

Issues in English Language Education at Korean Elementary Schools

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This literature review examines the current situations of English education at elementary schools in Korea and discusses three issues related to this educational challenge; (1) age of initial instruction, (2) access to effective English instruction, and (3) professional development needs of Korean teachers of English. Although the initial age of instruction has been lowered and will be further down to the age of six in Korea in two years, there is theoretically no agreement as to the efficacy of early introduction of L2 instruction. While the equity of the access to effective English instruction is heavily questioned, the quality of instruction assumes more importance in Korea. Teacher development programs are therefore needed to develop Korean teachers' English proficiency and skills and knowledge to teach English. Implications for the education policy and classroom practice of early English introduction in other parts of the world, particularly Japan, are included at the end.

Key Words : Korea, Japan, English education, elementary school, NNS, teacher development, initial age of instruction

. Introduction

English has become the de facto global language and it is in English that a majority of political, cultural, social and business transactions are carried out in the whole world day in, day out (e.g. Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Wallraff, 2000). English is an important means of communication not only for its native speakers from the so-called "BANA" (Holliday, 1994) countries, Britain, Australia, and North America, but also for the increasing number of non-native speakers throughout the world, who are much larger in number than the former. The impact of this is pervasive. Researchers and professionals in ELT (English Language Teaching) strongly underscore the significance of teaching English as a global or international language in the classroom (McKay, 2003; Nunan, 2001).

Many countries in the world, therefore, both English-speaking and non-English-speaking, consider it an urgent national policy to strengthen the nation's communicative competence in English. No single country can be spared from this linguistic challenge and the Asia-Pacific region, the area of the fastest

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growing economies, is no exception. In view of the increasing significance of English, countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea (Korea, hereafter) are revising their national education system so that, among other things, English start to be taught in elementary schools, rather than as previously done in junior or senior high schools (Nunan, 2003). As far as second language education is concerned, the earlier the better, they seem to believe. Yet this early introduction of English as a school subject is, critics argue, functioning to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots in society. And the quality, as well as the efficacy, of this language instruction is being questioned.

Among these East Asian countries, Korea is a leading contender. Currently, in the Korean school system, the third year of the elementary school (at the age of 9) is the time when English is introduced as a compulsory subject. Students in Grades 3-6 receive 1-2 hours of instruction per week, in Grades 7-9, 2-4 hours, and in Grades 10-12, 4 hours, respectively. The age for introducing compulsory English was lowered from 13 to 9 in 1997 (Nunan, 2003) Plans to further lower the starting age to the first year (the age of 6) were announced in 2006 and will take effect in all Korean elementary schools by 2008 (Chung, 2006).

This Korean government policy of the early introduction of English looks quite advanced, particularly when compared with the situations in Japan, where compulsory English starts at Grade 7 (the age of 12) (e.g. Kawai, 2004; Kawazoe, 2005; Hani, 2001; Tokita & Yoshitake, 2006) (See TABLE 1. English Education in China, Japan, & Korea.) This early introduction of compulsory English in Korea, however, could be described as a reflection of the “ English Fever ” (Kim, 2006) phenomenon, the growing popularity of English education among Koreans at large, which clearly exemplifies the magnitude of the impact of English as a global language.

These determined efforts by Korea 's government and citizens to facilitate the development of communicative competence in English seem again quite different from Japan 's climate, where the government 's ambiguity in educational policies further complicate the academic discussion as to the efficacy and appropriateness of the early introduction of English and produce a variety of reactions among the parents amplifying, as a result, the “ English ” divide in the society. (See, for example, Ikari, 2005; Matsukawa, 2004; Ota, 2006; Otsu, 2006.)

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current situations of English education at elementary schools in Korea and to discuss some issues related to this educational challenge. It is also hoped to gain implications for the language policy and classroom practice of an early introduction of English in other parts of the world, particularly Japan, where the debate as to the introduction of compulsory English at elementary schools has been going on for some time (Igawa, 2007).

TABLE 1. English Education in China, Japan, & Korea (Adopted from Nunan, 2003)

| Country | Grade level and age at which English is introduced as a compulsory subject | Frequency of instruction | Impact of English as a global language |
|---------|--|--|---|
| China | Grade 3, Age 9 | - Primary school: 2-3 40-minute lessons/week - Secondary school: 5-6 45-minute lessons/week | - age for compulsory English lowered from 11 to 9 in September 2001 - English teaching emerging as private business - English becoming increasingly significant as university entry requirement - English enhancing promotional prospects in the workplace |
| Japan | First year, Age 12 | Junior high school: 3 50-minute lessons/week | From 2002, primary students increasingly exposed to English, especially listening and speaking |
| Korea | Grade 3, Age 9 | Grades 3-6: 1-2 hours/week Grades 7-9: 2-4 hours/week Grades 10-12: 4 hours/week | - compulsory English lowered from age 13 to 9 - huge financial investment in teaching English - concern with negative effects on national identity due to early introduction of English |

It is so designed that this literature review should serve as preliminary research to a study under way investigating opinions of English teachers at Korean elementary schools and their classroom practice.

The issues reviewed here include the following:

- 1 . Age of initial instruction,
- 2 . Access to effective English instruction, and
- 3 . Professional development needs of NNS (Non-Native Speaking) English teachers

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. Issues of English Education at Korean Elementary Schools

Studying the professional development needs of the English teachers in three East Asian countries, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, Butler (2004; 2005) compared the situations of English education at elementary schools in these areas, which might serve as a cogent background to the current study.

A striking difference can be observed in comparing the educational system of the three countries; Japanese government initiative as to the introduction of English at the elementary level seems very decentralized, unlike other education policies, while the other countries, particularly Korea, take a strong, centralized position. As to the form of introduction, Korea and Taiwan teach English as an academic subject, while the Japanese position seems unclear and not specifically related to language learning. Also, Korea and Taiwan both introduced English nationwide in the late 1990s, while the Japanese introduction was as late as 2002 and on an individual school basis. (TABLE 2: A Comparison of the Systems in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in 2003) It could be argued that Korea in recent years has been committed to developing a nation that is capable of communicating in both Korean and English.

TABLE 2. Comparison of English Language Education at the Elementary School Level in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in 2003 (Part 1)(Adopted from Butler 2004)

| | Korea | Taiwan | Japan |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Government initiatives | Strong central government initiative | General guidelines set by the central government but with some allowance for local choice | Based on local choice |
| Form of introduction | As an academic subject | As an academic subject | Can be introduced as part of a curriculum to facilitate international understanding |
| Date officially introduced | 1997: only at the 3 rd grade level; by 2002: 3 rd -6 th grades | 1998:selected areas; 2001: nationwide | 2002: introduced based on individual school choice |
| Target grade levels(as of 2003) | 3 rd -6 th grades | 3 rd -6 th grades nationwide and 1 st -6 th in certain areas | Vary from school to school |
| Number of lesson hours | 3 rd and 4 th grades: 34 lessons per year; 5 th and 6 th grades: 78 lessons per year (40 minutes per lesson) | 5 th and 6 th grades: 72 lessons per year(40 minutes per lesson) | Allowed to teach within the“ period of integrated study ”spanning 105-110 hours per year, 3 rd grade and up |

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Similar things could be observed in Table 3, which compares the curriculum design of these countries. While Korea and Taiwan stipulate a national curriculum or specific guidelines, Japan does not even offer official guiding principles. As to textbooks and materials, Korean teachers are required to use the one and only textbook that is approved by the government and Taiwan teachers can choose one from the numerous textbooks approved by the government. Japan again looks lenient as to its textbooks.

TABLE 3. Comparison of English Language Education at the Elementary School Level in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in 2003 (Part 2) (Adopted from Butler 2004)

| | Korea | Taiwan | Japan |
|--|---|---|---|
| Objectives articulated by the central government | (a)To enhance students' interest in English;(b)To develop basic communicative competence | (a)To develop students' basic English communicative abilities; (b)To develop students' interests in and ways of learning English;(c)To increase students' awareness of native and foreign cultures and customs | (a)To understand different cultures;(b)To develop a sense of self and of what it means to be Japanese;(c) To develop basic foreign language skills and other communicative skills |
| Curriculum | 7 th Grade National Curriculum provides detailed guidelines about when and what to teach | Central government recommends when and what to teach | No official guidelines |
| Textbooks and materials | Government approves one textbook for each grade | Government approves multiple textbooks then teachers choose from among them | No specifically approved textbooks; teachers can use books and materials that they deem appropriate |

As to the INSET (in-service) programs for teachers, and teaching methodology, Korean as well as Taiwanese government policies look organized. What particularly stands out is that the Korean government requires 120 hours of in-service training, and that Korean teachers are supposed to teach one hour of English-only class per week for 3rd-6th grades, which might prove a challenge for non-native speaking (NNS) teachers. Other aspects of note in this table of 2004 are that Japanese schools have more NS teachers than Korean and Taiwanese counterparts and that in Korea homeroom teachers are required to function as English teachers while in Japan and Taiwan various teachers would teach English at elementary schools (Table 4)

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TABLE 4. Comparison of English Language Education at the Elementary School Level in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan in 2003 (Part 3) (Adopted from Butler 2004)

| | Korea | Taiwan | Japan |
|--|--|--|--|
| Teachers who teach English | Primarily regular homeroom teachers | Various types of teachers | Various types of teachers |
| In-service professional development | Government requires 120 hours of in-service training and allows some training abroad and at summer camps | Local boards of education and private institutions organize training programs and allow for some training abroad | Central and local governments offer but do not mandate short-term training courses; private institutions also offer training courses |
| Native English Speakers (NESs) in public schools | Very few NESs in 2003, and no plans to hire them | Very few NESs in 2003, but plans to hire them | Many NESs but their abilities and recruitment vary |
| Use of English-only instruction | By 2002: a weekly one hour English-only class for 3 rd -6 th grades | Central government suggests conducting lessons in English | Central government has not yet clearly articulated a policy |
| Suggested instructional methods | Learner-centered, discovery-based instruction; comprehension-focused natural approaches | Lively, relaxed, and interactive instruction with authentic materials | Experiential learning, activity-based instruction, natural approaches |
| Introduction of written English skills | Reading and writing should not exceed 10% of lesson time | Speaking and listening are primary but reading and writing " should not be neglected " | Focus on spoken English only |

(1) Age of Initial Instruction

Discussing the overwhelming similarities in Asia-Pacific countries regarding the initial age of instruction of English, Nunan (2003) points out that the age at which English is a compulsory subject in those countries has shifted down recently, and argues, " Underlying the shift is an assumption on the part of the governments and ministries of education that when it comes to learning a foreign language, younger is better " (p. 605). Nunan further contends, citing research by such psycholinguists as Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2001) and Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000, 2001) " This view seems to be firmly entrenched in popular opinion, ... despite its controversial nature in the professional literature " (p. 605).

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As to the relationship between age and introduction of second language instruction, however, it is worth listing some positions commonly shared by researchers, which are summarized by Hawkins (1998)

- 1 . adolescent and young adult L2 learners (as a group) are faster in the initial stages of L2 learning than young children (as a group) on all linguistic measures;
- 2 . with continued exposure, young children (as a group) become more native-like than adolescent and adult learners (as a group) on all linguistic measures; and
- 3 . the process of L2 development appears to be highly similar across child and adult learners (p. 6)

These positions commonly agreed upon by second language acquisition (SLA) researchers seem quite different from what is popularly assumed; particularly, the one that states that in the initial stages young children are not fast learners. Similarly, only “ with continued exposure ” could they become more native-like. Also adults and children tend to share the same learning processes.

The opinions and hypotheses other than these, therefore, are inconclusive and controversial and they include the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (e.g. Scovel, 2000) which basically states that “ there is a period during which language acquisition is easy and complete (i.e. native-speaker ability is achieved) and beyond which it is difficult and typically incomplete ” (Ellis, 1997, p. 67) The CPH was largely based on research indicating that people who lost their language ability, because of some accident, could recover it totally before puberty (at the age of twelve) but were unable to do so afterwards. This claim, based on first language (L1) research, has been carried over to second language (L2) research and has gained some currency among SLA researchers and ELT professionals.

Research in second language acquisition shows some evidence to support the position that learners who start learning an L2 as adults are not able to achieve native-like competence in either grammar or pronunciation although there is no sudden cuff-off point in terms of biological age. Referring to “ the relative lack of success of most L2 learners in comparison to L1 learners ”, Ellis (1997) argues, however, that there are “ radical differences in the way first and second languages are acquired ” and suggests that there might be a variety of differences including “ differences in the social conditions in which L1 and L2 learners learn have some kind of impact ” (p. 68)

What we could conclude from this discussion so far is that there is no unanimous conclusion as to a phase of biological development that dictates second language acquisition and the instruction and its quality are of more importance in this respect, as Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000) state, “ quality of L2 exposure is more important than age of initial exposure in determining outcomes and ... a

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focus on age as a key factor in introducing foreign languages is a red herring ” (p. 171).

East Asian countries, Korea in particular, where English is introduced as a compulsory subject at elementary schools, following the the-earlier-the-better position, it is therefore indispensable to secure the quality of instruction.

The other aspect related to the issue of early introduction of English is the concern as to a language identity disorder (Chung, 2006), young children are supposed to acquire their mother tongue first, otherwise they might be confused in learning two languages. Nunan (2003) also observes a similar concern among Korean educators that “ introducing English language literacy to students before they had attained literacy in Korean would have a negative impact on their L1 literacy ” (p.601).

Referring to the same phenomenon, but from a political angle, a concerned article in a current Korean newspaper states, “ Ignoring our language is losing our culture, which weakens the growth engine in the long run. So we need to study Korean harder, too. ” (Staff, 2006) Needless to say, this sounds quite similar to the current discussion on Japan and the Japanese language by Japanese politicians.

From the foregoing, however, it could be argued that these concerns and claims are not of significance as far as English education at Korean elementary schools is concerned. They may be of a political importance. It is because (1) the frequency and length of English lessons, 1-2 hours/week for 3rd to 6th graders, even with the addition of 1st to 2nd grades, do not seem to constitute a substantial amount of instruction - substantial enough to negatively influence the students ' L1 development, and it is questionable that the instruction of this paucity would ever drastically facilitate the intended L2 development, for that matter, and (2) the data available, discussed later, does not suggest that the quality of instruction compensates for the scarcity of time. Needless to say, it is also necessary to investigate the reality in the Korean classroom - the quality in performance of the Korean teachers with their students.

(2) Access to effective English instruction

Recently in Korea, the expression, “ English Divide ”, was coined after “ Digital Divide ” and it describes the division of Korean students based on their access to effective English language instruction and its resultant language proficiency (Shin, 2006). The expression highlights the current phenomenon that those students who are living in large cities such as Seoul, rather than in rural areas, as well as those who are from wealthy families, rather than from the poor, have a better chance to have access to good

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English language education - at private schools, language lessons after school, and/or study abroad in an English speaking country. The difference in the level of students' English proficiency in turn correlates with what kind of job students are to get after graduation, thus determining their whole life.

Traditionally, Korean society has been characterized by a variety of divisions and accentuated by the resultant sense of inequity. Buzo (2002), researching modern Korean history, writes, " During the 1990s, public opinion polls consistently showed a continuing high level of concern about social inequality " and lists some examples of divisions among the people of Korea including regional divisions between central cities and rural areas. This English Divide seems, therefore, a current addition to the traditional divides.

In fact, it is hoped, however, that the government's plan to further lower the initial age of English instruction to the 1st year (6 years of age) would fill this English Divide. Under the plan all the students will be learning English from the first grade. Chung (2006) however, cites the criticism on this new policy from a teachers' group who wonder if the government's plan would accelerate private tutoring more than ever:

...many children living in big cities will receive more private tutoring to prepare for regular English classes, while children living in remote areas cannot afford this extra tutoring, thus leading to a further widening gap between the rich and the poor... "

More parents would send their children to private schools if they could afford it; another source of English Divide. According to a recent study quoted in Chung, even now " seven out of ten children attending first and second grade classes at elementary schools are receiving private English lessons " (Chung, 2006)

Although the issue of private tutoring or lessons after school can be shared by other East Asian countries, the other example of the English Divide is unique to Korea: the " goose family ". This is " a fast-growing demographic " in Korea, and it means split families due to children's English study. According to Lee (2003), " Father geese " are " men who live apart from their families so that their children may be educated in an English-speaking country " (p. 48), fathers working in Korea while mothers and children living overseas. Parents sacrifice their life for the future happiness of their children.

Analyzing the current situation, Lee also mentions that since the financial crisis in 1997, the job-hunting situation in Korea has changed. Traditionally, graduates of Korean universities had little

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problem finding employment. However, now, “ graduates with English fluency and knowledge of foreign countries ” have a distinct advantage. In recruiting new employees, “ Korean companies clearly prefer graduates from midlevel U.S. universities to those from topnotch local schools like Seoul National University ” (p. 48). This seems quite a change. It is estimated that approximately 17,000 Korean students with their mothers are overseas for this purpose. Quoting university professors, Lee mentions that sending kids abroad to study has become a fashionable practice with rich families in Seoul these days.

(3) Professional development needs of NNS English teachers

Nunan (2003) describes the difficult situation of teaching English in Asia-Pacific countries as follows:

All of the countries surveyed subscribe to principles of CLT [Communicative Language Teaching] ... However, in all the countries surveyed, it would seem that rhetoric rather than reality is the order of the day. Poor English skills on the part of teachers as well as inadequate teacher preparation make it very difficult, if not impossible, for many teachers to implement CLT in their classrooms (p. 606)

This is quite appalling but it somehow clearly illustrates the professional needs of Non-Native Speaking (NNS) English teachers. The professional development needs of NNS English teachers can be approached from two aspects: (1) the target language needs: to develop and maintain their own English and (2) the pedagogical needs: to foster knowledge and skills for language teaching.

As to the target language needs, the Korean teachers of English, who are homeroom teachers, constitute a perfect example of NNS language teachers and this group of teachers shares some characteristics. A Hungarian teacher of English, Medgyes (1994) describes this situation as follows:

The point is that we are at a juncture between two languages and several cultures. By birth we represent our native language and culture, but by profession we are obliged to represent a foreign language with its cultural load. Whilst being enriched by two sets of language and culture, in the classroom we are beset with problems caused by our double-barreled nature (p. 39)

Butler (2004) conducted a survey on the language needs of NNS teachers of English at elementary schools in East Asia. In her study, elementary school teachers in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan self-evaluated their communicative competence in English and indicated the minimum level of

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proficiency necessary to teach English in the elementary classroom. The results of the study show (1) the teachers in all the three countries believed that their productive skills, such as speaking and writing, were weaker than their receptive skills, listening and reading. (2) Significant gaps were found between the teachers ' self-assessed proficiency level and the minimum level they felt necessary to teach. (3) The greatest discrepancies existed in the areas of productive skills including oral grammar, the ability to apply grammatical knowledge correctly in speaking.

As to the Korean primary school teachers in particular, Butler (2004) points out that they rated their English productive skills as " an intermediate low level ". Although the national curriculum underlines the importance of oral language, Butler notes, Korean teachers expressed their need to have " balanced proficiencies in all domains ". They thought they lacked higher proficiencies for listening, oral fluency, oral grammar, and reading (pp. 262-263). The 120-hour in-service training, mentioned above, sponsored by the government should include language development programs for those teachers.

It might be natural, however, for NNS English teachers at Korean elementary schools to feel they do not possess the minimum proficiency in English needed to teach because this lack of confidence is a common feature of NNS language teachers throughout the world. Roberts (1998), for instance, reviewing teacher development literature, summarizes the professional development needs of the NNS language teachers, which include language development need: " NNS teachers may lack confidence in their English language ability and give their own language improvement a high priority. " Further, Roberts mentions, " NNS teachers may undergo an erosion in their English language performance through its restriction to classroom discourse " (p. 97).

The second aspect of NNS teacher needs is related to pedagogy. Teachers, if they follow the recommended teaching approach of today, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) they need to maximize their use of the target language in the classroom while minimizing the use of their mother tongue which they share with their students; CLT is characterized with its focus on communicative functions and on meaningful tasks performed through using the target language (Savignon, 1991)

According to the Li (1998) who conducted a study on the English teachers at Korean secondary schools, the teachers ' perceived difficulties of CLT are summarized in Table 5.

Li (1998) argues that because of the factors listed as source, teachers ' perceived difficulties arise. Although the participants of Li ' s study were secondary school teachers, the situations at Korea ' s elementary schools do not seem to differ so much; teachers lack confidence in using English in the classroom and shy away from using it.

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Table 5. Reported Difficulties in Implementing CLT (Adopted from Li, 1998)

| Source | Difficulty |
|--------------------|--|
| Teacher | Deficiency in spoken English |
| | Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence |
| | Lack of training in CLT |
| | Few opportunities for retraining in CLT |
| | Misconceptions about CLT |
| | Little time for developing materials for communicative classes |
| Students | Low English proficiency |
| | Lack of motivation for developing communicative competence |
| | Resistance to class participation |
| Educational system | Large class |
| | Grammar-based examinations |
| | Insufficient funding |
| | Lack of support |
| CLT | Inadequate account of EFL teaching |
| | Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments |

In fact, a recent article in the Korea Times reports parallel findings as to the adoption of the English-only principle, an approach to promote the communicative interactions in English, by encouraging the use of the target language and discouraging the use of the mother tongue. In 2003, the teachers using only English in class constituted 22.3 percent, but the ratio fell to 19.9 percent in 2004 and down to 17.6 percent in 2005. On the other hand, in 2005 those teachers using only Korean in class went up to 12.9 percent from 10.7 percent in 2004 and 9 percent in 2003.

Yet, how proficient should teachers be if they are to follow what CLT calls for? Referring to the huge cost of communicatively teaching English at elementary schools, Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow (2000) argue that the cost may be considered well-spent, "if the teachers are native or native like speakers and well trained in the needs of younger learners" (p. 28). What seems to be underestimated, on the side of the government officials who started this education endeavor is the notion that the adoption of CLT necessitates proficient speakers of the target language as teachers.

NNS teachers are not confident about their own language proficiency to undertake the agenda advocated by CLT proponents (e.g., Savignon, 1991). Even in countries and areas where English is functioning as a means of communication among many segments of society such as Hong Kong and Singapore, studies report teachers are not confident in using English in the classroom, researchers say teachers are not competent, and administrators are not comfortable (Evans, 1996; Johnson, 1990; Lai,

1994; Pennington, Costa, So, Shing, Hirose, & Neidzielski, 1997).

It might be of interest to note that the practicality and/or appropriateness of CLT is questioned in SLA and ELT research (Holliday, 1994; Igawa, 2002; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). It might be necessary to foster some version of CLT, which could work efficiently and appropriately in East Asian classrooms.

. Conclusion

In Korea, English language education is started in the 3rd year and in two (2) years time English will be taught in Grades 1 and 2. Teachers have the government-sponsored INSET (in-service training) program, the focus of which may be language development.

In this review of teaching the English language at Korean elementary schools, three issues have been identified: (1) age of initial instruction, (2) access to effective English instruction, and (3) professional development needs of Korean English teachers.

As to the age of initial instruction, there is no unanimous conclusion among SLA researchers and ELT professionals as to some critical period that dictates language acquisition. The instruction, its quantity and quality, are of more importance.

Access to effective English instruction constitutes a component of the “ English Divide ”, which is the division of Korean students based on their access to effective English language instruction and its resultant language proficiency. Traditionally, Korea has been a society where some divisions are incorporated, thus creating some inequity. Early introduction of English might be another source of division, only adding to the old ones.

The professional development needs of Korean English teachers, who are NNS, could be categorized into two areas; language development and knowledge and skills of teaching method. Since those teachers teaching English in elementary schools are homeroom teachers, the 120-hour INSET program may be specifically designed for the language development of these elementary school teachers. As to methodology, there is controversy over the practicality and appropriateness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). A version of CLT, which is sensitive to the needs of East Asian societies, is necessary.

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In March, 2006, a subcommittee of Japan's Central Council for Education released a report recommending that English be taught as a compulsory subject to 5th- and 6th- grade students of elementary schools at least once a week. Tokita and Yoshitake (2006), in an Asahi Shinbun article "Tongue-tied", describe the situation as:

The report has sparked confusion at schools, which could end up being tasked with training homeroom teachers for English lessons and finding qualified assistant teachers. The report also raises questions on whether the subject is really needed.

The debate as to the introduction of English as a compulsory subject in Japan's elementary schools has been continuing. A variety of opinions have been expressed from all quarters, including criticisms questioning the efficacy of such instruction and deploring the possible further deterioration of Japanese language literacy among the youth. (See, for example, Matsukawa, 2004; Noriguchi, 2006; Otsu, 2006; Sakane, 2006.) Similarly, a variety of opinions are expressed as to who to teach English at Japanese elementary schools; Okawara (2004) reports an example of NPO (Non-Profit Organization) functioning as certifying English teachers for elementary schools. This clearly shows the extent of confusion in Japan and the tantamount importance of language teachers for younger students.

There are some implications from this study of Korea's English education for the future decision-making of Japan's English education in elementary schools. They are quite obvious and include the following:

- 1 . Age of initial instruction: Since there is no unanimous agreement among SLA researchers as to at what age to start L2 instruction, there is no theoretical justification for lowering the age for starting compulsory English currently set at the age of 12. However, if for other reasons the initial age to be lowered, the following conditions should be taken into consideration;
- 2 . Equity: In order to guarantee the access to effective English instruction for every child, it might be necessary to stipulate national curriculum and approve appropriate textbooks. It would, otherwise, create further confusion and accelerate the spread of "English Divide" in Japan.
- 3 . More importantly, it is necessary to implement some professional development program for elementary school teachers so that they can develop needed language proficiency and teaching skills, or to hire qualified teachers, NS and/or NNS, specifically for this subject. Teachers are of special importance for the success of this educational challenge. For, as we have seen, the instruction is of crucial importance.

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井 川 好 二

韓国の小学校における英語教育の問題点

井 川 好 二

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【要旨】

本稿は、韓国の小学校における英語教育の問題点に関する文献研究である。(1) 英語教育の開始時期、(2) 効果的な英語教育を受ける機会の公平性、および(3) 韓国人英語教師の研修の必要性の、3つの観点に関して研究を行った。韓国において早まりつつある英語教育の開始時期は、2年後の2008年には、小学校1年(6歳)まで早期化する計画である。一方、第2言語習得理論の研究では、早期化のメリットは未だに確認されていないし、開始時期より授業の質が問われている。韓国社会において、小学生が優れた英語教育を受ける機会が、平等ではないという批判は、多くみられる。また、小学校で英語を必修科目として担当する韓国人英語教師の英語力、および教え方の向上を図る研修の必要性はまことに高いといえる。最近、日本の小学校においても英語教育を必修化する動きが見られるが、そうした早期化政策に対する、本研究から得られる示唆も付した。