

7-1-2010

The Reluctance of Korean Education in the Face of Change

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Recommended Citation

Jambor, Paul (2010) "The Reluctance of Korean Education in the Face of Change," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 3, Article 51.

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol8/iss3/51>

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Academic Leadership Journal

It should first be stated that there are many bright students in the Korean educational system and Korea has produced great waves in the information technology fields and the Korean economy has leaped in bounds from the days of poverty and despair, following the Korean War, to the present days when Korea has proven itself to be a world class country with a world class economy. Nevertheless, the Korean system of education has seemingly lagged behind the advances the Korean information technology and semiconductor industries have enjoyed.

In general, the Korean system of education does not seem to value student creativity as a notable asset and thus it is hard for people with new innovative ideas to move to the forefront of the system in order to bring about positive change and to create something so great that the whole world would give it merits in the form of a Nobel Prize.

What is more, whether it is the positive changes in educational policies introduced by current Korean President Lee Myung-bak or the reshuffling of the educational policies at Korea University by former president Euh Yoon-dae in an effort to make Korean universities world class institutions, Korean educators themselves seem reluctant to allow such changes to take place, being less concerned with the quality of education and more concerned with their collective job security. Overall, education in Korea needs to evolve with the times so it could provide the highest quality of education for Korean students in the hope of making Korean students and universities more competitive internationally. Perhaps Korean educational policy makers should closely examine other educational systems and use them as blueprints in restructuring the Korean system of education. Additionally, the complete abolishment of plagiarism is just one of the necessary steps educational policy makers must make to move in the right direction.

The choice is simple. On the one hand it is the insistence of holding onto the Korean language as the primary language of education in tertiary as well as secondary educational institutions while still keeping to traditions and maintaining a teacher centered approach, and on the other it is the embracement of the English language in the same institutions in addition to the implementation of a more learner centered and task oriented Western teaching approach. While the latter choice leads to more 'world class institutions' and better domestic opportunities in terms of tertiary education for Korean students, the earlier keeps the international rankings of Korean universities down but a sense of comfort remains in the hearts of the Korean people in having a collective consciousness with regard to the fact that they are unified in the face of English Language Imperialism (ELI) in an effort to hold onto their Korean traditions. The choice to restructure educational policies surely has its own set of complications for even the younger generations of Koreans, but it is necessary if the aim is to rise to the forefront in a new educational global order.

The Use of English in the Korean Classrooms

To gain a better understanding of why the use of English by teachers in the Korean university classroom is becoming more and more important it is essential that the methodology, the QS World –

Times Higher Education uses to evaluate universities on a world scale, is first examined in more detail, since the international rankings devised by the magazine is gaining increased international attention. In the QS World – THE methodology, the highest weighing is given to the two surveys; the Peer Review section (40%) and the Employer Review (10%). Additional weighing is given to the Faculty Student Ratio (20%); Citations per Faculty (20%); the ratio of International Faculty (5%); and the ratio of International Students (10%) (See Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 : The Times Higher Education Methodology

Indicator	Explanation	Weighting
Academic Peer Review	Composite score drawn from peer review survey (which is divided into five subject areas). 6,354 responses in 2008.	40%
Employer Review	Score based on responses to employer survey. 2,339 responses in 2008.	10%
Faculty Student Ratio	Score based on student faculty ratio	20%
Citations per Faculty	Score based on research performance factored against the size of the research body	20%
International Faculty	Score based on proportion of international faculty	5%
International Students	Score based on proportion of international student	5%

(QS Times; Methodology, 2009)

Figure 1.2: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings Methodology

Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Alumni	10%
Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Award	20%

	Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	HiCi	20%
Research Output	Papers published in Nature and Science*	N&S	20%
	Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index	PUB	20%
Per Capita Performance	Per capita academic performance of an institution	PCP	10%
Total			100%

(Shanghai Methodology, 2009)

What is more, because in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings (Shanghai, 2009), 60% of the methodology is based on the citations and publications per faculty (Figure 1.2), which for the most part is carried out and published in English (See Figure 3A), and because the same applies to the QS World – THE University Rankings, with 20% of the methodology based on the faculty’s research performance (Figure 1.1), the role that the English language plays with respect to the international rankings the respective universities are able to attain, should become ever more evident.

The QS World – THE indicators that are most impacted by the use of English in the classrooms are the Employer Review (see (1)), the Citations per Faculty (see (2)), the International Students (see (3.1)) and the International Faculty indicators (see (3.2)).

(1) When it comes to the ability to speak a foreign language, employers are increasingly demanding English proficiency from their employees, most certainly in South Korea, therefore, it is beneficial that graduates get a head start by gaining sufficient abilities in English whilst still in school rather than attending private English language institutions while already in the work force or even as they search for work. One of my responsibilities at Korea University is to teach a Job Seeking Skills class, and I invariably tell my students the important roles the English language will play in their lives during job seeking or while on the job. Since today’s world is becoming increasingly globalized and economies rely more and more on not only domestic but also on international markets, it is becoming essential that employers hire staff that can perform cross border relations. In point and fact, the total GDP of the English speaking countries is 19.74 trillion US\$ while the two Koreas only have a total GDP of 1.246 trillion US\$ (Figure 2). This in itself should persuade any Korean employer involved in cross border activities to seek employees who are sufficiently proficient in English since the English language has a greater economic pull than Korean. Therefore, since employees are more inclined to seek graduates who can speak good English, those alumni who graduated from English speaking universities have a better chance at getting work, and as an added consequence Employers would be expected to rank higher those universities where larger portions of the curriculum is English mediated. Even Korean universities themselves have the tendency to hire professors who graduated from higher ranked

universities where the primary medium of education is English. Dankook University in 2006, for example, hired professors from predominantly higher ranked Korean universities as well as from foreign universities where the medium of education is English. Of the ten new hires on the Seoul Campus, five were PHD graduates of American universities, three from Seoul National University, one from Yonsei University and one from Ehwa Womans University (Dankook, 2006). Additionally, at the Sogang University Graduate School of International Studies there is no active faculty member that graduated from a Korean university. As a matter of fact, they all graduated from universities, the likes of Harvard, Yale, Stanford and George Washington University (Sogang, 2009).

(2) Moreover, as stated above, since academic papers are primarily published in the medium of English (see Figure 3A), and because 20% of the QS World – THE, and 60% of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings methodologies (Figures 1.1 & 1.2) are based on publications and citations per faculty indicators, it is essential that students learn how to write essays in English so that they can have ample opportunities to have their research published in academic journals and to have better chances in being hired for professorial/research posts at postsecondary institutions, should they pursue further education.

To my surprise, having done a show of hands survey, a large majority of my students in my Academic English classes at Korea University have had little or no training in writing academic essays, in Korean or in English. For the most part, only those students that attended international high schools in Korea or high schools abroad have had any training in academic essay writing. All in all, this is a clear sign that serious reforms need to take place and moreover a sign that Korean high school students are insufficiently prepared for the world of academia. As a matter of fact, the professors I talked to from abroad, i.e. at the University of Birmingham, would agree that while the visiting Korean students at their respective universities are bright and full of potential, many lack the ability to write in a logical manner when it comes to writing essays. Perhaps it is because they are taught to write according to Confucian rules (Yum, 1987) and not in line with the rules of academia.

Figure 2: Estimated Total GDP of the Biggest Economies (2007 – 2008)

Countries (Language)	Estimated GDP
Countries Where English is the Main Official Language (English)	19.74 Trillion
China – Honk Kong & Macau included (Chinese – Cantonese & Mandarin)	7.4 Trillion
Taiwan (Chinese – Mandarin)	0.7 Trillion
	Total: 8.1 Trillion
Japan (Japanese – Mandarin)	4.923 Trillion
Countries Where Spanish is the Main Official Language (Spanish)	4.36 Trillion

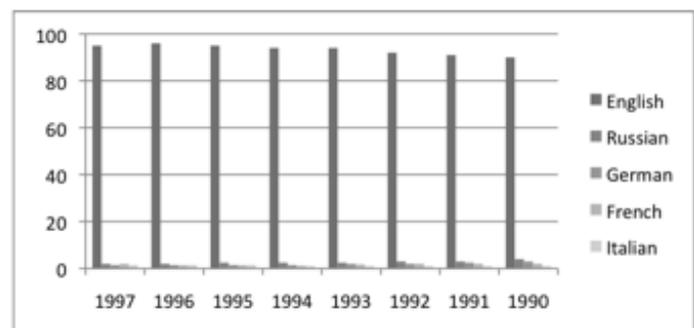
Countries Where German is the Main Official Language (German)	3.45 Trillion
India (Hindi – English as a Subsidiary Language)	3.29 Trillion
Countries Where Russian is the Main Official Language (Russian)	3.05 Trillion
Countries Where French is the Main Official Language (French)	2.15 Trillion
Countries Where Arabic is the Main Official Language (Arabic)	2.1 Trillion
Countries Where Portuguese is the Main Official Language (Portuguese)	1.83 Trillion
Italy (Italian)	1.814 Trillion
N. and S. Korea (Korean)	1.246 Trillion

(The Canadian GDP is figured into the English grouping while that of Switzerland is figured into the German language grouping. Despite the fact that these countries have more than one official language they nonetheless meet the criteria to qualify for their respective grouping since the majority of the people residing there speak English and German respectively.)

(The complete data set is compiled by amassing individual averaged data sets from both Wikipedia and The World Factbook in order to arrive at the most accurate figures)

Underwood says: “Korea is a Confucian society. Everyone is Confucian, including the Christians” (1998:85) and it is this strong Confucian belief system that has such an influence on even the way Koreans write. Overall, Confucian writing leaves the reader with a sense of mystery, and it is the ambiguity of his/her writing that makes the writer appear wise. According to Confucian philosophy, “the more subtle the nonverbal communication, the more

Figure 3A: Academic Output – Scientific Citation Index in the Major Languages



(MWS, 1998)

sensitive or masterful one should become to be a good communicator” (Yum, 1987). On the other hand, standard academic writing should be clear and to the point, without ambiguity. That is, an academic essay should speak to the reader in a straight forward and logical manner. However, Confucians see this as being excessively direct and overly dry cut, and as a likely consequence academic writing is for the most part neglected to be taught in secondary educational institutions. All things considered, it is a

much more daunting task for Korean students to develop into academics capable of being published in Academic Journals regularly as opposed to their Western counterparts who are more often trained in the art of academic writing, in the medium of English, from a much earlier age.

(3.1) As for increasing international student numbers, it goes without saying that it is easier for universities around the world to attract more foreign students if a higher percentage of courses are English mediated. That is, foreign students wishing to study in Korea are more likely to have a working knowledge of English than Korean and the less time they need to invest in learning Korean in order to study in Korea the more likely it is that they will choose Korea as a destination for their foreign studies ventures. Naturally, hiring foreign professors can more easily bring this kind of attractiveness to the table, especially if Korean professors are reluctant in conducting English mediated classes (as is evidently the case with some Korean professors; to be discussed in the section 'Korean Professors Reluctant to Accept Necessary Change'). What is more the brain drain South Korea is experiencing with the high numbers of professors teaching abroad needs to be compensated for by hiring qualified foreign professors to take their place.

(3.2) Currently at Korea University, ranked 211th worldwide by QS Times, only 5.3% of the staff is foreign (235/4,415); at Seoul National University, the highest ranked Korean university at 47th place, the ratio of foreigners is 5.66% (342/6039); at Yonsei University, which is ranked 151st overall, there is only 3.8% foreign faculty (203/5254); at McGill University, the highest ranked Canadian university receiving 18th place, has 17.8% (929/5,204); while at Harvard University, the number one ranked institution, the ratio is 31.6% (1,197/3,788) (QS World, 2009). Consequently, it appears that the number of foreign staff at the institutions does, to at least some extent, correlate to the international rankings of the respective universities. That is to say, universities which are more concerned with hiring qualified professors having a reputable research record, rather than hiring them based on their nationality, has the potential to increase the university's rankings. What is more, internationals bring various points of views to an institution and thus a wider assortment of nationalities, in terms of faculty, would invariably provide for a wider spectrum of knowledge and points of views to be disseminated amongst the student body. This would go far in ensuring that the academic approaches to any given subject does not become stagnant with the overemphasis of only one main point of view. At the very least, Korean students should increasingly take part in foreign student exchange programs. Overall, it may be safe to state that Korean institutions are apparently protectionist and subsequently characteristically stagnant in their teaching approach.

All in all, a higher proportion of foreign faculty and foreign student body would increase International Faculty and International Student indicators at the respective universities. What should raise some eyebrows is that the evident tendency for the above indicators combined (Empirical Review, Citation per Faculty, International Faculty and International Staff Indicators), to be so closely related to the prevalence of the English language at the respective universities, is a clear indication that increasing the number of English mediated classes should be a priority for universities worldwide.

English as an Imperialist Language

Aside from citing QS World – THE and Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings methodologies (Figures 1.1 & 1.2) to show that the more English mediated classes at Korean universities would consequently lead to higher university rankings, it may be important to note that since the English

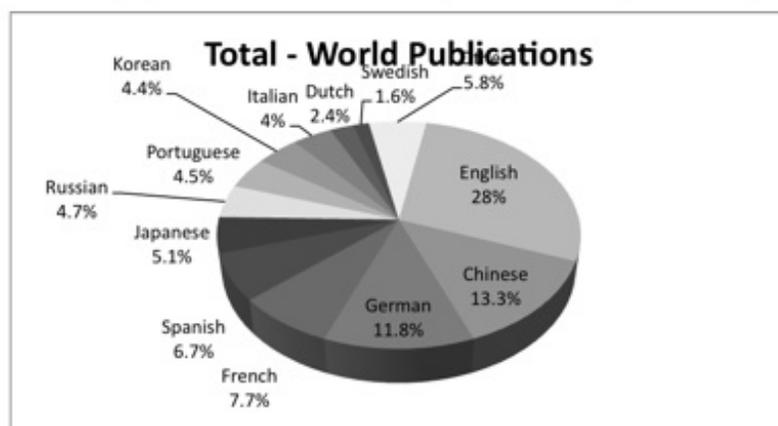
language is imperialist the need for accepting English as a working language in the classrooms is becoming more and more important in the face of globalization. Phillipson asserts that “ the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (Phillipson, 1992:47). This supports the idea that English is an imperialist language (See Jambor, 2007). Additionally, Holy (1990, in Finch, 2000) claims that English “can also act as a means of politico-cultural colonisation of the spirit, serving the interests of the most powerful concentrations of economic power the world has ever known”. While Phillipson, Jambor and Holy do make their point that English Language Imperialism is real, it is the learners of English as a foreign language that pay the ultimate price by bearing witness to their native languages being pushed out by English from all their domains. This is very much the case in South Korea, where English, much to the regret of most Koreans, is ever increasingly superseding the Korean language in its educational domains. Nonetheless, to keep English out of the Korean university classrooms is to keep Korean university rankings down.

Also, considering the number of books published worldwide in each language, the books published in English account for 28% of all the books published worldwide (Figure 3B). Since there is such an abundance of printed academic materials in the English language, and since only 4.4% of all the books published worldwide are in Korean, would it not be sensible to teach more university courses in English rather than Korean if the aim is to improve the overall quality of education? What is more, it is only logical to assume that the quantity of research in English far exceeds the academic materials printed in Korean given the low citation figures for Korean universities, therefore, it would give Korean students better opportunities to find relevant information in their areas of research if they were to perform their studies and research in English. As a matter of fact, the citation figures for Korean universities were so low in 2004 that the university with the highest citation index in South Korea only ranked 287th in the world, followed by the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology at 422nd place and Yonsei University at 648th (Thomson Reuters, 2004).

Additionally, it would only be logical to assume that because of the tendency for many Korean professors to have acquired their PHDs at higher ranked universities abroad, most likely in the United States, they would actually be better equipped to give lectures in English, the language in which they gained most if not all of the linguistic expertise pertaining to their respective fields/majors.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the economic strength of languages plays an important role in the decision employers make when hiring new workers, and universities need to take this

Figure 3B: The proportion of the world's books published annually in each language



(Graddol in Zughoul, 2003)

overwhelming factor into account since universities themselves are ever increasingly becoming financial institutions. In essence, their brand names count for a great deal in today's global world. It is no longer enough for universities to be the best within the borders to the outside world if they are to make their presence known worldwide. They must also be increasingly concerned with their international standings, and as the Estimated Total GDP of The Biggest Economies (2007 – 2008) chart shows (Figure 2), the English language far outweighs all other languages in terms of the associated collective GDPs attributed to the most prominent languages, with Chinese coming in at distant second.

Germany has the strongest economy in Europe, with German speaking countries having the 4th largest combined GDP (Figure 2), and German being the third most published language (Figure 3B), yet even the majority of German academics claim English to be their working language (Figure 4). For instance, 98% of all German academics in the field of Physics claim to use English as their working language. This is a very significant number given the economic strength of Germany, in Europe as well as internationally. There is simply no two ways of going about it. The English language has great economic influence and standing in today's global village and the avoidance of using English as at least one of the primary languages of education at any postsecondary institution will only result in the attainment of low international rankings for that particular educational establishment.

Figure 4: Disciplines in which German academics claim English as their working language

Physics	98%	Earth Science	76%	Veterinary Science	53%	Literature	23%
Chemistry	83%	Medical Science	72%	Economics	48%	History	20%
Biology	81%	Sociology	72%	Sports Science	40%	Classics	17%
Psychology	81%	Philosophy	56%	Linguistics	35%	Theology	12%
Maths	78%	Forestry	55%	Education	27%	Law	8%

(Graddol in Zughoul, 2003)

Figure 5: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings – 2009

University Name	World Ranking
Seoul National University	167

Korea Advanced Inst. Sci. & Tech	211
Yonsei University	301
Hanyang University	313
Korea University	323
Pohang Univ. Sci. & Tech.	333
Sungkyunkwan University	340
Pusan National University	444

(Shanghai, 2009)

Figure 6: Times Higher Education – QS World University Rankings 2009

World Ranking	University Name
47	Seoul National University
69	Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Tech
134	Pohang University of Science and Technology
151	Yonsei University
211	Korea University
339	Hanyang University
357	Sungkyunkwan University
371	Pusan National University
374	Kyung Hee University

379	Sogang University
397	Ehwa Womans University
418	Inha University

(QS World, 2009)

In actual fact, neither of the rankings; the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Ranking (Shanghai, 2009) or the Times Higher Education – QS World Rankings (QS World, 2009) bodes well for any South Korean post secondary institutions (Figures 5 & 6). Only Seoul National University and Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology managed to make it into the top 100 universities in the QS World – THE Rankings and only Seoul National University made it into the top 200 in the Shanghai Rankings (Figures 5 & 6). It is therefore evident that Korean universities have much to improve, but are they willing to improve, even if the simplicity of the formula is so clearly laid out before them? That is, to have more English mediated classes in more subjects and majors, and to hire more qualified foreign faculty.

Korean Professors Reluctant to Accept Necessary Change

It goes without saying that in order for institutions to undergo change, the faculty at the same institutions needs to embrace the change. However, this does not seem to be the case in Korea, at the very least not at Korea University in 2006 according to former Korea University President Mr. Euh. Nevertheless, it must be said that Korea University has one of the highest proportions of English Mediated classes in Korea, at 45%, due to former president Euh.

Symbolically, in 2006, Korea University ranked 150th in the world on the Times Higher Education world ranking list (QS World). Of course this was an impressive milestone for Korea University, moving up from 184th place in the rankings from the previous year. Again, this is due to former university president Euh Yoon-dae's initiative to implement changes in university policies in order to make Korea University a 'world class institution' (Digital Chosun, 2006, Nov.15). Mr. Euh went about to improve the standards by which academic papers are scrutinized and obligated professors to start giving lectures in English. In fact, this improved Korea University's rank by 34 places in 2006 as compared to 2005. However, Mr. Euh's actions did not go down well with the professors at Korea university and more than half of the 900 professors voting voted Mr. Euh out of the group of nine candidates running for re-election in 2006 (Digital Chosun, 2006). After his dethronement, Mr Euh was quoted as saying that "Korea University professors are like bankers. They don't like change; all they want is stability" (Euh in Digital Chosun, 2006).

Was this the right course of action from the faculty at Korea University, in an effort to stop language shift caused by the English language, or was this merely an exercise of selfish interests in opposition to the greater good of Korea University and education in South Korea as a whole? After all, their decision to dethrone Mr. Euh may have come with a price as Korea University came in 243rd in the rankings the following year in 2007 while gaining a little ground in 2008, attaining a rank of 236th. This is still 86 places behind the ranking that Mr. Euh was able to achieve in 2006.

Nonetheless, many universities allegedly shifted in the rankings from the year 2006 to 2007 since the methodology of the Times Higher Education rankings was revised for 2007. It is suspected that because professors were no longer able to vote for their own institutions, those universities where the professors were more inclined to vote for their own institutions dropped dramatically in the rankings. (Nevertheless, there may be a more sinister reason for the drop in Korea University's ranking in 2007, as we shall see in a later section entitled 'Plagiarism in the Korean System of Education').

The Decision of Whether to Hold Onto Traditional Values or to Accept Change in the Face of a Changing World and the Efforts to Standardize Tertiary Education

Korean educators on the whole are faced with some difficult choices: On the one hand they can decide to remain 'proud Koreans' by holding onto the predominant use of the Korean language in all South Korean educational institutions and by keeping Korean culture running through the veins of the Korean public. After all, since language influences culture and vice versa (Bernstein in Wardhaugh, 1998:326) it becomes essential to protect languages in order to protect the respective cultures.

On the other hand, they can accept the language shift caused by the English language and look forward to their university rankings improving internationally. Evidently, language shift is taking place in Korea as the English language is ever increasingly forcing its way into Korean society and I do feel the pain of the Korean people as they bear witness to their native language being forced out of the various domains and as a result a part of the Korean culture is gradually weakened because of the strong influences of the English language.

The choice is undoubtedly tough. Nevertheless, for every step Korean universities and other educational institutions take to keep English from forcing out the Korean language from the educational domain, the more they will find themselves lagging behind international rankings, by which all educational institutions are judged worldwide in the new global order.

The Consequences of Resisting Change

Change in the face of reason would be my chosen course of action if I were a policymaker in the Korean educational system. However, since I do not share the Korean language as my native tongue with the Korean people, and perhaps more importantly because Koreans will never see me as a Korean, it is without consequences that I stand to advocate the need to promote the English language in South Korean educational institutions. Nevertheless, there is a great significance in adopting English, at least in the domain of tertiary education, and it goes without saying that the reluctance of Korean educators to resist such change comes with its own set of consequences. As mentioned before, the international rankings of Korean universities would remain low, and the alumni of Korean universities would find it increasingly more difficult to find work in today's global economy where English is becoming ever increasingly prominent (See Jambor, 2009). More importantly, Korean students would be ill prepared to attend higher ranked universities in English speaking countries. And perhaps as a matter of consequence and as previously mentioned, the domestic universities would pay the ultimate economic price since they themselves are commercial institutions, and in a twisted turn of fate the Korean economy would eventually take the blunt of the blow for all the students learning in higher ranked universities abroad would perpetually be more prepared for the challenges of today's global world. The rich in Korea seem to anticipate this and they appear to have a vested interest in sending their children to study at higher ranked universities abroad, especially in the United States.

Additionally, 4% of the Korean children, in the Gangnam district of Seoul (a more financially affluent area of Seoul), are sent abroad to study at the elementary level (mbn, 2009). Since only the financially well off can afford this luxury and since their children will as an outcome be better prepared to meet today's new global challenges, they are no doubt anticipated to remain in positions of power, therefore, keeping the hegemony of the Republic of Korea. This in itself is a huge disadvantage to the average Korean as this may very well be an extreme form of Capitalism, and not a true democracy of equal opportunities for all citizens, at work and the less financially able will invariably suffer the consequences as they will undoubtedly not be given equal opportunities to become better prepared for the new global order in a "truly global society" (Brown in UK PM, 2008).

Korean President Lee Myung-bak and his Efforts to Change the Korean System of Education

One advocate of change is current Korean President Lee Myung-bak who hopes to have all high school English teachers in South Korea teaching English in English as early as 2010. Significantly;

in November, the then-presidential candidate said it might be a good idea to [teach Korean history and language classes in English](#) and got himself roundly criticized as being "like the Japanese imperialists". (Korea Beat, 2008)

Consequently, many South Korean teachers are quite understandably unhappy and stand in opposition to Mr. Lee's proposed change in educational policies. Namely, many high school teachers are reluctant to "teach English in English" (Korea Times, 2008). From my own personal experience, having been assigned by the Institute of Foreign Language Studies at Korea University to teach 2 consecutive Teaching English in English Teacher Training Programs for middle school and high school teachers working for the Seoul Metropolitan Board of Education, during the fall semester of 2009, the teacher trainees were quick to voice their clear and undue reluctance to teach English in English. A number of them went through the entire course of the session with this attitude of excessive resistance in the face of change. As a matter of opinion,

a majority of the country's English teachers report that they could deliver lessons wherein the first language of everyone in the room is conspicuously absent. But ... this is bad pedagogy, and that this is the reason most teachers have resisted the policy. And forget what will become of competent teachers unable or unwilling to "teach English in English." (Korea Times, 2008 – March 11)

Simply put, there is an air of resistance by Korean high school teachers when it comes to President Lee's English oriented educational policies. Perhaps the words "unwilling or unable to teach English in English" in the above quote is what best drives across the message that the biggest reason for the opposition to positive change is not that it "is bad pedagogy" (also from the above quote) to teach English in English but rather that it threatens the job security of many middle school and high school teachers. After all, this supposed inability or unwillingness no doubt would lead to the loss of some of their jobs. That is to say, as was the case with Korea University professors according to former Korea University President Mr. Euh (Digital Chosun, 2006), Korean high school teachers have much to lose in terms of job security if they are unable to start teaching English mediated English classes to their students. Perhaps it is not so much the best interest of their students that they truly have in mind but rather their own vested interests. But of course if educators are given too much power, educational change is hard to implement if the educators themselves are unwilling participants.

My own Experiences as an Educator in South Korea

Needless to say, I am not in the same boat as the South Korean educators for, as I have already stated, my native tongue is not Korean but rather English. Overall, I am sure that I sound like an 'English Imperialist', however, I have only the welfare of the Korean students in mind. Moreover, it would seem that I have only to gain from advocating that the English language should have a more prevalent position in the Korean system of education, however, it is not job security I seek, as the article you are reading now will most likely not bode well with my Korean colleagues, therefore, it would prove to be counterproductive if my aim was job security since I work on a year to year contract and I need colleague approval for every renewal. In actual fact, I am more concerned with the future of the younger generations in South Korea. My principal goal is to give the best possibilities to the student body here in South Korea.

Being an integral part of the Korean educational system, I am constantly faced with the ineffectiveness of the high school system in Korea as I find my students ill prepared for the challenges of the university system as well as the challenges of the new global world. Supporting evidence for this may lie in the findings of the doctoral dissertation of Samuel Kim; 'First and Second Generation Conflict in Education of the Asian American Community', claiming that 44% of Korean students who enter top universities in the US fail to complete the four years required for attaining a degree (Kim in Kwon, 2008). In comparison, according to Kim's findings, the dropout rate for Chinese students it is only 25%, 21.5% for Indian students and a mere 12.5% for Jewish students.

As previously mentioned, most of my freshmen students at entry level are unversed in writing essays at even the most basic level. This is certainly a huge disadvantage for Korean students, especially if their aim is to study at universities abroad or if their goal is to pursue graduate and post graduate studies wherein academic essay writing is indispensable. After all, a large portion of the evaluation system at those levels consists of the scores they receive for their essays.

The Korean University Entrance Exam – System of Evaluation

While Korean university entrance exams, modeled on the American 'Scholastic Assessment Test' (SAT), are slowly evolving, they are nonetheless primarily based on a system of multiple choices, as is perpetually stated by my freshmen students at the various Korean post secondary institutions I have instructed at. As is the case in the USA, "the SAT Subject Tests is the collective name for 20 [multiple choice standardized tests](#) given on individual subjects. A student typically chooses which tests to take depending upon [college](#) entrance requirements for the schools in which he or she is planning to apply. The difference in the Korean SAT, as opposed to the American, is that in Korea all students have to simultaneously take the same test on a wide but the same range of subjects, wherein the test on any given subject is uniformly designated a given timeframe. In essence, students in Korea have no choice in which test to take. Rather they have to take all the tests in the curriculum, lasting the better part of a day. While, in Korea, multiple choice questions are seen to provide a fairer system of evaluation nationwide, as the answers are either right or wrong with no gray areas in between, they nevertheless provide a platform wherein creativity holds a position of little importance. That is to say, students who have good memories tend to do much better on these types of tests than those who are adversely better at creativity since their levels of success depend for the most part on how well they are able to retain information. Additionally, since the students who do better on these tests tend to get into the higher ranked universities, they invariably become leaders of the different sectors of society given the

increased levels of importance Korean society places on university rankings and given the trend that those in positions of power in Korean society have for the most part graduated from the higher rated 'SKY' (Seoul National, Korea and Yonsei) universities. Overall, eight out of ten judges and prosecutors appointed locally are from the SKY universities (Korea Times, 2008 – November 4). Lee Myung-bak, the president of Korea, himself graduated from the Korea University Business School where I happened to teach supplementary business English classes. What is more:

Roughly 60 percent of the 1,000 people who pass the Korean bar exam each year are also SKY diploma holders. Moreover, of 285 top government officials, including ministers, vice ministers and presidential secretaries, 61 percent, or 175, are SKY graduates, while seven out of the 10 chief executive officers of the top 100 Korean companies by market value in 2007 graduated from one of the 3 universities. (Korea Times, 2008 – November 4)

What should be even more disturbing about this trend is that, in South Korea, it is intensely competitive to get into the few prestigious universities. Consequently, given the trend that those students who do better on the university entrance exams generally get into better universities and therefore end up in better social positions within Korea, and since those students who have vast creative potential as opposed to outstanding abilities in memorizing are largely left in lower ranked schools and therefore being placed in lower ranked positions, the country inevitably suffers from a lack in creative individuals in significant positions of power. This is an apparent loss to the nation as a whole if one takes into consideration that creativity leads to innovation and innovation leads to advancement in the technology race.

One might expect that creative individuals would be more prone to implementing much needed changes in the different sectors of society, including the sector that deals with educational policies, and this might even prove to be a blessing in Korean society wherein creativity on the whole lags far behind the advances in both the information technology (IT) and the nanotechnology fields. Perhaps, an added number of creative individuals in positions of authority might even facilitate the type of learning and research environments wherein students can more easily attain Nobel Prizes for their revolutionary thinking in creating ground breaking research and technologies.

On the whole, Koreans have proven themselves to be great at manufacturing products based on existing technologies, but when it comes to outdistancing other IT producing nations, like Japan and the USA for instance, in masterminding innovative technologies, it may be essential that a higher number of creative individuals are given the chance to reach more significant positions. Consequently, they could exert a more positive effect on the domestic IT industry and thus contribute more to winning the IT race, after all, "imagination is more important than knowledge" (Einstein, 1879-1955) and "creativity can solve almost any problem. The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality, overcomes everything" (Lois, nd.).

By and large, it is conceivable that if a much higher level of importance was placed on creativity in the university entrance exams, by having fewer multiple choice and more essay type questions requiring creative thinking, that those individuals with superior writing skills and creativity could move to the forefront of Korean society and as a result move Korea into a more positive direction by helping it break into the forefront in developing ground-breaking technologies and produce more academics who are proficient in writing academic articles publishable by Academic Journals.

What should be of even greater concern is the standardization of entrance exams nationwide. While many South Koreans would likely tell you that this is the fairest system of evaluation since the answers to the questions are absolute and that all Korean students take the very same test, the result is the same opportunities for everyone. However, I would argue the exact opposite. That is to say, the students are only as good as the teachers themselves. After all, if one teacher has a better idea of what is on the standardised exam than another, then s/he can in effect better prepare his/her students for the test. Also, the more money parents can afford to spend on supplementary education, by moving to elite districts wherein the national system of education is significantly better and by sending their children to supplement their studies in institutes where students are best prepared for the standardized test, the better chances their children can have at getting high scores on the test. After all, the total variance in the levels of education between national schools in South Korea is 31.8% (PISA Report 2006). Thus, in actual fact, students are only as good as the level of education provided to them in the districts they learn in (with better education found in pricey elite districts) and the supplementary private education their parents' pocketbooks can afford and only as well prepared as their teachers' levels of competence.

On the other hand, if teachers could evaluate their students' abilities themselves, through the tests they have devised on their own, and this system of evaluation was the standard by which entrance requirements to universities were measured, it would prove to be a fairer system in determining who gets in and who doesn't get into their chosen post secondary institutions so long as secondary education is standardized on a national level.

The Korean Classroom Culture

Although South Korean 15 year olds were ranked first in reading and fourth in mathematics (PISA Report, 2006: 47 & 53), they are nonetheless subjects that can successfully be taught and learnt in a teacher centered Eastern system of education. Furthermore, for students to effectively master these subjects, the creative environment is nonessential.

Korean students do appear to fair well in learner centered educational environments. In any case, my postsecondary students throughout Korea also seem to do fairly well in my learner centered classroom environment once they become accustomed to it and once they are made aware of its legitimacy, thus, the argument that the leaner centered teaching approach is ineffective in the South Korean educational environment should remain grossly unsubstantiated.

Taken as a whole, a learner centered system of education could go far in reducing the need for students to attend private educational institutions which put an unnecessary strain on the average Korean's pocket book. Moreover, the education learners receive in the public school system should no doubt be more than sufficient in meeting the educational requirements needed to pass the annual SATs. If this is not the case, then it is safe to say that the public educational sector has hideously failed in their responsibilities toward the students. What should be of greatest concern is that the increased expenses in education, as a result of the rising need to send Korean children to private institutions, may very be the cause of the low Korean birthrates of 1.2 children per woman (Lee, 2009). No doubt, the low birth rate will one day lead to a larger proportion of the elderly within the Korean population, and this will in all likelihood put an unnecessary strain on the Korean economy with the fewer numbers of young having to support the larger aging population.

What is more, instead of making the Standardized Assessment Tests (SATs) uniform nationwide, it would make for a better approach to place the focus on standardizing education on a national level instead to ensure that all students were taught the same things and according to the same standards.

As shown by the PISA 2006 report, “the variance in student performance between schools” was a whopping 31.8% for Korea (PISA Report, 2006: 32). Armed with this information, it is therefore safe to state that the assumed to be fair Korean SAT system is insufficient in creating equal opportunities for all students without the standardization of education in the entire school system in itself. That is to say, without standardizing the very system education nationwide, by bringing the variance level to as close to 0% as possible, an SAT test that’s identical nationwide will fail to provide a laxen system of assessment. As such, if a fair SAT scheme is to be achieved, both the SAT test and the system of education must be uniform countrywide.

What is more, adopting a non-standardized testing system may even reduce the high levels of suicides among South Korean high school students as a result of the enormous pressures they are under in order to get into the educational institutions of their choice. “Suicide rates unsurprisingly spike around the time of midterm exams for high school students” (Ohmy, 2007). What is more, South Korean teenagers contemplate on suicide at an alarming rate:

The survey of 4,700 middle and high school students, taken by the state-run Korea Youth Counseling Institute, showed 58.8 percent of the respondents had thought of suicide. Of the total, 11.1 percent attempted suicide. (Yonhap, 2008)

Overall, to reduce the pressures on students regarding their entrance exams it may best be left up to teachers to evaluate student performance, and make these evaluations the primary means by which entrance to universities is determined. By and large, if Korea had a more uniform system of secondary education and if teachers would only assess the students’ knowledge on only what they taught it may very well put students under less pressure and provide them with the fairest method of secondary school performance assessment.

Western versus Eastern Styles of Education (The Type B vs. the Type A syllabus)

For the most part, Korean education is based on an Eastern style of education, with roots in Confucian values, wherein the teacher acts as the knower and the students as the receivers of the highly regarded knowledge the teacher has to offer. In this context, the teacher becomes the central focus of the classroom and little focus is placed on the students. This creates an authoritarian setting in the classroom and the students find themselves under the authority of the teacher, only speaking when directed by the teacher (White, 1988:44). In essence there is a large power distance relationship between students and the teacher (Hofstede, 1986:313). Hofstede further states that in traditional “Confucian tradition, ‘teacher’ is the most respected profession.” (1986:304) As such, it is the teacher who stands at the top of the hierarchy with the students taking on a role of obedience and compliance.

Conversely, a student centered learning environment, wherein education is “inner directed or self fulfilling” (White, 1988:44) is indispensable. That is, a more task based teaching approach wherein increasing the amount of self-directed tasks, such as small group work and discussions/debates, ought to be implemented in the Korean classroom.

Although teacher centered teaching approaches have their own merits, namely that they are suitable for teaching subjects like math and they are well suited for lecture seminar settings, they should nonetheless only be used in teaching contexts where the aim is the transference of vital information, from teacher to student.

On the whole, because Korean students are far too complacent and introvert, according to my own personal experience, every reasonable effort should be exerted to break them out of this predicament as soon as possible. This could be done effectively enough through the consistent implementation of a learner centered and task based Westernized system of education.

Nonetheless, when it comes to language teaching the general consensus in the English Language Teaching (ELT) community seems to be that a 'Type B Syllabus' provides students with better communicational abilities and is internal to the learner (White, 1988:44) & (Long and Crookes). Conversely, a 'Type A Syllabus', a widespread method of teaching English at high schools throughout Korea, being external to the learner (White, 1988:44) & (Long and Crookes) with a focus on the teaching of grammar rules one item at a time, is widely considered ineffective in ELT education if the aim to use the language for real time communication.

All things considered, if the aim is to teach grammar as a separate subject on its own then the 'Type A' approach may prove more useful, but if the aim is to provide learners with the ability to communicate in real time then a 'Type B' syllabus makes for a better choice. After all, the ideology of the 'Type B' approach advocates that fluency leads to accuracy rather than accuracy to fluency (Willis, 2000:37).

Nonetheless, one must also take into consideration that a Type A Syllabus provides the teacher with more accountability toward the various levels of administration. This is because the type A syllabus clearly defines what is to be learnt and thus the teacher can easily show what s/he has taught his/her students ([Breen, 1987:83](#)), therefore improving his/her job security. This in turn would likely cause resistance among teachers to move toward a more learner centered approach.

Plagiarism in the Korean System of Education

A learner centered approach may also go far in improving student creative potential, by steering them out of the trend of constantly being directed by the teacher. In essence, students could learn to rely more and more on their own devices and thus allow their creative processes to take over. This would surely go a ways in reducing the need of students to copy other people's ideas, therefore avoiding the charge of plagiarism.

All things considered, it should be an added priority to eliminate plagiarism at the university level in Korea. Alarmingly, a Dong-A Ilbo article entitled 'Korea Has Reputation for Plagiarism' states that Korea has " the notorious nickname 'the Republic of Plagiarism' " (Dong-A Ilbo, 2007). In order to break this trend, Korean students must also be taught at high school and even at elementary school levels not to plagiarise. Much to my dismay, two and three of the students from two of my Academic English classes plagiarised by copying more than 50% of their work from various internet sites. I Googled the suspicious work and surely enough found the original text online. Their punishment was a mere F on the particular paper since there are no rigid university policies in place for plagiarism at Korean universities. This should no doubt change if there is any hope that the international rankings of Korean universities is to improve.

Given the seriousness of the consequence related to plagiarism abroad, usually indefinite expulsion at Academic institutions in the US, should Korean educational institutions not be advised to follow suit? After all, the majority of my freshmen students claim to have had little knowledge of the seriousness and the consequences of plagiarism at the academic levels before my class lecture on plagiarism. They claim that they knew it was bad practice at professorial and doctoral levels, but assert that they had little knowledge of plagiarism being wrong at undergraduate levels. So why were these students not enlightened about the dangers of plagiarism? Why were they not warned sooner?

Perhaps the answer to these questions may have more sinister roots. That is to say, even the former president of Korea University (not Euh Yoon-dae, already mentioned, but Lee Pil-Sang who took his place) eventually admitted to plagiarising 12 of his published works shortly after being elected at the end of 2006. His 12 works were nearly identical to the works of students he supervised between 1983-2005 (Digital Chosun, 2006 December). Needless to say he then had to resign and it is hard not to see the irony in this case since the previous president of Korea University, Mr. Euh, whose only mistake was to bring about unpopular yet necessary changes in policies, was ousted from the group of remaining candidates up for re-election, only to have a plagiariser take his place. This is a shame that all Korean professors have to live with for some time to come. Conceivably this is the more sinister reason (as foreshadowed in the section 'Korea Professors Reluctant to Accept Necessary Change') why Korea University dropped 93 places in the rankings from 2006 to 2007. Perhaps, this is also one of the reasons why Korean students plagiarise so readily. That is to say, while a certain university president is known to have plagiarized, then why should students not feel compelled to do the same in the hopes of reaching that very position? At least that is the argument students may put forth when faced with the decision of whether to plagiarise or not.

All in all, plagiarism deserves the proper attention in the educational system at all levels in South Korea. What is more, this may once again be a by-product of the Korean System of Education's tendency to move to the forefront those individuals who have great memory skills but not necessarily skills in creativity. After all, coming up with new and innovative ideas requires at least some level of creativity, and if those in the forefront lack this trait then they may be more inclined to copy other people's ideas and call it their own.

A Student Perspective

Looking at the issue of learner vs. teacher centered education, from a student point of view, my Academic English class students at Korea University were each asked to write an essay about their views on whether a Western (student centered activity based) educational system or a traditional Eastern (Confucian based teacher centered and information sequenced) educational system is more suitable for Korean education at the various levels. On the whole, 65% of the students would like to see a change in the educational system to a Western teaching approach (Figure 7), many of whom claim that the Eastern teaching approach is inadequate in readying them for the more Westernized system of education already in place at Korea University as a result of the changes in the university policies brought about by former university president Euh. Students often complain about the overwhelming task of having to adapt to a Westernized system of education in a very short period of time when first entering university. In line with the trend to establish more English mediated classes at Korean universities, other top Korean universities are following suit. Seoul National University, for instance, invited "American scholar Eugene Park to teach a [Korean Studies course exclusively in English](#)"

(Korea Beat, 2008) starting at the first semester of 2008.

Additionally, 10% of my students would like to see a combination of the two approaches, the majority of whom believe that a Western approach is only appropriate for university (Figure 7). 19% of the students want to see only the traditional Eastern approach, while only 5% see the merits of the Western approach but feel that Korea is not ready for it. Finally, only one student wants the Western approach limited to English education. Furthermore, not represented by the chart, a number of students express the need for more English mediated education at the High School level in an effort to ease the transition of students into the university system.

Figure 7: Korea University Academic English Class Students' Educational Preferences – 67 Students in Total – Math Education, Geography Education and Art & Design Majors

All in Favour of Westernised Education	A Combination of the Two Types of Education		In Favour of Traditional Eastern Education		
	Combination at all Institutions and on all levels	Westernise only at Universities	Westernise only for English Class	See the Advantages of the Westernised System but Feel that Korea is Not Ready	Want Only Traditional Eastern Education
65%	10%		25%		
	3%	7%	1%	5%	19%

(Source – Academic English Class Essays at Korea University)

As shown by the above chart, my Academic English class students, who are for the large part (73%) Education Majors and will eventually become educators themselves, recognise the need for a change in Korean education policies. They often cite the lack of stress on creativity in the Korean primary and secondary educational systems. Lee Hyung-eun, a student in my Math Education class for one wrote the following: “We need creative mind to survive in this era. The Western approach can increase students’ creative thinking.”

What is more, students often complain that the Korean University Entrance Exams (Scholastic Assessment Tests – SAT) focus too much on multiple choices and assert that Korean high school teachers teach only to ready the students for the exam and not for the sake of teaching. In reference to this, a student named Oh Si-gi of my Art & Design class wrote that “education is not for pure education, only for go to university”.

Students also criticize the current Korean high school system by stating that there is a lack of

discussion as well as back and forth dialogue in the classrooms. Bang Sung Soo from my Math Education class, for one, claims that “there isn’t a discussion and participation, and but memorizing” in high school.

Perhaps, most importantly, being students in the Department of Education, a substantial number of students are themselves beginning to see the reasons why teachers would prefer a more traditional teaching approach. For instance, my student Lee Yong-a, also from Math Education, states the following: “Type A is a system that teachers want. Main characters of education are not teachers but students”. This student clearly states that education should be more concerned with the students rather than the teachers. In line with that rationale, it would be more beneficial for the Korean system of education, with the welfare of the students in mind, to pull the decision-making away from the influence of the teachers so that the policymakers could do their jobs. In essence, it is time to restructure the Korean system of education so as to have the best interests of the students in mind.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the Korean system of education is in need of serious reforms if the aim is to create ‘world class institutions’, but if the aim is to hold onto the predominant use of the Korean language in educational institutions and to keep Korean traditions instead, then the resulting consequences must be endured. No doubt, those on the short end of the stick will not be the educators themselves but rather the newer generations of students when faced with the new challenges of today’s emerging global world.

All in all, it is in the best interest of Korean education to adapt the much needed changes even though it may put a number of educators, reluctant to accept change, out of work. Nonetheless, change must come at all levels of education, and as is shown in the body of this paper and there is really no excuse for failing to implement positive changes, unless of course the policy makers themselves fail to do so as a result of the imprudent opposition put up by teachers and professors.

In line with positive change, as discussed in the body of this paper, making Korean universities come to par with the best universities in the world would inevitably result in more opportunities for the young generations of Koreans, both domestically and internationally. Generally speaking, a superb domestic university system is a good indication of a healthy local economy and it would moreover go a ways in giving Korea a boost in the information technology race and go the distance in improving the Korean economy, the life blood of the country.

What is more, it is important that non-ethical acts like plagiarism are weeded out at all levels of education, that teacher centered instruction techniques are implemented where they are needed and that a higher focus on creativity as well as the teaching of essay writing are considered to be vital in all educational institutions in Korea.

All in all, South Koreans owe it to themselves to take the decision making into their own hands by supporting the policy makers in bringing about positive change, so as to make their domestic educational institutions more competitive on a global scale. This would surely lead to more chances for Korean students to get better education domestically and as a consequence would undoubtedly result in more opportunities for the average South Korean regardless of his/her class and/or financial circumstance.

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