

English Education in Korea: Past, Present, and Future

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1. Introduction

Ever since the beginning of English education in Korea in 1883, Korea has witnessed a multitude of changes in the goals, theories, methods, techniques, and general trends of the English education happening right here on her soil. With extremely fluid social demands for reformation of English education, Korea will also witness ever more intensive and extensive changes during a couple of decades to come. This study will survey the extent of English education in Korea and will also project its possible future. The survey will be carried out from a historical perspective and will divide the history of English education in Korea into three periods: the past from 1883 to 1990, the present from 1991 to 1996, and the future from 1996 on.¹⁾ The past period of approximately 100 years will be further divided into, namely, parts which will be called the first half century and the second half century.²⁾

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1) This division of periods is based not on big political events but on theoretical changes in English education in Korea.

2) The first half of the past stretches up to the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule in 1945.

During the first half century of the past period, English education in Korea experienced very slow changes. It was carried out mostly by foreign instructors, i.e., at first by so-called native speakers from England and America and then, after the Japanese occupation, by Japanese English teachers. On the other hand, changes during the second half century of the past period were dazzling and mind-boggling, with most of all past-period changes have been made during the second half of the period. With national liberation in 1945, Koreans took over full responsibility for their English education, but they were totally unprepared for the job. The major problem was limited human resources, which later became the hub of reformation.

Professionalism in English education in Korea emerged slowly, but steadily with the modernization of Korea. As a matter of fact, it took almost a century to be firmly established. In the beginning, there were no known concepts of professionalism. Teachers were just laymen who happened to speak English as a mother tongue or as a second or foreign language. Prior preparation for teaching, i.e. pre-service training, was introduced during the later part of the first half century of the past period and was nationally institutionalized during the second half century of the past period. Accordingly, pedagogy and methodology became academic and research subjects, and attempts were made to enlighten teachers in their profession.³⁾

3) As a matter of fact, serious papers on English education started to appear in the 1960s.

2. The Past

2.1. The first half century of the past period

English education during the first half century of the past period was characterized by the selective nature of the student population. The first modern school in Korea, Dong-moon-hak (同文學), was founded by the Ministry of Commerce in 1883 as a school for English interpreters and started with less than fifty students. Even the first regular school, Yook-young-kong-won (育英公院) which was opened in 1886, was no exception: it began with about the same number of students. The student population increased steadily for two decades, but was, in a sense, very limited because modern education was available only in the capital city. A nation-wide explosion of the student population was triggered by the modern school system which was inaugurated in 1911.

A special characteristic of English education during the beginning of this period was that the medium of instruction was English. Even after the establishment of regular schools, English was employed until the fall of the Korean Empire as the medium of instruction for all subjects simply because instructors did not speak Korean. (Teachers during this beginning stage were Halifax, Gilmore, Bunker, Hulbert, Gifford, Hutchison, Frampton, etc.) However, with the Japanese occupation of Korea, English classrooms gradually turned to abound with non-English explanations of English; and English was no longer the sole medium of instruction and was scarcely heard even in English classrooms, not to mention the classrooms of other subjects.

In the beginning, the aim of English education was to produce able interpreters, who were at the time believed to be highly modernized and promising. However, with the advent of the modern school system, English became a subject for general education and lost its original purpose of preparing students to be proficient users of English. The aim of English education was now to equip students with reading skills in the hope that they could have higher education through English textbooks. Moreover, it was not long before English was included as one of the subjects on the selection examinations, especially entrance examinations, and accordingly gained instrumental value as an absolute means of success.

As for theories, methods, and techniques, nothing was definite at first. The pedagogical characteristic was found in instinctive application of methodologies to English education. Instructors were not trained as teachers and did not have any systematic knowledge of the theories, methods, and techniques of English teaching. Owing to their lack of ability in the Korean language, those foreign instructors could not help but teach English through English and, unknowingly, employed a method which we now call the "direct method."⁴⁾ However, during the later part of the first half of the past period, the emphasis on reading ability inevitably brought in intensive explanation of grammar and extensive exercise in translation, another unconscious employment of a major method, i.e. the

4) Direct method is perhaps the oldest method known to mankind because when two groups of people with unintelligible languages come to contact one group of people has to learn their opponent's language. Then, there is no other way of teaching except for direct method.

“grammar-translation method.”⁵⁾

The qualification of teachers was unclear during this beginning stage.⁶⁾ It seems that, since English education in Korea made its start with native speakers of English, being a native speaker was enough for anyone to be qualified as an English teacher. Non-native speakers, Koreans, were hired when they were proved or thought to be proficient in English. These two cases indicate that anyone who was fluent in English was informally dubbed as an English teacher. This practice was fully in line with Korean tradition in which the one who was best qualified in a trade or field became the teacher. In fact, formal teacher training and licensing had to wait some decades before they were strictly implemented.

2.2. The second half century of the past period

English education was truly made available for the general public in the second half century of the past period which began with the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule in 1945. During this period of time, English Education in Korea experienced drastic changes and innovations. First of all, the government changed its policy on English education more than five times and accordingly revised the secondary curriculum as many times as it changed policy. For one thing, the major variety of English as the target language was changed from

5) At the time, they did not have any chance to speak English. Therefore, English education focused on reading skills, and grammar-translation method was found to be the best method for that purpose.

6) No certifications were necessary at first. Or perhaps there was no concept of certification at all.

British English to American English.⁷⁾ Also, theoretical studies produced numerous advances, though there was an unavoidable time lag between development, or rather introduction, of a theory and its practice in classrooms.

2.2.1. Goals of English education

The goals of English education were not clear at first. However, by the 1960s, they were clearly defined in secondary-school English curriculum and were divided into two clear-cut categories, namely, mastery of skills as the intermediate goal and exchange of cultures as the ultimate goal. This definition of goals altered the traditional view of language learning which had been so far cherished and supported, mastery of all four skills, and put a new emphasis on spoken language. This change, or rather expansion, of emphasis on skills learning reflected the change of consumer from a chosen few who were mostly academics to the general public who needed English for daily use. Now English had become a down-to-earth commodity, not an item for fancy purposes.

Mastery of all four skills of English as the intermediate goal could be instrumental in achieving the ultimate goal. However, a big question was how fluent was enough to achieve the ultimate goal, that is, to learn the cultures of the English-speaking countries through English and also to introduce Korean culture

7) The formal policy of the Ministry of Education was and still is "the teacher is free to choose any variety of English: if she is good at British English, she may choose it to teach, and if she is good at American English, she may teach it." Over a half century of American presence in Korea has resulted in perhaps more than 99% of the Koreans teaching and speaking American English.

to the peoples of the English-speaking countries. Since a culture encompasses virtually all aspects of a given community, comprehension and explanation of a culture take a near native or a native competence in the target language. This level of language proficiency is almost impossible to attain within a short period of time; therefore, attainment of the intermediate goal, as an instrument of the ultimate goal, seemed impossible. Very few success stories were known in the past.

There were two obstacles to the realization of two-way⁸⁾ cultural enlightenment, the ultimate goal. The first was achievement of high-level proficiency in English. It is always the case that cultural enlightenment through a foreign language is possible only with a high level of fluency in the language. The second was the scarcity of materials for teaching culture owing to the virtual non-existence of cultural awareness programs. Even now, description of the target culture requires a herculean task, and acculturation of the target culture takes even greater effort. These two difficulties hindered attainment of the cultural aims of English education of the past for a century.

The aims of English education were very impressive and noble. However, as mentioned above, they were not by any means attainable. Firstly, the government put the goals too high for teachers and students to achieve; secondly, most of the learners did not find any practical value in the goals set by law. Rather, the learners and their parents found themselves in an unusual situation in which English was a subject to conquer for the entrance examination. The primary purpose of

8) To understand the target culture and to propagate the learner's culture to others.

teaching and learning English now was to use English not as a means of communication but as a means of passing the entrance examination. The disparity between the somewhat abstract goals of the government and the down-to-earth goals of consumers was far and wide. There was no way that reconciliation of these two sets of goals could happen.

2.2.2. Development of theories and methodologies

During this period of time, theories and methodologies were imported rather than developed within. Until the early 1960s, studies in theory and methodology were in the embryonic stage of development. Therefore, it was easy and convenient to import theories and methodologies developed in foreign countries. Because of strong American influence, most of them were borrowed from the United States. Besides, almost all Korean ESL/EFL scholars had been trained in America. Naturally, American know-how prevailed in Korean English classrooms. However, one great regret about the process was that imported theories and methodologies at first were applied to the Korean situation without any modification, only to cause many problems later on.

Structural linguistics and behavioral psychology were among the first wave of imports from abroad. The second wave was, of course, Chomskyan grammar and generative psychology. The first-wave imports were in line with empirical and scientific tradition, while the second-wave imports were every bit the opposite of the first wave in that they bluntly ignored scientific method and tradition. As far as English education was concerned, the first wave contributed a lot, but the second

wave was just for formal research, not for application. There were some other imports, for instance, functional grammar, but they failed in gaining popularity among Korean scholars and did not play any major role in the field of English education.

During the second half century of the past period, home-made theories of English education started to develop very slowly. Independent footing of Korean theories had a long time to wait, especially to have world recognition. The beginning stage of the development of home-made theories was by and large characterized by modifications of imported theories. Yet the modifications were very meager and unnoticed by all but the modifiers themselves. Though the modifications were not quite visible, they served as seeds which would later duly sprout. One major reason for the slow development of home-made theories was the lack of adequate number of ESL/EFL scholars or researchers. Also, the few that did exist were, so to speak, general practitioners in the field. In point of fact, those scholars had been trained in some special subfields, but they were, in a sense, forced to be general practitioners by the situations they were in at that time.

As for methodology, the first-generation methodology,⁹⁾ grammar-translation method, was employed in the later part of the first half century of the past period and continued to exert strong influence on English education until the end of the past period. This method was an ideal model to meet the needs of students and parents whose sole purpose for learning English

9) Though direct method was employed before grammar-translation method, it did not enjoy general acceptance and was too short-lived to claim itself as the first-generation methodology.

was to prepare the students for the entrance examination which was based on skills in written English. With some knowledge of English grammar, one could easily translate English into Korean. Grammar-translation method enabled teachers who were less competent in spoken English to easily handle English classroom activities because they were not obliged to teach spoken English.

The second-generation methodology, aural-oral approach, was introduced in the 1960s by a new breed of theorists along with structural linguistics and behavioral psychology and gained momentum every year. Though teachers found it unfamiliar and were reluctant to adopt it, aural-oral approach brought a new awareness of spoken English to English classrooms. Nevertheless, adoption of this new methodology was fully optional, becoming the teacher's choice. Some teachers used aural-oral approach to arouse students' interest in English, while some flatly dismissed the approach as a waste of time for students who were preparing for impending entrance examinations.

2.2.3. General trends

In theory and by law, the goals of formal public English education were perfectly clear. In practice, however, formal education had long been contaminated by unhealthy secular demands. As a result, to help students pass entrance examinations became the utmost goal of English education. Everyone was now involved in a conspiracy to restructure the whole English education to be suitable for preparation for entrance examinations. Thus, a new category of English for specific purposes, namely Examination English, was established.

Teachers could no longer stick to the specifications prescribed by law. Therefore, it seemed that ordering teachers to go by the law was sending them on a wild goose chase.

In informal private English education, the goals and purposes of English education did vary, depending on the demands of the consumers. Informal private institutes adapted themselves to social needs ranging from preparation for entrance (or TOEFL/TOEIC) examinations to basic survival English conversation for tourists. Teenagers chose to have intensive practice on Examination English, while most adults preferred to have some knowledge of English for everyday use. Informal institutes offered professionally set courses of Examination English to teenagers. Also they provided nearly all the intensive English conversation courses available in Korea. As a matter of fact, informal institutes enjoyed a flexibility which was denied to formal education.

The trends in English education in the past period are now fully clear. However noble and admirable were the goals set by the government, students, parents, and teachers did not find any practical value in them and would not accept them as they were. Rather, these people wanted to find ways to pass entrance examinations and came to regard passing entrance examinations as an absolute value and the first and foremost purpose of English education. To achieve this new goal, English education came to terms with Examination English and emphasized rote learning of grammatical points and structural patterns because of the haphazard nature of Examination English.

Of course, there were efforts to reform formal English

education, the most significant being the introduction of native speakers to English classrooms in the late 1960s. However, they had to content themselves with nominal success. Full success belatedly came almost two decades later when not only students but also the general public began to learn conversational English with great enthusiasm. Too much emphasis on spoken English this time surely made the pendulum swing back, but skills asymmetry remained just the same. Conversational English was everything in learning English. It never occurred to the learners, both students and the general public, that "a balanced competence alone does the trick."

3. The present

3.1. New generation academics

The present period of English education in Korea has been flooded with a plethora of new claims and contentions made by a new generation of academics. These new generation academics have mostly been returnees from abroad with doctoral degrees. Each of them has his/her own solution to, or rather prescription for, corrupt English education in Korea. To our great regret, however, while their ideas have sounded palatable, no one has yet produced definitive evidence of the effectiveness of his/her ideas. Consequently, ivory-towerish opinions pervade every stratum of the hierarchy of English education in Korea, only to make the entire English education confused. Moreover, no

matter how smart their ideas and opinions are, old ideas and practices die hard. That is, the past, be it immediate or distant, haunts us.

Until the end of the 1980s, only a few applied linguists took care of all aspects of TEFL, just like general practitioners of medicine. With the turn of the present decade, however, a new generation of doctors appeared in large numbers on the scene. Some of them dispelled the notion of general practice and declared their specialties. Furthermore, they began to introduce all sorts of teaching techniques as well as abstract theories. Though those techniques and theories failed to replace old ones and sometimes caused confusion on the part of consumers, they succeeded in raising questions about the efficacy of old theories, methods, and techniques.

These new generation academics have made a considerable contribution to the field of English education in Korea. First of all, they helped English education to be formally recognized as a serious and independent field of study by fellow academics of related fields. Second, with the coming-of-age of English education as a serious field, they have actively assisted the government in shaping its policy on English education and have participated in the nation-wide propagation of new ideas and techniques. Third, they have been updating English education in Korea by introducing the most recent ideas and techniques from throughout the world. Last, but not least, they have triggered reappraisal of past traditions. All in all, they have greatly contributed to breaking English education away from the hands of laymen.

3.2. New goals

At the beginning of the present period, there was a major change in the secondary English curriculum, which was seen as an about-turn for the government. The structural syllabus of the past was now replaced by a notional-functional one. That is, emphasis on grammatical structures moved to emphasis on functions and notions. Also, the emphasis of teaching English moved from attainment of accuracy to that of fluency. Thus, attainment of accurate use of the target language was no longer sought out, but fluent use became the most important intermediate goal. This change of emphasis was misunderstood at first because most classroom teachers took the emphasis on fluency as a complete divorce from teaching grammatical structures.

The change in the secondary English curriculum received a hearty welcome among the private sector. Everyone concerned took the emphasis on fluency for a stress on spoken English, and learning conversational English became a nationwide endeavor. For the people in the streets, the sole goal of English education was, and even now is, to achieve high-quality competence in spoken English. Skills other than spoken English were neglected altogether, as though competence in spoken English would in the end warrant a mastery of all skills by some magic. Spoken English, thus, is now the informal aim of learning English. Accordingly, informal private institutes for conversational English have multiplied, and their business has been flourishing.

Both the public and private sectors seem to deliberately ignore the ultimate goal of English education, cultural

understanding. In fact, no one bothers about the cultural goal in which they find no immediate value. Therefore, the all-out efforts to conquer so-called conversational English are a far cry from emphasis on cultural understanding. Every one wants to be a fluent speaker of English, and some have already succeeded in becoming one. Some have indeed achieved both fluency and accuracy. Nevertheless, their achievements are limited within the scope of the linguistic aspect of English and are based on their mother culture, which often gets in the way of effective intercultural communication.

3.3. Superfluity of the old and new ideas and techniques

Theoretical development in the present period of time seems to have reached a stalemate. No leading and fashionable theories or methods appear on the scene. Only technical level minor ideas and techniques claim their efficacy and usefulness. Thanks to a shrinking world, new technical-level ideas and techniques are dispersed rapidly throughout the globe, provided that they find proper mediators. In Korea, new generation academics have been serving as mediators and have been promptly introducing new ideas and techniques developed abroad, either in their original forms or in their modified forms. As a result, Korean teachers of English are familiar with all sorts of ideas and techniques known to the world. On top of it, old ideas and techniques do not die, but hang on.

These days, however, the new generation academics give voice less frequently to imported ideas and techniques. Perhaps, they now realize how futile the blind adoption of foreign ideas and

techniques is. No imported theories or methods have been fully successful in Korean classrooms simply because their cultural backgrounds have not been compatible with Korean culture.¹⁰⁾ Fortunately, there exist a few techniques which have been custom-made in Korea to suit the requirements of Korean classrooms. However, no one theory or method, domestic or foreign, monopolizes English education in the classroom. Consequently, each of the existing ideas and techniques, old and new, imported and home-made, claims its share. Therefore, an eclectic collection of ideas and techniques would be best possible solution to this dilemma.

3.4. Changing trends

When the government modified the format of the qualifying examination for college admission by including listening comprehension, the aim of Examination English was correspondingly modified. Listening comprehension immediately attracted considerable attention from the examinees and their teachers. Not only regular schools but also informal institutes all started to train the students for listening comprehension. Unlike other skills of Examination English, listening skill is hard to master by rote memorization, regardless of how many hours one spends on it. For that reason, some give up the mastery of listening skill altogether, while some struggle on to master it. Anyhow, the fact is that the scope of Examination English has widened, and the burden of the examinees has become heavier.

10) For example, the reticence of students gets in the way of new ideas and techniques.

The goal of English education remains practically the same. Everyone involved in English education reasons that the matter of utmost urgency is to pass the entrance examination and that the sole goal of English education is to secure success on the entrance examination. This general trend leads English education to the short-term value of passing the entrance examination. By the time students pass that examination and get into college, everyone has completely forgotten the noble and admirable values prescribed by law. Their English, therefore, fossilizes at best at an intermediate level of competence with asymmetrical skills.

The emphasis on spoken English has been built up over the past several years, during which time there has been an influx of native-speaker instructors. Some of them are qualified instructors on invitational work visas, and some are ill-prepared workers and illegal residents on tourist visas. However, it does not really matter whether they are qualified or not because it is hoped that they will serve as good models for English speaking. The impact of this influx of native speakers has been helping learners pronounce English ever-more accurately, even though there are dialect differences among those native speakers. Now schools under public and private control alike intend to employ as many native speakers as their budgets permit.

With the influx of native speakers, some schools, particularly at college level, have already begun to delegate instruction of freshman English to them. The Ministry of Education has plans to hire nearly one thousand native speakers from English-speaking countries, such as the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia, and so on, and this new teaching force will teach elementary-

school English. This trend of hiring more native speakers every year may cause a serious problem of unemployment among Korean English teachers. In some cases, teachers with native competence and Korean English teachers will, in the long run, compete each other.¹¹⁾

The Ministry of Education also allows elementary-school children to go abroad at an early age to study for the sake of acquiring "a native-like or near native competence of English." Incidentally, this policy of the Ministry may eventually produce Korean nationals¹²⁾ with native-like competence of English and, also, with foreign thought patterns and behaviors. In metropolitan areas, those parents who can not afford, or are not brave enough, to send their children abroad, but with enough means, send their children to private institutes in which native speakers teach English.¹³⁾ In a word, the entire country seems to be plagued by an enthusiasm for learning English.

4. The future

4.1. What should our goals be?

The Korean government made a very important decision to

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- 11) Perhaps, Koreans would make better English teachers than native speakers because they all know from their own experience the best and the worst ways of learning English as a foreign language.
 - 12) They are not Korean immigrants who still carry Korean passports.
 - 13) There have been some notorious cases in which some wives of American military personnel stationed in metropolitan areas illegally take in those children for tutoring.

initiate elementary-school English education starting in the 1997 academic year. Since the elementary education is compulsory, English will become a required subject. It is hoped that all Korean citizens will eventually speak English. In theory, Korea will become a bilingual country. In practice, however, that is not very likely. For one thing, elementary-school teachers, all of whom are expected to teach English, are not at all prepared because they have never been trained for that job. With these unprepared teachers, one can not possibly achieve any substantial success. Considering what has happened so far, one should be worried about the bleak future of English education at the elementary-school level.

Of course, there are a sizable number of elementary-school teachers who handle English fairly well, but the number is skimpy compared to the whole population of elementary teachers in the nation. At present, preparation for elementary English education is well underway, training elementary-school teachers with 120 hours of conversational English. Within the next three or four years, all elementary-school teachers will receive the training and become English teachers. No one, however, is sure that they will make good English teachers.¹⁴⁾ Thus, the prospects for effecting innovation in English education in Korea seem very slim. English is indeed the most efficient and powerful language in this ever-shrinking world, but it will remain tantalizingly out of the reach of Koreans for decades to come.

14) As a matter of fact, elementary-school teachers will not be changed into good English teachers with only 120 hours of training in conversational English. We have good reasons to believe in the maxim "one cannot teach an old dog new tricks."

At the secondary level, a gradual reformation of English education has been taking place, but it is in vain owing to the existence of Examination English. Examination English, which was created as a washback effect of the entrance examination, has always exerted a great influence over secondary English education. Any alteration made to the entrance examination necessarily would have an immediate influence on Examination English. It seems that almost all aspects of secondary English education hinge on Examination English. Hence, innovative minds can not survive the harsh environment of Examination English. In fact, one may jump to a pessimistic conclusion that Examination English will, in the long run, kill the incurably crippled English education in Korea.

If there is still any hope of success left, it may be found in the private sector where English is taught for practical purposes other than passing the entrance examination. Private institutes enjoy absolute freedom from government control and may choose whatever program they want to offer. They are very sensitive to the needs of consumers and, these days, offer mainly conversational English programs. These programs are thought to be better than similar programs offered by schools of formal education, and even English majors enroll in these private programs to learn English conversation. In a sense, these private institutes take full responsibility for teaching English for everyday use.

The goals of English education, particularly the ultimate goal, will remain the same in the future because those goals are regarded as being sacred. Only the skills goals, i.e., the intermediate goals, will change, depending on changes in

entrance-examination policies and on changes in public needs. For now, English conversation seems to be everything for the public because conversation ability is easiest to observe, but it will not take long for the public to realize that English conversation is only a part of colloquial English. Hopefully, a balanced competence of language skills will become the need of the public in the near future. The skills the learner should strive for should not be limited to any one skill but should cover all the linguistic aspects of English. Further, a program which emphasizes both fluency and accuracy in all skills of English would be most welcome in the future.

4.2. Should we develop new theories and methodologies?

English education in Korea began with the direct method and no knowledge of ESL/EFL theories. Now that we have experienced all the available theories and methodologies during the past hundred years, we should be good at choosing the best theories and methodologies. However, we find that theories and methodologies change ceaselessly only to repeat themselves in some different forms or disguises. In metaphorical terms, "Nothing is new under the sun. Even the thing of which we say, 'See, this is new!' has already existed in the ages that preceded us" (Ecclesiastes 1, 9-10). There will be no major changes in or revisions of theories and methodologies in the future. If any, they will be modifications of those which have already existed.

Development of theories and methodologies will, therefore, be limited to reinterpretations of old theories and procedural reorganizations of existing methodologies. At this point in time,

in which learning conversational English is in fashion, methods developed for teaching oral English naturally attract more attention than ever. For native-speaker instructors, direct method is the best and only method, but for Korean teachers of English a better solution is audio-lingual method in which they can use Korean to make their explanations brief and to the point. After the selection of methods to use, their adaptation is in order. To accommodate the rapidly changing demands of the public, teaching methods should undergo all the changes and modifications necessary.

If some new ideas and techniques should appear, they would necessarily be connected with instructions or learning through multimedia. Computer-assisted language learning seems to enchant lovers of the computer. In addition, teaching/learning through interactive multimedia CD-ROM seems to have the ability to revolutionize the conventional language laboratory. However, it is not likely that this new method will monopolize the entire field of English education in spite of its undoubted advantages and effectiveness. Education, in general, is human and educational interaction should occur between human beings, not between man and machine. In this light, computer-related methods may follow the path of those which were short-lived. Theories and methodologies will continue to compete among themselves.

4.3. What will be the general trend?

The nationwide enthusiasm for learning conversational English will further develop into a passion for speaking perfect English. This perfectionist goal requires a learner's absolute and

unconditional sacrifice. Quite a considerable number of Koreans are prepared to sacrifice all for a perfect command of English. Incidentally, it is very strange to observe that Koreans do not pay much attention to their competence in their own mother tongue. A large number of Koreans are proud of being fluent and accurate speakers of English, while they do not speak flawless Korean. Koreans seem to have the notion that a good command of spoken English is the ultimate goal in life.

The learner's enthusiasm and passion defy stalemate theories and methodologies of learning English. Government policy will certainly change because the government renovates the English curriculum every five years. However, the change will never be drastic because the skills goals can not be altered altogether. Moreover, past experience tells us that, even though there are some changes in theories and methodologies, they usually cause only a small stir in the field of English education. Therefore, the future of English education will completely depend not on theories and methodologies or principles and techniques but on the enthusiasm and passion of the learners.

If Koreans concentrate on impassioned learning of English and continue to disregard competence in their mother tongue, they may have a comparatively very poor competence in Korean. Although there may appear, in the future, people with several different levels of English competence, that is, native competence, near native competence, fairly good competence, poor competence, bad competence, etc., the state of the situation, then, may proceed toward Korea's being a nearly bilingual country. Accordingly, the general trend at that time would be that everyone should become a fervent learner of English.

5. Conclusion

English education in Korea which began to take shape from scratch has been very eventful, so let's just recapitulate the essential points. During the first half century of the past period, English education was meant for a chosen few, but with enlightenment of the nation it was made available to the general public during the second half century of that period. One characteristic of English education during the latter period was that English classrooms were test grounds for imported theories and methodologies: that is, lots of theories and methodologies were imported, and some of them were actually tested. A second characteristic was that Examination English was established as a washback effect of the entrance examination. This Examination English brought disorientation to normal English education and caused English education to go astray, producing skills asymmetry.

During the present period, professionalism emerged in the field of English education, and TESL/TEFL specialists began to replace the general practitioners of the past. These specialists brought all kinds of new ideas and techniques to the English classrooms of Korea and kept classroom teachers abreast development throughout the world. Moreover, they actively participated in shaping the policy on English education. As a result, they succeeded in emphasizing fluency over accuracy and also succeeded in replacing the structural syllabus with the notional-functional one. This major shift of emphasis made the public aware of conversational English and triggered employment of native speakers as well as an enthusiasm for learning English.

In the future, the goals of English education will remain just same, but Examination English will remain too. If there is any revolution expected, it will be CD-ROM with interactive multimedia recorded on it. An important change which will happen in the immediate future, however, will be the introduction of elementary-school English. Elementary-school teachers are not prepared to teach English as yet, but they will have to make themselves English teachers within the next three or four years. Nobody can guarantee their success. In spite of everything, it is expected that there will be more than enough fluent speakers of English within a decade's time. With so many English-speaking citizens, Korea could become a nearly bilingual country, but this is not expected.

To sum up, English education in Korea has been advancing very fast since it first gained momentum. English education, however, recently reached a stalemate, and the major stumbling block has been Examination English. Now there is another stumbling block, and it is the shortage of manpower for teaching English. Especially, elementary schools will suffer from the shortage. Nevertheless, an early start of English education at the elementary-school level aroused hopes in the people of becoming bilingual. Some expect Korea to become a nearly bilingual country. That, however, will never happen. In this ever-shrinking world and in a nearly bilingual country, people may soon find that their mother tongue will be in danger of extinction and will choose to safeguard it lest they should lose their own identity.

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Abstract

English Education in Korea: Past, Present, and Future

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This paper aims to make a historical survey of English education in Korea. Ever since its beginning in 1883, it has gone through many changes, reforms, and innovations, but will encounter more eventful occasions in the future. In the past, everything was new and mind-boggling, but at present nothing seems to be new or interesting. Nevertheless, the future of English education in Korea may experience something nobody has ever experienced before, that is, everyone will speak English and the nation may become a nearly bilingual country. However, this situation will never happen, no matter how well people speak English, because people will soon discover that their mother tongue is in danger of extinction and will choose to safeguard it lest they should lose their national identity.