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Article

English as International Language Revisited: Implications on South Korea's ELT Context¹

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KEYWORDS

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English Subject;
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ABSTRACT

This paper specifically aims to examine conceptual and empirical studies on the evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT) worldwide and its progression affecting ELT in South Korea. A systematic review was used as the research methodology. A number of significant articles from top-tier journals and book chapters were analysed utilising a content analysis, to gain evidence-based solutions. This paper begins with the outset of EIL (English as an International Language) in general, and examines a paradigm shift concerning the prestige norms such as American English (AmE) and British Received Pronunciation (RP). This paper heavily emphasizes on the condition of English Language Teaching in South Korea, and what theoretical foundations can be utilized to English language program in South Korea. Furthermore, this paper critically investigates the interconnectedness complexities between English and the national language, along with the attitudes toward native and non-native English-speaking teachers. The findings reveal some particular recommendations which can be undertaken to reconceptualize the language policy, teachers' recruitment and curriculum developments in South Korea.

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INTRODUCTION

As an international language, English has undergone considerable changes as a result of cultural, political, and economic influences (Halliday, 2020). Approximately, it is reported that the highest number of people using English is more than 1,3 billion people, and it can be reached up to 2 billion people in the near future (Lyons, 2017). In addition to that, today's variations of English are mostly spoken by people who speak English as a second language (McKay, 2018).

In early years, the widespread use of English sparks a fierce debate among applied linguists and interculturalists.

Phillipson (1992) for instance, contends that the supremacy of English has caused discriminations in cultural establishment, and sees English as a language killer. In a similar vein, Singh, Kell and Pandian (2002) argue that English as the language of power will always be notoriously associated with inequality. Meanwhile, Rajagopalan (2004) believes that despite its hegemony towards unprivileged languages, English is poised as essential lingua franca because it is the most coveted passport to the global citizenship. As global citizens, we need to understand 'the new dynamics of power' that English could bring; thus, a new paradigm shift towards the spread of English must be taken with vigilant approaches (Graddol, et. al., 2020).

English in the one hand, occurs to be used as a lingua

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franca for global communications. On the other hand, English has now been widely used in local settings across the globe. This juxtaposition dilemma has caused a heat debated among scholars (Canagarajah, 2014; Pennycook, 2017). Therefore, to be analytical and critical on how English is simultaneously regarded as an inequitable tool for global communication as well as a medium for local purposes, a systematic review of literature is required. The historical perspective on a paradigm shift towards English legacy in teaching can be understood from the case of British Council 50th anniversary conference three decades ago. In the conference, Quirk (1985) strenuously defends 'a single monochrome standard'. Quirk convincingly advocates the attended audiences and scholars to adopt inner circle varieties (either American English or British RP) as an authoritative model for second or foreign language teaching all over the world. However, this contention has 'no longer appeals to the majority of those who are involved in the ELT enterprise' (Rajagopalan, 2004). Instead, Kachru's (1992, 2005) plea for a paradigm changed on standardization have continued to be a favourable preference among ELT professionals.

The worldwide spread of English has gained its dominance in the educational system in many countries, and South Korea is no exception. Based on Kachru's (1992) three concentric circles, South Korea is included in the expanding circle of English as a foreign or international language. In South Korea, English has been chosen as the first foreign language of the country since the time of Japanese rule' ended in 1945 (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2003). The intimate relationship between South Korea and the U.S after the World War II has legitimised the prestige status of English, AmE in particular, as a 'cultural capital' in South Korea (Shin, 2007). Historically speaking, English was first taught as a regular subject in 1945, with its functional characteristic is initiated by the government, which was called as 'national operations' in its educational system (Jung and Norton, 2002).

Today's language policy in South Korea is principally generated within the discourse of globalisation, where languages are regarded as the economic products to keep up the country with the rapid development of world economy (Shin and Lee, 2019). Education is operated as an instrument to support this campaign. One of the actual coverage of this campaign is 'English-only' movement in the instructive program which commands that English should to be taught without first language's support (Jenks, 2019). This campaign is endorsed by the South Korean government as a devotee of the capitalism and the globalisation (Lee, et. al., 2010). As cited in Moodie and Nam (2016), Kim (2015) contends that Korean government has long been obsessed with English

education, initially, this demand is influenced by the 'English fever' that sweeps East-Asia countries thirty years ago.

Drawing predominantly from aforementioned discussions, the tension of complex interrelations between English as a global language and the use of English in the local context has the potential to be both, 'language killer' and 'language promoter'.

Therefore, re-evaluating the supremacy of English and the application of ELT for local context is significant, especially regarding the status of English language in the society. Furthermore, the evaluation of pedagogical norms in South Korea context is crucial, before answering the initial questions in a more nuanced way.

METHOD

This paper was framed through a systematic investigation or also known as a systematic review. Bryman (2016) defines a systematic review as a review process that is scientific, transparent, and replicable which allows the authors to review numerous sources of research by minimizing biases and providing authors with an audit trail of the reviewers 'decisions, procedures, and conclusion. Bryman (2016) also highlights that the systematic review can act as a stand-alone review which means they are not a prelude to research although its result could potentially lead to subsequent research. The systematic investigation also enables authors to gather evidence-based solutions by critically engaging and synthesizing a heap of journal articles and formulate valuable evidence-based research for decision-makers.

Drawing upon the fore mentioned argument, the use of systemic review in this paper allowed the authors to obtain a deep understanding of the complexities of English pedagogy in South Korea. The paper critically investigated through synthesizing a number of existed literatures. Only articles and book chapters disseminated by reputable publishers were reviewed. This includes chapters published by Routledge, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and Palgrave Macmillan or papers indexed by Scopus, DOAJ, WOS and ERIC.

Various measures were used to reduce subjectivity in our sources selection. At the beginning of the selection process, titles and abstracts were carefully examined to research-related topics. Further, methodological and discussion descriptions were scrutinized into an annotated bibliography. 64 research papers, books and book chapters were chosen for content analysis from a total of more than 100 sources annotated. The studies in this paper were divided into three main discussions, i.e., the development of English language curriculum and policy in South Korea, attitudes toward NEST and NNEST, and the status of English language in the community (a language killer or a language promoter).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Background of ELT Curriculum Development in South Korea

Since the existence of a hierarchical culture tradition in South Korea is substantially more severe than in most other countries, educational attainment is perceived as the only way to achieve ‘the social status and economic prosperity’ (Song, 2011). Accordingly, the parents in this community firmly believe that the children’s achievement depends on their educational attainment (Ahn, 2017). Since English language education in South Korea is considered as the top priority in the country, a success in this subject is highly regarded as the possibilities to create more opportunities in future careers. In tertiary education, for example, the high rates of the degree attainment have consequently created intense competition between adolescent in South Korea (Kim and Choi, 2017). Especially concerning high English proficiency as ‘the bridge’ to enter most prestigious universities is available in the country (Ahn, 2017). Therefore, suitable approaches to teach English started from secondary schools are set as a high priority and become the government primary agenda.

Some approaches have been observed to be implemented in the secondary school system, and English education curriculum has experienced minor and major changes from the early 1950s to the present days. Thus, a brief historical perspective on its alterations hopefully will gain more understanding to the current makeup of ELT in South Korea. Started from the year of 1954 to 1963, English education is introduced with grammar translation methods, while in the second curricula which was started from 1969 to 1973, used audio-lingual methods for an attempt to develop students’ pronunciation by imitating the teachers’ output (Lee, 2012). Within these two periods of time, the syllabus design is similar; they are a structural and text-based instruction (Kwon, 2000). Further, the third (1973-1981) and the fourth curricula (1981-1987) are executed with similar approaches; they are audio-lingual and structural-situational which emphasize on meaningful dialogue and grammatical complexities (Lee, 2012). Within this change, there is an attempt to improve students’ speaking skills, but the teachers are not adequately trained (MEST, 2011).

Furthermore, in the fifth curricula (1987-1992), the audio-lingual approach is no longer appealed to be an effective teaching style; thus, only a structural-situational approach is performed (Moodie and Nam, 2016). By 1992, the sixth curricula use the notional-functional approach as the teaching methods because this notion is aiming at a real-world situation of language use, and encourage students to have an interactive communication (Park, 2009). In the

seventh curriculum (1997-present day), the South Korean government focuses on two onsets of teaching mechanism; First, the curricular objectives are based on communicative competence; second, there is a paradigm shift in learning focused, which is from teacher-centred to student-centred (Moodie and Nam, 2016).

Lastly, the final revision of the 7th curricula in 2008 is marked as one of the most instrumental revolutions made in the history of ELT in South Korea. English is introduced as a regular subject in the primary schools for the first time (starting from the 3rd grade) and ‘The Nationwide English Immersion Plan’ is developed to create a more authentic English environment (Ahn, 2017).

Since the National English Curriculum is started to be implemented in the early 1950s, AmE is chosen as its only ‘standard’ teaching model (MEST, 2011). As a result, a large number of textbooks use American English as the norm in teaching-learning process (Kim, 2015). A further concern, however, happened in the mid-1960s when the elite English-speaking group of Koreans returned to the community from United States after finishing their higher education program (Ahn, 2017). This group of educated men, therefore, becomes a symbol of success for the following generation, and this tradition has been continued to the contemporary period of time (Kim, 2011).

As the nation of South Korea has transformed from being one of the poorest countries to be one of the wealthiest nations in Asia, along with Singapore, Hongkong and Taiwan (Jeon, 2009), this rapid financial and economic development, therefore, keeps South Korean people for having frequent contact in intercultural communication with various speakers of Englishes around the world in many social and economic events (Halliday, 2020). Since then, the desire to learn English in the country escalates significantly, and English has become one prominent subject at school (Cho, 2017). In regard to South Korean identity and its solid political and economic relations with the US, the combination of exonormative and lingua franca model can be adopted (Low and Ao, 2018). There are at least two main reasons why these models are the most relevant models to be implemented in the present time.

Firstly, since many South Korean have a tendency to study or live in the inner circle country like the US, they will have greater benefits since the exonormative model is acclimatizing the language and cultural norms of AmE speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2012). As a result, sooner or later they will have the confidence and sufficient ability to take the standardized test like TOEFL to compete with their counterparts across the globe, especially in regard to enter

world's best universities (Kim, 2017). Accordingly, some prestigious universities in the national level have demanded a high level of proficiency from English standardised tests to be achieved by the students, prior to graduation (Ahn, 2017). Equally important, having a good score in those standardized tests become one essential requirement for applying for jobs in South Korea, especially in multinational companies (Kim, et. al., 2018).

Secondly, for South Korean people who have no intention to pursue a dream job or a living in inner circle countries, must be facilitated with the lingua franca model. This is the most relevant model to be implemented since its goals are to achieve sufficient intelligibility of English as well as to avoid potential dominations of American English in South Korean society (Low and Ahn, 2017). As Jenkins (2009) puts it, mutual intelligibility is essential in the manifestation of understanding the Global English, especially to comfort intercultural communication between global citizens (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2018).

As far as scholars' concern, the appearance of English usage in public domains is very pervasive in South Korea, prominently in the entertainment businesses such as K-pop music industry, tv dramas, variety shows and brand advertisings (Ahn, 2017). Thus, the prevalent use of code-mixing and code-switching as a linguistic hybridization (Lee, 2006) and borrowing words from English as rhythmic or non-lexical vocables (Lawrence, 2010), are inevitable. Lee (2006) claims that this 'technical use' of English is intended to create intelligibility and discursive space for both Korean and English speakers worldwide. This is mainly because South Korean's entertainment industry is seen as one of the emerging consumptions across the globe nowadays (Ahn, 2017; Low and Ao, 2018). Accordingly, there are no potential demands that force South Korean people to use English as their primary mode of communication in daily life, especially in such monolingual and homogeneous community (Yoo, 2014).

Native vs Non-natives Teachers

Since the political dominance of the United States in South Korea, the idea of Native speakers of American English is often seen as an ideal model to teach the language (Braine, 2013). As a consequence, local teachers or Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST) are often marginalized in South Korea's ELT practice (Yim and Hwang, 2019). Despite the fact that expats (NEST) in South Korea are found to have a high level of normative and affective commitment to ELT profession, but they lack of commitment towards the workplace (Moodie, 2020). This means NESTs are unlikely to give significant contribution to the development of the programs and may results in seeking employment elsewhere (Morin, et. al., 2015; Moodie and Meerhoff, 2020).

From a critical perspective, English usage in Asia is predominantly used between non-native speakers than to communicate with native speakers (Moodie, 2020). Therefore, English language teaching cannot be treated with an 'Anglo' or 'Western' norms such as British or American English (Kurian and Kester, 2019). Instead, teaching methodologies and materials that represent the cultural norms of country should be included in the curriculum, and native English-speaking teachers (NEST) can be considered as not as vital as the local teachers (Rahman and Yuzar, 2020). Hence, the importance role of NNEST in the classroom cannot be overlooked.

Despite the fact that English language teaching will always be evolved around the notion of the native speakers, being thoroughly monolingual may actually turn out to be a limitation. Especially, when it comes to teaching English for non-native speakers, particularly in the novice level (Rajagopalan, 2004). It can be argued that, in terms of language accuracy and productive skills, NEST may be favourable compared to NNEST (Chun, 2014). However, NNEST is seen to be eminent in helping students in main elements like second language learning strategies and cross-cultural attentiveness (Abayadeera, et. al., 2018). In addition to that, NNEST could be more understanding to what students' needs in learning a new language since they knew what sort of situation that students have been through in learning a new language (Braine, 2013). Equally important reason, NEST also understands what kind of teaching technique can be implemented to help students achieve the learning target (Moodie and Meerhoff, 2020).

English in the 21st century: "Language killer" or "Language promoter" in South Korea?

Any understanding to the future of English across the globe needs to move beyond the relationship between its international framings and its local context complexities (including linguistic and cultural biodiversity). One prominent human right activist and linguist, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, in her book *Linguistic Genocide in Education – or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights*, argues that 'the monolithic version of teaching English is clearly both empirical and political absurdity' as she considers English is a 'language killer' to minority languages across multilingual communities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The problem is English as a symbolic of linguistic power could cause to minority languages is how English is replacing local languages in most schools as a medium of instruction (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2015). Despite the fact that she always reminds people that she has nothing to do with against people who learn any languages, she substantively put her concerns toward how English is learned at the cost of the mother tongues, not as an addition to them (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2020).

In supporting her criticism toward English as a language killer, there is plenty of academic works on how English has accelerated indigenous and minority languages through their educational systems (e.g., Bamgboṣe, 2019; Jenks, 2019; Purkarthofer and De Korne, 2020). Therefore, the need for re-thinking and re-evaluating the status of English and the implementation of ELT worldwide in relation to maintain its role as a language promoter is required.

The notion of whether English should be taught merely from the perspective of prestige norms such as American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) is needed to be revisited. Nowadays, more and more people from mainland China will not hesitate to eventually talk to Japanese, Korean and Indonesian in international forum. Prestige norms like American English and British English are not seen as the presenters of the language (English) anymore. According to Rajagopalan (2004), English in the globalized world will no longer attached to the native speakers, so that everyone has the right to use it anywhere, anytime.

Nevertheless, the role of English as the language promoter can be seen as an ideal notion. English is seen as language that unifies our diversity gap, but an effort to achieve ‘an ideal’ standard English must be underlying in the mutual intelligibility, not in the ‘Englishization’ or ‘Americanization’. As Kachru and Nelson (2006) put it, if the people in North America have no wish to speak or write like a British English user, why should a Nigerian, an Indonesian, or a Korean feel any differently?

The notion of ‘thinking globally but acting locally’ is relevant to the purpose of the teaching English as a global language. Global English must be taught through Paulo Freire’s ‘critical pedagogy’ that may resonate local attentiveness but have global implications. In relation to the future of ELT in South Korea, an analogy from Kirkpatrick (2000, 2012) and Kim (2015) can be taken as a theoretical foundation, in which to include both local and global setting in teaching-learning process. Especially as an emancipatory site to counterbalance the tension between local and global norms into classroom discourse (Finardi, et. al., 2021). Simultaneously, the inclusion of real-world circumstances in the curricula is equitably distributed (Jane Ra, 2019).

When English is ‘glocalized’ through cultural needs, it has the potential to work as a ‘language of opportunity’ for South Koreans (Kirkpatrick and Lixun, 2020). Thus, the reconceptualization of the ownership of English in South Korea will have more significant implications for ELT practices in the country (Jane Ra, 2019). Fortunately, despite English’s high standing in South Korea and the

country’s vulnerability as a monolingual culture, patriotic and nationalistic attitudes are passionately held by South Korean citizens (Shin, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the South Korean educational system has been highly influenced by a considerable impact of world globalization and the U.S political agenda. In particular, a perspective considering American English as a prestigious norm in the country which may deter its sociolinguistics values and national identity. Due to this reason, the government must diminish the notion of Americanisation in teaching methodology and materials. Instead, the government should begin to ‘Koreanize’ the English teaching material with a great sense of Koreanism and set a focus on reflecting Korean cultures like respecting elders and hospitality.

One possible solution is to employ more experienced local teachers instead of relying upon inexperienced Native English Speaker Teachers (NEST). NNESTs are believed to possess a socio-cultural understanding as well as metalinguistic knowledge. As it has been highlighted in previous studies, it is suggested that the lack of experienced monolingual NEST who has limited knowledge of local culture should be reintegrated with professionally trained bilingual NNEST. Drawing upon this, the status of professionally trained local teachers needs to be promoted. Furthermore, the recruitment of local teachers should not be a concern because their dominant values of a comparative’s knowledge of linguistic resources and socio-cultural understanding.

The significance of this paper can be used as a reflection and a consideration in recruiting teachers, instructors, and staff, as well as to treat both NEST and NNEST with equal conduct. NEST and NNEST are responsible for a significant role in creating a positive learning atmosphere and pedagogy. Nevertheless, both teachers need to be well aware of introducing a single-minded promotion of English despite individual demands and interests. Furthermore, regarding the question of whether English is disrupting the local language ecology or not, it can be contended that there is no evidence or whatsoever that claim English is affecting the Korean language. Instead, nationalism is firmly attached in any individuals of Korean as they are proudly present and promote their national language in the eyes of world media. Particularly, in the case of worldwide spread of Korean entertainment industry.

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