across diverse countries. Only small percentages of countries incorporated English into the school curriculum up until the first half of the twentieth century. Within half a century, however, English achieved a legitimate status in the school curriculum in most countries around the world.<sup>16</sup> Most conventional views explain the popularity of English language education in terms of its economic and political functions in a given society. Such explanations proffer useful insights from a realistic stance. However, an educational phenomenon is not only a functional or political response to meet substantive societal needs; it is also an institutional embodiment of transnational cultural rules and values. By gaining legitimacy from universalistic world models and principles, English language education appears to have consolidated its status in curricular policies across countries. Reflecting worldwide rationales re-

garding the significance of English proficiency in the increasingly globalized world as well as international discourses emphasizing the empowerment of the individual as a capable and responsible member of global society, the importance of English language education is becoming taken for granted across non-English-speaking countries. A certain high level of English proficiency appears to be increasingly conceived as a basic skill for everyone, rather than as something that privileges particular social strata, although the latter was once the case especially in many postcolonial societies.

In support of linguistic diversity around the world, the theorization of language as inseparable from human existence extends to growing concerns about the “ecology” of languages, and such concerns are now framed in terms of how to preserve indigenous local languages and promote linguistic human rights (Hornberger and Hult 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The celebration of linguistic diversity in world discourses, however, is not necessarily in conflict with the worldwide discursive promotion of English language education. Indeed, both ways of discourse formation are grounded in the common notion of the individual whose personhood is seen as constituted independent of national citizenship. That is, an individual person is theorized as a member of subnational and transnational communities in addition to a national citizen. Increasing attention has been given to both indigenous and global languages along with national languages because the nation-state as a societal unit is no longer conceptualized as the only primary boundary for an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). Further, both linguistic diversity and English language education are commonly “invoked with . . . the world interest in mind” (Ramirez 2006, 382), rationalized around universalistic principles of progress and justice.<sup>17</sup> While linguistic diversity is seen to contribute to the richness of the cultural heritages of the world, English is assumed to serve as a useful tool for international communication and global cooperation.

Education is a futuristic project in character. Contemporary political conceptualizations of education continue to expand the purposes of public education far beyond providing direct or immediate functional utility to individuals or to society (Gutmann 1987; Labaree 1997). Education systems around the world are constantly responsive to new visions of society, not only within but also beyond national boundaries. They have integrated various educational aims into their educational policies, with increasing emphasis placed on education for world citizenship and sustainable development, for example (Banks 2004; Cha et al. 2010; Fiala 2006). In this respect, the incorporation of English language education into curriculum policies around the world can be seen largely as an embodiment of ideas that have been constituted in various “transnational spaces” (Gough 2000) for educational discourses, symbolically reflecting institutional dynamics of the modern international system. As economic and cultural globalization processes intensify, an individual child in

even a remote peripheral nation-state is now expected to become a capable and responsible member of a new “imagined community” that may be called “world society” (Meyer et al. 1997). Current world-cultural values that celebrate individual personhood as the fundamental basis of one’s distinctive and special roles in society undergird various educational policies for empowering all individual children regardless of their circumstances (Frank and Meyer 2002). In this context, the potential effect of educational policies for English language education extends not only to their contribution to meeting some concrete societal needs within individual countries but also to their institutional impact on our cognition by which every individual is seen as having the ontological status as a primordial member of global civil society.

Given the unprecedented spread of English instruction across national education systems, reflective evaluations of current curricular policies on English language education are necessary in order to better assess their intended and unintended effects on nations, local communities, and, most importantly, individual children. Without such reflective procedures, English language education incorporated into the school curriculum might remain only as an official policy element whose impact on lived experiences in the classroom might be limited in many parts of the world, especially where an adequate teaching force or other necessary educational resources are not present. Further, the access to quality English language education should not be determined based on children’s socioeconomic backgrounds or on other socially constructed categories of difference that serve to privilege some groups over others, either within or across countries. In this respect, the world institutionalization of English language education poses both promises and challenges to educational policy makers and practitioners all around the world. Sustained and shared policy efforts should be directed toward pondering how to better design English language education as an empowering tool to help all schoolchildren develop a heightened sense of both cultural diversity and common humanity in the context of today’s world society.<sup>18</sup> As the incorporation of English language education into national education systems has become a world model, educators and policy makers should become reflective enactors of this curricular policy model in order to achieve its intended educational goals while constantly identifying and minimizing its unintended consequences.

## Notes

1. The number of people who speak English as a native language is estimated to be about 400 million around the world; other English speakers, estimated at about a billion at least, are those who have learned English as a second or foreign language (Crystal 2006).

2. Although there have been some critical views on the growing impact of English on local cultures and languages around the world, a certain high level of ability to

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communicate in English seems to be becoming in many countries a new kind of basic literacy that no longer conveys narrowly Western ideological connotations (Crystal 2003; Honna 2005). In this respect, English proficiency may be comparable to the new digital literacy for information and communication technologies, which is now part of basic competency for tomorrow's global citizens (Ham and Cha 2009).

3. This theoretical approach is also referred variously as, e.g., a "neo-institutionalist" perspective or a "world culture" or "world society" perspective (Baker and LeTendre 2005; Boli and Ramirez 1986; Meyer et al. 1997).

4. Empirical studies of specific curricular areas such as mathematics (Kamens and Benavot 1991), science and technology (Ham and Cha 2009; McEneaney 2003), and social studies and human rights education (Ramirez et al. 2009; Wong 1991), e.g., provide substantial evidence supporting the notion that the social construction of appropriate curricular content is, by and large, the embodiment of institutional rules and values that are embedded in the cultural dimension of world society.

5. Primary data sources included many documents and reports of education-related international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1958; UNESCO and National Institute for Educational Research [Japan] 1970; UNESCO Regional Office of Education in Asia 1966); International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO 1937, 1958, 1984, 1986, 1992, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006); and Eurydice, the Information Network on Education in Europe (Eurydice 2005). Useful data sources also included official Web sites of national ministries of education as well as reports about education in foreign countries produced by some national governmental agencies (Board of Education [Great Britain] 1897–1914; U.S. Bureau of Education 1873–1915). In addition, country reports edited by Amadio (2004), Ho and Wong (2004), and Kandel (1924–1944) as well as studies by Fishman et al. (1996) and Sasnett and Sepmeyer (1966) provided valuable information.

6. Only independent (or self-governing) countries were included for analysis; societies under colonial rule were not included until they became formally independent. Including all societies for analysis wherever data were available regardless of formal sovereignty did not change overall historical patterns, however.

7. In our data, either a compulsory or compulsory elective subject taught in primary or general secondary schools was considered as a regular school subject in this study, but an optional subject was excluded from analysis.

8. If English was an official language in a given country and, at the same time, was the first language of more than half of the population, we regarded the country as having English as the first/national language and thus excluded the country from the sample. In other words, unless English was used as the first language by more than half of the population in a given country, we regarded it as *de facto* a foreign language even if it had an official status in the country.

9. One might want to utilize an event history model to analyze the data. Unfortunately, our data set did not allow us to do that because there were many countries for which we were not able to find the exact year of adoption (or abandonment) of English language education, which would result in substantial missing data in an event history model. Although we relied on extensive cross-national and historical data sources, they often did not provide information about exact years of adoption and instead provided information about approximate periods. Indeed, this is not surprising considering that it is only a recent phenomenon for international agencies to compile comprehensive cross-national data on school curricula in a systematic manner in collaboration with national ministries of education. For related discussions, see Benavot et al. (1991) and Kamens et al. (1996).

10. Data sources included the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook* series, Roeder's (2001) *Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization Indices*, SIL International's *Ethnologue* data set, the Union of International Association's *Yearbook of International Organizations* series, and the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* data set.

11. A critical assumption of ordered logit regression is that the effect of independent variables is the same for each level of the ordinal dependent variable (McCullagh 1980). The insignificant results from the  $\chi^2$  tests of this "proportional odds" or "parallel lines" assumption in table 5 suggest that this assumption is not violated in our analyses.

12. The effects of interest did not much differ if countries that were once under colonial rule by an English-speaking country were added to the sample. The results are available on request.

13. The linguistic diversity of the world is often seen to be threatened by the rise of English as a global language. Such a view is based on the analogy between an increasingly reduced number of living languages in the world and an increasing number of endangered species in the natural ecology. Of course, this ecology metaphor is useful to draw attention to diverse linguistic heritages around the world. However, many sociolinguists today observe a variety of modern Englishes that have evolved in different parts of the globe (Davies 2005; Kachru 1990), thereby questioning the traditional assumption that English has some unidirectional influence from one particular culture to another. As Honna (2005, 76) notes, "the spread of English as a language for multinational and multicultural communication utilized by an enormous number of non-native speakers shows that English is becoming more and more de-Anglo-Americanized in many regions of the world." Similarly, Graddol (2006, 58) emphasizes that "the history of English, or rather, the traditional way the history is told, represents an obstacle to a clear view of the future. Global English may represent an important discontinuity with the past, rather than the triumph of [nineteenth-century] Modern English on the world stage."

14. We use the word "myth," derived from Meyer and Rowan (1977), to emphasize that an institutionalized rule often conflicts with practical efficiency but persists as a taken-for-granted routine.

15. In other words, some countries that are highly developed and modern may delay adopting innovations; since they are already deeply integrated into world society, conforming to additional world standards may not be their immediate political priority. For example, Rauner (1998) provides some evidence supporting this hypothesis with respect to the cross-national incorporation of global civics content into social studies curricula.

16. It is important to note that the transnational isomorphism in educational policy discourses inevitably involves the pervasiveness of various "loose couplings" (Meyer and Ramirez 2000; Weick 1976) within individual countries. The reason is that imported models may be "indigenized" or "hybridized," at various levels of policy and practice, into innovations extensively different from the original models that have been officially adopted and institutionalized (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Paine and Fang 2006). Such institutional isomorphism accompanied by local or national recontextualization processes is primarily due to the "structural duality of educational policy" (Ham et al. 2010) through which nation-states successfully incorporate and display elements that conform to global epistemic models of education and yet preserve considerable autonomy of state action.

17. See also Lo Bianco (2009, 126–27), who describes the traditional discourses of foreign language education as marked by the "continuous oscillation between principles of [economic] efficiency and [cultural] identity" and introduces the notion of "world-



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mindedness” as an alternative principle, emphasizing that “cultures penetrate each other, are not discrete or confined to nation-states.”

18. Toolan (2003), e.g., discusses the possibility of “English as the supranational language of human rights.”

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