

A Study of the History of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign
Language in the United States

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF TEACHING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

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摘 要

美國大專院校中文教學課程的設施已有一百一十二年的歷史。最早開放中文課程的學校是耶魯大學。遠在一八七一年有位叫范南 (Van Name) 在該校開課講授中國語言。爲今，美國差不多具有模範的學校均設有中文課程，以資鼓勵學生學習中國語言，進而從事中國研究。

本文把美國大專院校中文教學簡史分成三個階段，即第一階段從十九世紀末期到一九三〇年代，第二階段從第二次世界大戰起到一九五八年美國國防教育方案通過爲止，第三階段是從一九五八年起迄今爲止。

同時本文對美國中學中文教學情況亦予以介紹，其他如雙語教育（有關中英語部份）亦作簡要的探討，以提供讀者參考。

I. A Brief History of Foreign Language Teaching in America:

Foreign language instruction in American schools was originally restricted to the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages. In the early Colonial days, the need for professional men - particularly clergymen and lawyers - led to the establishment of secondary and higher education. For education beyond the three "Rs", the traditions of past centuries dictated that Greek and Latin were indispensable. Other modern foreign languages were considered as unsuitable subjects for serious scholarships.

However, most French communities in the New World had their own church schools, and there the language and culture of Old French were taught to the children. By the 1700s the Germans who had settled in Pennsylvania after 1682, at the special request of William Penn, were teaching German in their local parochial schools. In what is now Florida, California, New Mexico, and other localities settled by the Spaniards, the Jesuits and other religious orders sought to instill a knowledge of correct Spanish in the children as early as 1606. It is assumed that the University of Mexico, of course, had some instruction in languages as early as 1552. These three languages - French, German, and Spanish - have played a fundamental role not

only in the educational history but in the cultural development of the New World. The Italian language did not have the advantage of a transplanted native population until the nineteenth century, but it, too, has had an important part in America's cultural growth.

As far as can be determined, French was the first modern foreign language introduced into American colleges and universities. As early as 1735, Harvard University included a course in French taught by H. Langloisserie who held no regular professorship at the university. Columbia college in New York also scheduled instruction in German during the eighteenth century from 1784 to 1795, when it was discontinued. German was not offered again until 1830. Spanish language instruction played only a minor role in the American college curriculum. After the Spanish-American war, many colleges began to add courses in Spanish because people were stimulated by the prospect of trade and political relations with the newly acquired Spanish possession. Bellini, an Italian who in 1780 taught an Italian course at William and Mary College, was possible the first individual to introduce Italian into the college curriculum.

In the early history of America (roughly from 1780-1880), opposition to modern foreign languages came from professors of the classical languages. Modern foreign languages were considered too easy and too utilitarian to serve the high purpose of developing the intellectual faculties. Yet, despite the resistance of the educational elite, German and French gradually infiltrated the college and secondary curriculum.

By 1883, these forces had grown strong enough to found the Modern Language Association, an organization which has survived and flourished down to the present. The teachers of modern languages worked consistently toward making their subject useful to the community in which they reside. This association, together with local language groups that in 1924 finally became the Federation of Association of Modern Language Teachers; language societies such as the American Association of Teachers of French, of Spanish, of German, of Italian, and of Slavic languages, have all shared the objectives of the MLA. Many of these language associations worked with educational authorities, the public, students, parents, and teachers in adapting their subject to the changing needs of the community.

The period since World War II was considered very important in the development of language study in the United States of America. Interest in languages was aroused by the fighting in Europe and in China and in the Pacific as well as by military and diplomatic alliances, UNESCO, the Cold War, and the Sputniks. In April 1943, courses in language and area study were offered in fifty-five colleges in

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all parts of the United States. By December of the same year more than 13,000 service men were enrolled, all devoting full time to language study in small classes, with modern equipment and well trained teachers who were often native speakers.

Just prior to Pearl Harbor (in October 1941) the United States Army had established a Military Language class. The original emphasis was on teaching Japanese; however, in 1946 the scope of the program was broadened. By 1955, the faculty numbered 200, and 24 different languages were offered. The first priority was to teach the student to understand the target language and to speak it with both reasonable fluency and accuracy.

The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was one of the greatest forces for the development of language studies in the United States. Title VI of the Act deals with the need by the government, defense services, and business for persons with appropriate language skills. Many more students and teachers were needed, and the Act was considered important but, the highest priority was given to Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Urdu or Hindustani.

II. The Purpose and Scope of this Study

Since the National Defense Education Act of 1958, interest in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States has increased. Just like other modern languages, Chinese has also been offered either as major or minor in many American colleges and universities. In search of understanding the historical development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the New World, the author has gathered together some useful as well as informative materials and finished writing this article. Hopefully, this article will provide substantive information to the people who are anxious to know the history of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States of America.

The historical development of the Chinese schools in United States' Chinatowns and Saturday and Sunday Chinese schools in the Chinese Communities were excluded in the study.

III. The Historical Development of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in U.S.:

The teaching of Chinese in the United States can be reviewed essentially in the following stages. The first stage covers the period from the late 19th century to the 1930s. The second stage covers the time in 1939 to the establishment of National Defense Education Act Programs in 1958. The third stage covers the period since

1958.

The following is a brief historical treatment of the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in the three stages mentioned above.

a. *First stage of the development:*

Professor T. H. Tsien has pointed out that as early as 1818, Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to a friend, wondered about the Chinese ideographic writing as a suitable medium of communication for scientific ideas. A similar curiosity about the Chinese language led Peter S. Due Ponceau, then president of the American Philosophical Society, to the publication in 1838 of a dissertation on the nature and character of the *Chinese System of Writing*. Apparently, the author did not read Chinese but learned some of its theories from European writings and from certain reports that the peoples of China, Japan, Korea, and Liu-chiu understood each other by means of "common written character" even though they could not understand each other's language. One of the first Americans to gain some real knowledge of spoken and written Chinese was William C. Hunter, who moved to China in 1825 at the age of thirteen. After studying Chinese at the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca, he was employed by a commercial firm of which he later became a partner. He was the author of two books, *The Fan Kwae at Canton* (1882) and *Bits of Old China* (1885) which included some interesting accounts of life in South China before the treaty days.

It is very interesting to note that the American missionary-scholars were among the first groups to contribute to the understanding of the Chinese language by the American people. Three missionary-scholars should be mentioned. Ellijah Coleman Bridgman was the first American missionary to arrive in China. In 1829, while he was on a ship to China, he met William Hunter, who volunteered to teach him Chinese, beginning with the radicals. In 1832 Bridgman published the first English periodical in China, *The China Repository*, which was designed to serve as a medium for informing Westerners about Far Eastern matters. In 1841, he published a book entitled *Chinese Chrestomathy in the Canton Dialect*. This work was one of the earliest attempts to use romanization as a medium for the study of the Chinese language.

Another American pioneer in Chinese studies was Samuel Wells Williams who went to China in 1833. He worked as a printer for a missionary press and learned both Chinese and Japanese. He published the earliest Chinese-English dictionary entitled *Syllabic Dictionary of the Chinese Language* in 1874. Later he became a lecturer, writer, and professor of Chinese at Yale University. He succeeded Bridgman

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as editor of *The Chinese Repository* between 1848 and 1851 and contributed many articles to this publication. His most influential writing was the *Middle Kingdom*, published in 1874. This was the first publication on China written by an American and it was used extensively at that time.

The third famous missionary was William Alexander Parsons Martin whose name was known to both Chinese and American circles as a scholar-politician. He became an interpreter for the American Delegation in Peking and later professor of international law at Tung-Wen College. He was then chosen as the first president of Peking Imperial University. He wrote a number of books, in both Chinese and English, including his personal reminiscences. These included *A Cycle of Cathy* (1896), *The Siege in Peking* (1900), *The Awakening of China* (1907), and other writings. His activities in China, especially his associations with the Chinese people in official circles, had some influence in the Chinese reform movement toward the end of the 19th century.

Other missionaries who contributed to Chinese studies include Calvin W. Mateer, whose *Mandarin Lesson* (1892) had been used as a classic for some time and Chauncey Goodrich, whose *Pocket Dictionary* (1891) sold 15,000 copies by 1933.

This period also evidenced the rise of institutions' interest in adding Chinese language instruction to their regular curriculum. Yale University had the earliest start when Mr. Van Name offered courses on the emphasis of Chinese in 1871. Later, Samuel Wells Williams was appointed to the chair of Chinese language and literature in 1876. And three years later, Harvard offered Chinese language instruction as part of the regular curriculum. The first professor who taught Chinese was a Chinese scholar, Kun-Kua Ko. Unfortunately, Ko died three years later, and the teaching of Chinese was suspended until the 1920s, when Chao Yuen-Ren and later Mei Kuang-ti came to fill this post.

At the University of California, the Agassiz Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature was established in 1890. This position, however, was not filled until 1896 when John Fryer, a British educator, and a noted translator of more than 100 Western works into Chinese, was appointed to the Chair. He served there until 1915, when a Chinese scholar, Kang-hu Kiang, was appointed as his successor.

Columbia University established the Chair of Dean Lung Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literature in 1901. This Chair was established by a Columbia graduate who, in memory of his faithful Chinese servant Dean Lung, made a substantial donation to Columbia for the promotion of Chinese studies. Dean Lung himself also made supplementary contributions. This Chair was first held by a German Sinologist, Frederick Hirth in 1902, and was later occupied by Thomas

Francis and Carrington Goodrich. Other eminent European Sinologists such as Herbert Allen Giles and Paul Pelliot visited Columbia to present lectures.

The University of Hawaii, which is favorably situated for the meeting of the East and West, started a Chinese language and culture program in 1922 with Shao-chang Lee as the director. The introduction of the Chinese language and culture instruction at the University of Chicago came three decades later when Harlee G. Creel joined the faculty. The program was officially installed in 1936.

Through the study of the available literature the author has found out that the type of language taught during this period was almost entirely literary Chinese, and the method used was grammar translation. As a matter of fact, there were few students studying the language and these were some serious-minded people who either wanted to be sinologists or missionaries. After several years of hard work, the students had a reading knowledge of the language, and they were unable to speak the Chinese language fluently. The Romanization used at that time was Wade-Giles system which was too difficult for students to recognize or to pronounce. This manner of teaching and learning remained in effect until the outbreak of World War II.

b. *Second stage of the development:*

Most scholars agree that World War II marked a new era for teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States. The Federal government along with various foundations and universities all allocated large sums of money to the development of teaching Chinese language and culture during the pre-war period. Participating institutions included the American Council of Learned Societies, the Chinese Institute in America located in New York City, and the Harvard-Yenching Institute in Boston.

During the entire second stage of development, the most stimulating feature of teaching Chinese was probably the implementation of the advanced degree in Chinese studies in the major universities. According to a survey made by the United States Department of State, External Research Division, there were at least fifteen universities that offered the M.A. degree in Chinese Language and Literature by the end of 1950. Columbia (1959) and Harvard Universities were among the pioneer institutions. The area of concentration in the curriculum included Chinese language, literature, and history.

However, the results in this second stage of development could hardly have been achieved in so short a time without generous support from sources outside the universities, especially the great philanthropic foundations and the Federal government. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York

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played the earliest roles in supporting this addition to university curricula. In 1937, Yale University received the first grant for the sole purpose of subsidizing the teaching of Chinese language from the Rockefeller Foundation. The most important grant ever made by the Rockefeller Foundation in this field was an allocation of funds to the American Council of Learned Societies. This was awarded in 1941 before the United States entered the war, and was intended to provide instruction in foreign languages which might be needed by the country's Armed Forces, but modern languages such as French, Spanish, German, and Italian were excluded. The Foreign Area Fellowship Program, initiated by Carnegie Corporation in 1947 and supported on a broader scale by the Ford Foundation after 1951, helped produce in American society over 1,400 people with competence in Non-Western languages and cultures.

After grants had been allocated by foundations, the next chief source of financial aid was from the Federal Government. The Federal Government had two separate periods of intensive support for foreign area programs in which the Asian studies were also a beneficiary. The first period was in the 1940s; the second period came with the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 which will be discussed in the third stage of the development of the Chinese language program.

The Federal government authorized the Army Specialized Training in 1943. 13,186 selected military personnel were sent to fifty-five institutions. Many enrolled in the Chinese language and culture courses offered at several of these civilian universities. One of the most notable programs was the one contracted by the Air Force with Yale University where a new method of Romanization known as the Yale system was developed.

In addition to subsidizing military personnel studying Chinese language and culture in civilian schools, the Federal government also authorized the Army to set up its own language training school, which was known as the United States Army Languages School located in the Presidio of Monterey, California. There are forty languages offered in the school curriculum, among which were Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese Chinese.

Textbooks published during this stage were a more important concern than ever before. Dr. John DeFrancis wrote his first Chinese textbook entitled *Beginning Chinese*, which he completed in 1945. Dr. Yuen-ren Chao published his textbook *Chinese Primer* in 1948 and Professor Ssu-Yu Teng published *Conversational Chinese* in 1947. Reverend Gardner Tewksbury, another scholar at Yale University, took the responsibility for compiling a new textbook. This was entitled *Speaking Chinese* and appeared in 1946. As a continuation to this volume, Professor Fred Fan-yu

Wang compiled the *Chinese Dialogues* in 1953. In addition to this conversation series, a set of reading materials was also compiled by Fang-yu Wang and his colleagues. Further supplementary materials were gradually added. Yale University, for the first time in the United States, completed a series of Chinese language textbooks which has been used very widely throughout the world.

c. *The third stage of development:*

The promulgation of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 marked the third phase of teaching of Chinese language and culture in this country. Since the American public had been shocked by the Russian's scientific display of orbiting a satellite in 1957, a major increase in interest in foreign language education, in general, was manifested throughout the country on all levels of instruction -- college and university, high school, elementary school, U.S. government, and private institutions. In 1958, the NDEA of the U.S. Office of Education classified Chinese, Japanese, Russian Arabic, and Hindi as critical languages for the American public to learn. In order to promote the teaching of these languages rapidly, the Federal government decided to finance foreign language programs in colleges and universities. Funding from the Federal government usually was allocated for the following purposes.

1. To establish language and area centers, at universities where there was experience in the teaching of the language and sufficient strong faculty through support of half of the budget of the center.
2. To award National Defense Foreign Language (NDFL) fellowships to graduate students through selected universities.
3. To award contracts to scholars for compiling instructional materials or for conducting language research.
4. To award fellowships to faculty members of the language and area centers and to graduate students in their last year of studies to do research in Taiwan, Republic of China.
5. To fund overseas institutes or seminars to be conducted in Taiwan, R.O.C. for faculty members.

Shortly after the passage of the NDEA, the teaching of the Chinese language was much more in evidence. Those universities that had been teaching Chinese before began to strengthen their programs. Those institutions that had not previously offered Chinese courses attempted to establish such programs. In 1960 only forty-four students were enrolled in advanced degree programs (M.A. and Ph.D) in Chinese language studies in American colleges and universities. Few colleges and

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universities even offered courses in the language, and very few indeed offered advanced degrees in the field. A survey taken in 1964 revealed that sixty universities across the country offered course work in the Chinese language. During the following year this figure rose to sixty-seven. By July 1970, there were 201 colleges and universities in this country that included Chinese language courses in their offerings.

During the first ten years (1958-1968) for the NDEA, nearly \$100 million of federal funds were allocated to support language and area centers at institutions of higher education, toward fellowship stipends for modern foreign language and related studies, to support basic research, and for the preparation of instructional materials. About 17 percent of these funds were granted to East Asian programs. Foundations joined the Federal government in similar endeavors. It is estimated that during these ten years alone, about \$30,000,000 was allocated for Chinese studies in the form of fellowships, faculty appointments, and library acquisitions by the Ford Foundation and the United States Office of Education.

In addition, the Federal government also supported summer programs for intensive Chinese language training. The NDEA summer intensive Chinese Language Institutes expanded from two in 1970 to twenty-one in 1968. There were also East Asian Centers, funded by NDEA which offered the Chinese language and area courses throughout the year. These NDEA East Asian Centers increased in number from thirteen in 1950 to twenty-two in 1968.

Additional textbooks were published in this third stage. Dr. John DeFrancis published three books within four years. The first one was entitled *Beginning Chinese* (revised edition) in 1963; the second, *Intermediate Chinese*, was published in 1966; and the third one *Advanced Chinese*, appeared in 1967. Dr. Yuen-Ren Chao wrote *Readings in Sayable Chinese* in 1968. A widely used book entitled *Twenty Lectures on Chinese Culture* was published by Professor Po-fei Huang in 1967. Professor Harold Shadick and Chaio Chien of Cornell University also completed and published a textbook, *A First Course in Literary Chinese*, in 1968.

Due to the joint efforts of Dr. John B. Tsu, Dr. K. Y. Hsu, and others, the Carnegie Foundation allocated three separate grants, totalling over a million dollars, in order to support the introduction of teaching Chinese as a foreign language at the secondary level. The grants were designed to support six regional metropolitan centers at which the teaching of Chinese at the secondary level could be developed. The following institutions in three different metropolitan areas were recipients of the first grant:

- A. Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey
(responsible for New York - New Jersey metropolitan area);

- B. San Francisco State University
(responsible for San Francisco Bay Area); and
- C. Thayer Academy, Braintree, Massachusetts
(responsible for greater Boston area).

The first Carnegie grant was made in 1962 for a period of one year. The three recipient institutions put forth utmost efforts in introducing Chinese to high schools and gained spectacular results. Because of these excellent results, Carnegie made a second grant in 1963 by adding three more institutions in three new metropolitan regions. The institutions which received the second grant were:

- A. Seton Hall University;
- B. San Francisco State University;
- C. Thayer Academy;
- D. Evanston Township High School
(responsible for Greater Chicago area);
- E. Washington University in St. Louis
(responsible for greater St. Louis area); and
- F. University of Southern California
(responsible for greater Los Angeles area).

Because of their successful achievement, these six institutions received the third Carnegie grant in 1964. The amount of grants were varied and awarded according to local needs and regional achievements. The four universities received a larger amount than the two secondary schools. In addition to Carnegie's support, the United States Office of Education also extended a tremendous amount of help in promoting the teaching of Chinese in secondary schools.

Through the financial support of the Carnegie Foundation and the United States Office of Education, and due to the efforts of San Francisco University and Seton Hall University, the teaching of Chinese at the secondary level began to spread across the country.

Another meaningful program which has influenced the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language extensively is bilingual education. Although, the teaching and learning methods of bilingual education are not the same as those used to teach Chinese as a foreign language, the historical development of the latter is also worth mentioning.

Bilingual education in America is defined as the use of two languages, one of them being English, for instructional purposes. When we speak of "Chinese Bilingual Education," we are in effect referring to Chinese-English Bilingual Education. Bilingual Education thus refers to the use of both English and the student's mother

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tongue or home language as medium instruction. The teaching of Chinese to American students alone, therefore, does not constitute bilingual education, but belongs instead to the sphere of foreign language teaching. In Bilingual Education, by contrast, Chinese may be taught to sharpen a student's home language skills or impart a greater understanding of his cultural origins, but in this case, both Chinese and English should be employed to teach all subject matter.

Although some institutions of higher learning in America may have a bilingual class, e.g., teaching a Chinese literature course both in Chinese and English, no university at this time has a planned Chinese bilingual program. Bilingual Education is consequently employed at present only on the secondary and, more commonly, elementary school levels. Even in these schools, however, there are only Chinese bilingual classes and bilingual programs. Chinese bilingual schools have not yet been established. Colleges and universities today are primarily involved in the training of bilingual teachers, and are not directly involved with teaching students in a bilingual class environment.

Although bilingual programs have long been used for Spanish speaking children, Chinese bilingual education also had a very early beginning. When Dr. John B. Tsu began to pioneer the teaching of Chinese to elementary and secondary school children in the 1960s with assistance from the Carnegie Foundations, the U. S. Office of Education, and Chinatown communities, he was able to convince the Board of Education of New York City to establish a Chinese course at Seward Park High School near Chinatown as a regular program in its foreign language curriculum. When the Chinese language program began in 1962, a year earlier than the Coral Way Spanish bilingual program, there were seventy-two students enrolled in the class. Sixty-five percent of them, however, were Chinese students from Hong Kong who had difficulties with the English language. The instructor had to conduct the class in a bilingual manner. This was the actual beginning of a Chinese bilingual program in a public school in the United States.

After the Bilingual Act was passed in 1967, grants were given in 1968 to two Chinese bilingual programs. One was the Two Bridges Bilingual Program in New York City and the other was the pilot bilingual program at Commodore Stockton School in San Francisco. Each program was supported for six years. The Bridge's Bilingual Program was discontinued, but the commodore Stockton Program is still in operation with Title VII funds. Due to the initial success of these two programs, several other school systems developed Chinese bilingual programs. Examples include the Castelar School in Los Angeles, Lincoln School in Oakland, Berkeley P. S. in Berkeley, Sacramento P. S. in Sacramento, the Seattle public school system in

Washington, the Boston, Cambridge, and Brookline school systems in Massachusetts, and the Haines School in Chicago.

Meanwhile, the Chinese themselves made an historical contribution to the development of Bilingual Education. That contribution was made evident by the favorable ruling the Supreme Court made in the case of *Lau vs. Nichols* in February, 1974. This case laid the foundation for the victory of the *Aspira* consent decree in New York City in August of that year.

These cases, together with the pressure exerted by the Spanish speaking community, resulted in

1. The extension of the Bilingual Education Act for another five years starting in 1975;
2. The passing of mandatory Bilingual Education acts in seventeen states; and
3. Appropriations for Bilingual Education in several cities.

Up until 1982, there were more than one hundred Chinese bilingual programs in the United States funded by the following sources:

Title VII of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act)
Title I of ESEA
Title VII of the Emergency School Assistance Act
State Money
City Tax Levy Money

During the years 1975-1982, the Office of Education supported at least 500 or more bilingual projects in elementary and secondary schools, 95 of which were Chinese programs. In addition, there were twenty multilingual projects which included Chinese components. Forty-five institutions of higher education received training grants and eleven included Chinese components. The Office of Education allocated 800 fellowships to train teacher trainers, and sixty of these fellowships were for Chinese and Japanese.

Through the efforts of those involved in Bilingual education, the unreserved support of the Asian Caucus in Washington D.C., and leaders of Chinatown communities, Chinese bilingual programs received substantial funding.

III. Conclusion:

To day, the programs for teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States are very well developed. Many American scholars have rendered support to

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accomplish this epoch-making endeavor. The officers and members of the Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA); the American Association of Teachers of Chinese Language and Culture (AATCLC); the Asian Society (AS); the Modern Language Association of America (MLA); the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association (NFMLTA), and the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTEL) have made enormous contributions on teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States of America. Without the full support of the chairmen and the teachers of modern language departments in colleges, universities, and institutions, the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in United States would never have reached its present level. Chinese is now recognized as one of the modern languages and compares equally with other language courses. The propellers of this pioneering movement, however were teachers of the Chinese language who were dedicated to a great cause which was vital to the history and development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States of America.

However, there are still many problems in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The most acute problems in the rapid development of Chinese teaching have been the instructor's preparation, effective teaching methodologies, the shortage of better text books for each level, and the methods of evaluation. Those people who are concerned must put greater efforts into solving these problems in the time to come.

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