



REVIEW ARTICLE

STUDY ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING CENTER IN MONGOLIA: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTER

***Uranbileg Chogsom, Zegiimaa Choindon and Bulgaa Altanshar**

Graduate University of Mongolia

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*Corresponding author:

Uranbileg Chogsom

ABSTRACT

The first decision was made to retrain the Russian language teachers with English language teachers' preparation course for secondary school in Mongolia in 1991. Within the framework of the education sector reform, the discussion was held on improving the foreign language teaching policy and steps were taken to develop English as one of the main foreign languages of instruction in 1995. The first English language training centers had been established which was based on market and social demand since 1993. This study aims to clarify the dynamics and quality changes in English language teaching that based on the case of the foreign language training center in Ulaanbaatar, which started with English language course in 1996. In this context: First, a quantitative study was conducted using content analysis on the archival documents of the training center (1996-2024). Second, in order to verify the results of the quantitative study, a qualitative semi-structured expert interview method was used to conduct an interview survey with managers of English language training centers. As a result, conclusions were drawn about the dynamics and quality changes in English language teaching in the training centers.

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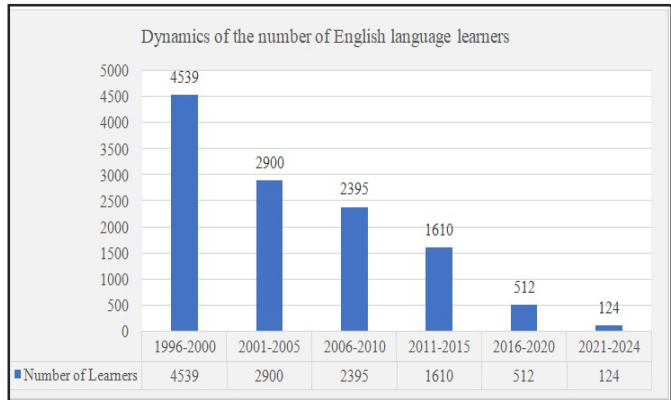
INTRODUCTION

Mongolia expanded its international relations, and the demand for learning and mastering the English language significantly increased, with the transition to democracy and a market economy in 1990. The education system, which had been dominated by Russian, gradually shifted toward a multilingual system, with English assuming a leading position. During this time, many foreign language training centers focused on English emerged. In 2003, under the directive of the Minister of Social Welfare and Labor (Order No. 25), regulations were established regarding the requirements for professional short-term training activities. Based on these regulations, the National Employment Center (NEC) began issuing "Certificates of Compliance for Professional Training Activities," which allowed foreign language training centers to operate. The issuance of such certificates was based on criteria including training programs, teaching staff qualifications, learning environment, and financial capacity (Study on the Quality of Vocational Training Centers, 2016). Between 2002 and 2016, a total of 2,329 vocational training institutions were registered nationwide under the Ministry of Labor's affiliated National Employment Center (NEC), of which 1,746 also provided foreign language training. Among these, 75% (1,746) operated in Ulaanbaatar, while 25% (583) were located in rural

areas (Study on the Quality of Vocational Training Centers, 2016). In Ulaanbaatar alone, 70% (1,125) of vocational institutions were foreign language training centers, with 436 of them specifically focusing on English language training. However, in 2016, following the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Labor, Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Sports (2016), the registration of foreign language centers was updated, leading to a twofold reduction in the number of registered centers. There were registered 550 institutions, of which 250 were English language training centers from December 2016 to October 2017. During the global COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), as in-person classroom sessions were completely suspended, foreign language centers shifted to online learning formats. According to data from the Training, Evaluation, and Research Institute of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (2023), 215 training centers are currently registered in Mongolia, with 101 of them specializing in English language training. According to experts at the Labor Researching Institute, Only 19 centers have re-approved new English language training curriculum of centers. Due to the expiration of the permits for other centers, they have not conducted program evaluations, yet continue their operations.

Dynamics of the number of English language learners in the case of this training center. Initially, the number of students

enrolled in English language courses was high, but gradually decreased over time.



Source: Based on the archival records of the English language training center.

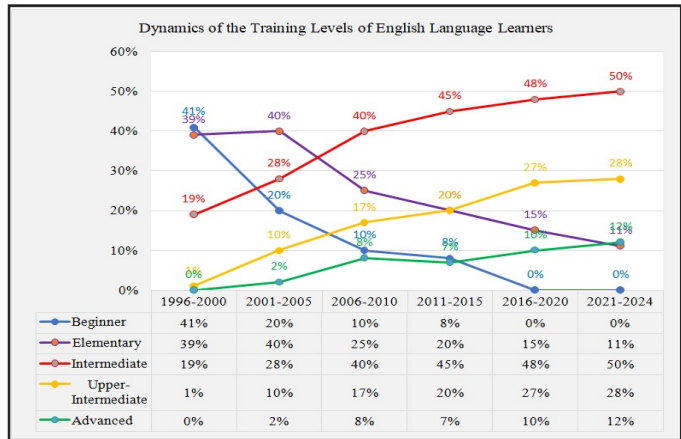
Graph 1. Dynamics of the number of English language learners at the foreign language center

In the research conducted through semi-structured expert interviews with the managers of training centers, they explained the decrease in the number of English language learners by linking it to the growing number of training centers.

- **Interviewee A:** "Initially, there were only a few training centers. According to the 2016 registration data of foreign language training centers in Mongolia, there were 436 centers offering English language courses. The significant increase in this number was related to the transfer of the training center approval process from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Labor, which began issuing permits through the 'National Employment Service Centers'"
- **Interviewee B:** "Perhaps starting from 2014, language training centers began to face strong criticism in the media, which may have contributed to the decrease in their number. I remember the criticism saying that 'Language courses have become a new business'"
- **Interviewee C:** "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many training centers were closed, and now only a few remain, primarily those with quality training programs, financial capacity, foreign investment, or ties to large companies. This is a natural phenomenon, as only those that meet specific criteria have survived"
- **Interviewee D:** "The development of online learning due to the pandemic may have reduced the demand for training centers"
- **Interviewee E:** It is important for educational institutions at all levels to pay attention to bringing English language learning to a world-class level"
- **Interviewee F:** English language training has become a prominent global sector, driven by technological advancement. This is due to the development of technology. Without knowledge of English, there will be problems in installing and operating new equipment. All technical specifications are in English.
- **Interviewee G:** In the future, the demand for adult and academic English language training will increase, and the number of English-speaking professionals will increase.

Dynamics of the training levels of English language learners. Classifying the training levels of English language learners according to standard programs clearly reflects the

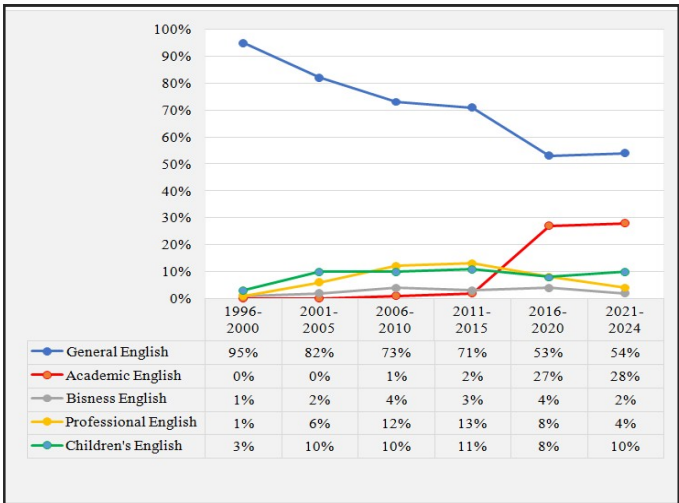
changes in the quality of their education. In the period from 1996 to 2000, beginner English language learners made up 41% of the students at the training centre, but by 2016-2024, this group had completely disappeared. This change is linked to the integration of English language learning into all levels of the education system. Additionally, elementary learners accounted for 39% of the total number of students at the center between 1996 and 2000, but by 2021-2024, they made up only 11%, with the majority being young children. Intermediate learners comprised 19% of the total students in 1996-2000, but by 2021-2024, they represented 50%. These learners are mostly students with specific goals, such as overcoming academic gaps or traveling and studying abroad. Advanced beginner learners, who were just 1% of the total students in 1996-2000, increased to 28% by 2021-2024. Advanced learners made up 2% of the total in 2001-2005, but their share grew to 12% in 2021-2024. Most advanced and upper-intermediate learners have specific objectives, such as preparing for exams like IELTS, TOEFL, and TOEIC. English language training centers offer a variety of courses, classifications, and formats to meet the needs and goals of learners. These can generally be categorized as follows:



Source: Based on the archival records of the English language training center.

Graph 2. Dynamics of the Training Levels of English Language Learners at the foreign language center

- **General English:** This focuses on fundamental grammar, vocabulary, speaking skills, and listening comprehension. It is intended for learners from beginners to advanced levels. General English language training is provided to those aged 16 and over. It has declined sharply since 1995, reaching 50 percent, but has been steadily declining since 2016, with a normal growth rate of 1-2%.
- **Academic English:** This includes preparation for exams such as IELTS, TOEFL, and SAT, with a focus on improving academic writing, reading, and speaking skills. Academic English courses are offered to international and domestic university students, students and adults over the age of 18. Since 2016, there has been a sharp increase in the number of students taking academic English, accounting for 30% of all students, but since 2020, there has been a normal increase of 1-2%.
- **Business English:** This aims to teach language skills used in the business environment, such as business vocabulary, e-mail writing, and giving presentations, generally designed for the workplace. Business English courses are mainly attended by civil servants over the age of 22, accounting for 2-4% of all students.



Source: Based on the archival records of the English language training center.

Graph 3. Comparison of Training Classification Dynamics

- **Professional English:** This is for specific fields such as Tour Guide, Healthcare, Medicine, Pharmacy, Technical English, Engineering, And Law, Focusing On Industry-Specific Terminology etc. The number of people who have taken professional English courses in the last 10 years has doubled compared to the previous 10 years. This is due to the increased demand for English-speaking professionals.
- **Children’s English:** Designed for school-age children, it uses games, picture books, and engaging lessons to teach the language. Children's English language courses are offered to children aged 8-16. The number of children aged 8-16 enrolled in English language courses has been stable since the pandemic, growing by 2%.

In the category of General English, learners made up 95% of the total number of students at the center from 1996 to 2000. However, from 2016 to 2024, this number slightly dropped to 54%. While this shift is related to the integration of English into all levels of the education system, the decline was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2023. The demand for Academic English training was just 1% of the total students at the center from 2006 to 2010, but by 2021-2024, it increased to 28%, showing that the demand for specialized learners remained strong. The drop in overall student numbers likely contributed to the higher proportion of Academic English learners. Based on the case study of the training center, here is the comparison of the dynamic distribution of the training categories:

The sharp rise and fall in Professional English learners were examined through semi-structured expert interviews, with one manager noting:

“Most of the learners in Professional English courses were studying English for tourism and guiding, but with the outbreak of COVID-19, these courses stopped. After the pandemic, interest in this field diminished as people started using the internet more, and fewer came to the courses. While the number of children learning English has drastically decreased, it remains at about 10% due to the overall reduction in student numbers”

Digital or E-learning dynamics. From 1996 to 2000, the training center used cassette tape recorders and CD players,

which can be considered as the first attempts incorporating some elements of modern interactive learning. During the period from 2001 to 2005, the center upgraded its facilities to include a classroom with cassette tape recorders, CD players, headphones, and microphones. This allowed learners to record their speech and listen to it after lessons to identify and correct mistakes, integrating some interactive elements into the learning process. While the use of cassette tapes and CDs provided limited interactivity compared to modern interactive learning, it was innovative for that time. The training center established a virtual reality-based environment for children’s summer training in collaboration with recreation and camp sites from 2006 to 2010.

Table 1. Digital development dynamics of the case study training center

Year Training materials	1996- 2000	2001- 2005	2006- 2010	2011- 2015	2016- 2020	2021- 2024
Audio tape recording CD, DVD	100%	100%	100%	100%		
Lingua phone cabinet		20%	30%	50%	60%	
Vacuum & Virtual			10%	25%	35%	40%
Interactive program		10%	30%	35%	35%	40%
Online, Video content, podcast				10%	40%	30%
Classroom, Blended Hybride					20%	50%

Source: Based on the archival records of the English language training center.

This environment was a vacuum-sealed (completely isolating the learner from the real world) virtual reality setting. From 2011 to 2015, the center introduced interactive learning formats using cassette tapes, CDs and projectors. Between 2016 and 2020, the center began using the digital platform "Google Classroom" for e-learning. From 2021 to 2024, the center transitioned to the blended learning model, combining both classroom and online education to support the learning process.

Dynamics of teacher development in English language training center. In Mongolia, short-term training for English language teachers began in 1992, and teaching licenses were first granted. From 1993 to 1995, as long as teachers had a teaching license, they were allowed to work in training centers. Starting in 1996, it became a requirement for teachers to have completed higher education and possess a teaching license to work in training centers. In 1993, universities began training professional English language teachers. From 1997, it became mandatory for training centers to hire professional English language teachers, but licenses of teachers who had worked previously were extended based on their experience. The requirement for professional English language teachers was formally established and implemented starting in 2000. In Mongolia, the EXCELL program for training English language teachers was implemented in collaboration with the U.S. English Language Institute between 2002 and 2004. The ALTE program by the European Language Testing Association was also introduced in 2003. These programs were designed to train teachers from higher education institutions and general education schools. Mongolian English teachers participated in these courses to align their teaching skills with international standards. Between 2006 and 2010, some of the teachers who had undergone these programs began to retire and started teaching at language training centers. During this period, in order to meet international standards, some teachers enrolled in CELTA and DELTA programs at their own expense. From 2011 to 2015, language training centers started requiring teachers to participate in TEFL/TESOL programs to meet the growing social demand. Between 2016 and 2024, English teachers from

the 10 training centers involved in the study participated online in the aforementioned programs and obtained certification.

Table 2. Dynamics of teacher development in English language training center

Year Teachers certification	1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2024
Certificate to teach for English	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Bachelors diploma for English	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Proficiency English Teacher		80%	100%	100%	100%	100%
EXCELL	10%	20%	20%	30%	40%	50%
CELTA DELTA			10%	20%	20%	30%
TEFL, TESOL				10%	30%	50%

Source: Based on the archival records of the English language training center.

Impact of COVID-19 and the future of language training centers: The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for change in the education sector, including language centers. With the shift to online learning, many centers faced the challenge of maintaining engagement and providing effective instruction in a virtual environment. However, this transition also led to the growth of digital and hybrid learning models, which many centers, including the selected center, continue to use today. One of the most significant trends observed during this period was the increasing preference for self-directed learning. Many students began to rely more on online resources, such as interactive platforms, mobile apps, and language-learning websites, reducing their dependence on traditional language centers. This shift in learner behavior poses a challenge for centers to adapt and offer more flexible, tech-driven learning experiences. Despite these challenges, the demand for academic and professional English courses remains strong, especially in the context of globalization and the increasing need for proficiency in international exams. The ability to adapt to these changing needs and integrate

CONCLUSION

The increase in the number of language training centers, the criticism of low-quality centers, the impact of the pandemic restrictions, and the competition from online learning platforms have presented significant challenges to the operations of training centers. To survive in this sector, it is essential for training centers to improve the quality of their courses, adopt new technologies, and offer programs that meet the needs of learners. During the pandemic, the use of online learning platforms grew, and many people shifted to self-directed learning environments. As learners began using interactive platforms to study independently, the demand for traditional training centers decreased. The categorization of English language training centers has evolved in response to learners' needs and social conditions. From the dynamic of the training programs at this particular center, it is evident that the demand for academic and professional English language courses has increased, while the demand for general English and children's courses has declined. This dynamic indicates that the center's management policies must adapt and undergo further changes to align with evolving learner needs. This center has systematically integrated technological advancements into its training programs, developing interactive, digital, and blended learning models since 1996.

The center's development has focused on improving the quality of education and implementing advanced solutions to meet the needs of learners. From the introduction of interactive learning to the integration of online platforms, these innovations have become exemplary in modern educational reforms. The importance of professional development programs for teachers has not only enhanced their skills but has also aligned Mongolian English teachers with international standards of teaching. With the expansion of international relations, Mongolian teachers have gained the opportunity to work and collaborate globally. Furthermore, the improvement in language training quality has positively impacted the quality of education in general education schools, universities, and language centers. These programs have made a significant contribution to the development of language education in Mongolia, playing a crucial role in elevating the professional skills of teachers to international levels.

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