

## **National Discourse of EGL and English Teaching in Korea: Focusing on Education Policies and Teacher Perspectives**

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This study examines the impact of English as a global language (EGL) on English language teaching in Korea in terms of pedagogical principles and practices operating within the nation's English education. The study first reviewed the English education policies presented in the National Education Curricula since the 6<sup>th</sup> Revision, in which communicative competence was promulgated first time in the nation's history as the primary objective in English language teaching. Then, these discourses were assessed by 19 Korean teachers of English and native English-speaking teachers using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The study shows that national discourses of EGL impose considerable impact on the contents and methodologies in Korean English education. Communicative competence is a firmly established goal for language pedagogy at all school levels; yet such policy objectives leave a significant gap in our understanding of the reality of classroom-based language instructions, where test-oriented pedagogy and teachers' inadequate preparedness for oral language are dominating such that implementation of communicative syllabi appears to be a distal reality. Teachers' biggest challenge comprises students' unequal levels of proficiency and motivation; their assessment of teaching Korean EFL is essentially not congruent in itself suggesting a clear disjunction between policy ideals and pedagogical reality.

[English as a global language/communicative language teaching/L2 pedagogy/  
세계어로써의 영어/의사소통중심언어교육/제2언어교수법]

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Nunan (2003) put forward an earlier account on the impact of English as a global language (EGL) on educational policies and practices in each of the modern states. While considering the revelation of significant problems relating to English language education at

the national level, including the age of initial instruction, inequity in access to effective language instruction and the issue of inadequacy in teachers' preparedness, he essentially called for a need to compile systematic information on the major influences in each nation it received from the global dominance of English internationally.

To date, the scholarly discussion on the emergence and expansion of English as an international language on a global scale has centered on three perspectives. The first view is based on sociopolitical stance seeking to provide an answer for causes of the spread of English, wherein the ideological proposition of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) parallels the macrostructural approach to World English (Brutt-Griffler, 2002), and this macroperspective of World English views this global phenomenon as a historical phase in the world language development. Another perspective comes from a linguistic position that deals with the issues of authenticity and standardness of English by juxtaposing the native versions, namely American and British English, with varieties of Englishes mostly found in postcolonial countries (Widdowson, 1996). Kachru's (1985) analysis of different versions of Englishes in his three Concentric Circles offers an illustration of the ramification of the language and its people based on historical and linguistic understanding of English development. The third view of EGL centers on the relationship between each nation's national identity and the global language that emerges from types of tensions and conciliations surrounding language and culture in promoting English as a national project and on the impact of English on major aspects of a nation particularly on language policies (Tollefson, 1991; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007).

While observation of the effect of EGL at the societal and national level may take myriads of years to be concrete and transparently visible, this study intends to provide an interim report on the third issue in a non-colonial and culturally cohesive country, Korea; hence the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in a particular context of Korea. With the focus given to the functioning of English in the nation's discourse on EGL, the guiding questions of the study centered on the influence of EGL on education policies and practices as stated below.

- 1) What is the impact of English as a global language on English teaching in Korea?
- 2) What discourses do Korean English teachers have in terms of their goals, pedagogical beliefs, and difficulties in teaching Korean EFL?
- 3) Is there a gap between policy ideals and pedagogical reality assessed by teachers of English, and if so, what reasons are responsible for that gap?

## II. STUDY BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 1. English as a Global Language and English Bilingualism

The global discourse of English as an international language has an inseparable relationship with the growth of English bilingualism worldwide. The unstoppable spread of English obviously manifests itself in its sociolinguistic process into all nations of the world, perhaps with no exceptions, and this process is characterized by the special role that English plays, either nationally for some countries where the language gained an official status or internationally for other nations as a medium of communication and transactions (Bolton, 2005, 2008; Brutt-Griffler, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2010; McKay, 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Tollefson, 1991; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). As Brutt-Griffler (2010) posited, “English bilingualism is on the rise in the EFL context” (p.230), in which the status of English is foreign but its learners and users outnumber speakers who acquired the language natively, and thus the English language no longer belongs numerically to speakers of English as a mother language, and thus its ownership is given to people who actually use it (Brumfit, 2001; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Seidlhofer, 2011; Widdowson, 1994). Statistically native speakers are no longer in a majority and at the same time it is non-native users of English who lead the language spread and change linguistically and extra-linguistically or culturally throughout the world, and most noticeably, these users are situated in the context of EFL (Brutt-Griffler, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2011).

The key assumption underlying the notion of EGL rests on the conception that the global language is used for communication between people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, foregrounding the importance of cross-national and cross-cultural communication ability among its speakers (McKay, 2002; Smith, 1983). As such, the development of functional bilingualism, while serving as a principal goal orientation in learning and teaching the world language, and at the same time paves the road for social motivation for fostering English language proficiency (Bolton, 2008). In other words, English bilingualism in nature essentially centers on the issue of language proficiency, but given any nation’s drive to gain global competitiveness, this discourse of proficiency is not just targeting individuals’ linguistic competence, but it also aims to enhance societal proficiency as well (Bolton, 2008). As every nation perceives the importance of English as a tool for communication in the international transactions thereof serving as the base for raising the nation’s national standard in the global society, this perception provides an official route for the spread of English with an unstoppable pace. Korea is not an exception to this line.

## 2. English in Korea: Education Policies and Social Issues

The spread of English in Korea is closely related to the nation's response to globalization. The nation's adoption of *segvehwa* (internationalization) policy declared by the former President Kim, Young Sam in 1995 was the base for the nation's drive toward globalization. With the words, '*segye*' indicating 'the world' and '*hwa*' meaning 'becoming', '*segvehwa*' signifies 'becoming internationalized - internationalization'. As encoded in these words, Korea's interest in pursuing *segvehwa* with great determination and enthusiasm was based on the premise that Korea as a nation has a strong need to cope with the changing world and thereby to mark a transition away from the long history of political seclusion moving onto the intensified degree of globalization (Kim, 2000).

The national drive for internationalization has targeted almost all levels of social life as priority realms to reform, among which the most important area was education, particularly English language education. Hence English language teaching has been under the strong influence of such socio-political changes caused by globalization, as observed in other nations in the Expanding Circle wherein the government's initiative was one of the major forms of influences that promoted the spread of English in each locality (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Nunan, 2003; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007; S. Yim, 2003).

It should also be noted in the nation's attempt to global expansion that this national drive is essentially based on dual objectives: aiming at raising both *inter*-national competitiveness and *intra*-national cohesion. That is, Korea's globalization is pursued in two-layer projections: constructing national identity and promoting the school youth's English proficiency, which form the thematic base of the National Education Curricula (NEC), 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Revisions. Noticeably, it is Korea's firm belief that the juxtaposition of national identity with the promotion of a foreign language is reconciliatory, not a conflict that needs to be resolved (Block & Cameroon, 2002). The point here is that English is a dominant mediational tool in constructing a modern state and the inseparable relationship between the global and the local should be conceived as sort of natural process (Block & Cameroon, 2002), given the widespread perception that globalization is an opportunity for each nation-state in that the nation can utilize the immediacy of communication and knowledge sharing for their national advancement (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). In the nation's political endeavor to face globalization, Korea's methodological choice was to educate its school population to become proficient in English, and this instrumental purpose attached to English is an indication that English education in Korea is a nationalistic project to promote the nation's *segvehwa*, internationalization, while maintaining its national identity (S. Yim, 2003). As such, English in the contemporary Korea is the result of government's principled efforts to achieve its global competitiveness as a nation and education policy has played a key role in that effort as a core step to achieve that aim.

### III. METHOD

The study reported here used a two-level investigation into the impact of the dominant role of English as a global language on English teaching in Korea. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1993) conceptual model of ecological paradigm where contexts of learning are classified into three levels: macro-, meso-, and microcontexts, this study operationally defined discourse contexts at two different levels: national discourse as Macro and teachers' case as Micro. Hence the current research design has two-level data collection and analyses as described below.

#### 1. Macro-level Analysis of National Discourses

To uncover the major discourses on English in the contemporary Korea, the study first analyzed macro-level discourses. It specifically focused on English language education policy and practices relevant to English education in Korea. Specifically the major features of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> revisions of NEC were analyzed in relation to the nation's foregrounding of English competence in its discourse of EGL. Because English language education in Korea is strongly conditioned by the government's education policy through NEC, the examination of language policy, particularly English language education, is deemed to be a necessary task to identify the answers for the key research question in this study that examines the impact of EGL on English language education in Korea. As teachers' perceptions on language teaching and pedagogical decisions are in reality susceptible to and practically controlled by the educational environment offered by the government's language education policy (Y. Cho, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), so this macro-level analysis is aimed at providing the context for teacher discourses on teaching Korean EFL. Hence the first data serves as a contextual backdrop for the teachers' own assessment of Korean ELT.

#### 2. Micro-level Analysis of Teachers' Discourses

This section qualitatively analyzed teacher discourses in a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to identify the operational ideas and thinking lying behind their teaching goals, pedagogical beliefs and perceived difficulties in teaching EFL in the context of EGL in Korea. In fact, the primary focus of this research is to investigate the impact of EGL on English language teaching in Korea; yet teaching itself can entail myriads of practical issues arising in the classroom and for this reason teachers' perspectives reported herein are not solely limited to policy-related conceptions and ideas. Hence the data provided in this section include teachers' general assessment of teaching

English in Korea, encompassing their opinions about English education policy, its implications for their classroom teaching, and the needs and difficulties they encounter in actual teaching.

#### 1) Teacher Participants

The study invited 16 high school English teachers teaching in two different cities in Korea and 3 native English-speaking instructors teaching in a large university of a metropolitan city in Korea. The demographic profile of the participants shows that their age ranges from middle 20s up to 50s with different length of teaching experience, 3 years as minimum and 16 years as maximum. The average of self-reported English proficiency among Korean English teachers was high-intermediate; most of them rated themselves as advanced in reading, yet their assessment of speaking and writing virtually stayed at levels lower than intermediate. The gender ratio shows five male and fourteen female teachers. The recruitment of these participants is based on the researcher's acquaintance with them and the researcher obtained permission from each teacher for audiotaping the interviews.

#### 2) Survey and Interviews

In July of 2012, the questionnaire was administered to all the participants in person or by e-mail. The questionnaire includes 33 questions mostly asking about teachers' goals for English teaching, their opinion and appraisal of pedagogical issues and difficulties in teaching and constraints caused by the government's education policy, and lastly their assessment of English language education in the contemporary Korea. The 19 teachers all returned their feed back in written response either by e-mail attachment or by submitting to the researcher in person. Following the survey, the interviews with Korean English teachers were conducted all on site except for the two teachers who preferred to use phone due to their school schedule. Following the high school teacher interviews, three university instructors were also invited for interviews and the site was the university where they were teaching.

## **IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Analysis of the Significance of EGL Discourses as Defining Motivation for English Education**

This section provides descriptive and interpretive accounts on English in Korea as

presented in the contents of language education policies and practices. As the major discourse of EGL in Korea has been formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s through the national events of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympics, while the completion of EGL as national discourse was observed in the *Segyehwa Policy* in 1995, the focus of the current analysis is narrowed into the features of 6<sup>th</sup> Revision of the NEC through the 7<sup>th</sup> Revision, where educational reform was conducted under the government's socio-political objectives to modernize the nation. Comparing the major features and characteristics of 6<sup>th</sup> Revision with those of the previous versions, the analysis focused on the major changes therein and gave attention to those points noticeable thematically and articulated repeatedly in the government's rhetoric such that the impact of EGL on the nation's language education can be essentially epitomized as the following.

#### 1) Communicative Competence as Primary Objective for ELT

The biggest impact of the global dominance of English as an international language is found in the popularization of the language that manifests itself in the growing need for English-using ability at both school and societal levels. From a historical perspective, the English language was initially designated as a mandatory foreign language subject in the 2<sup>nd</sup> NEC (1963-1973) since its official entry into the national curriculum during the U.S. Military Government (1945-1955), and thereafter, the language had been placed as a key school subject along with Korean and Math to get a successful admission into a prestigious college. And this tradition remained up to the 5<sup>th</sup> NEC (1987-1992) in which the major features of ELT curriculum consisted of grammatical structures to be taught at differing levels. Passing through the transitional period in the 1990s, the English language had to encounter major changes in its theoretical base and methodology under the government's drive for English proficiency (O. Kwon, 2000; R. Shim & M. Baik, 2004).

The specific change in teaching concepts and methods came with the 6<sup>th</sup> revision (1992-1997), in which the curricular emphasis was transferred from grammatical competence to communicative competence (O. Kwon, 2000). In the social context where the nation had to tackle the issue of national development to prepare for globalization, English education was strengthened in many ways, among which the most salient was the official introduction of Communicative Approach to language syllabus in a way to replace the conventional grammar-focused teaching. Thereafter, the emphasis of language education was placed on the actual ability to use English rather than grammar.

The socialization of the English language in Korean society has occurred simultaneously with the social perception of the importance of English as a global language, which was mostly engendered by the educational paradigm that gives its priority to a practical and functional view of English, not to the accumulation of its linguistic knowledge.

However, the inadequate preparedness for implementing CLT in actual classroom teaching on teachers' side and lack of structured systems to cope with this paradigm shift at the national and school levels have incurred some space wherein the private sector fills in the gap. Fueled by the official introduction of listening skill in the Korean Scholastic Ability Test<sup>1</sup> in 1993 (for the school year of 1994) first time in the nation's history and the introduction of English as a mandatory subject in primary education starting 1997, the social interest in English education has been rising exponentially such that *English fever* is a normative title to describe collective enthusiasm for English in the contemporary Korea (S. Jung & Norton, 2002). Indeed, it is strongly possible to draw an inseparable connection between the ever-heated motivation for English learning nationwide and the national rhetoric fostering the significance of communicative ability in English (Y. Cho, 2013a, 2013b), and this is where the global discourse of EGL is deeply entrenched as the source for social motivation for the ELT in a particular locality where English is no longer believed to be simply a foreign language by society and by individuals. Seen this way, the most significant impact of EGL on the nation's ELT came with this top-down influence whereby the conceptual and methodological innovation was required to promote the functional aspect of the language education, and most noticeably, through this socializing process the language was popularized as an essential skill to survive the modern era nationally and internationally.

## 2) English Language Education as Nationalistic Project

Tsui and Tollefson (2007) proffer a significant emphasis on the influence of global expansion of English onto the modern state's language policy and national identity, and this perspective poses a differing angle compared to Block and Cameroon (2002) whose juxtaposition of the global with the local is seen more of reconciliatory than mutually conflicting as indicated in their term, 'glocalization'. The relationship of each nation with globalization, in Tsui and Tollefson's view, is epitomized as one in which the construction of national and cultural identity poses a dilemma with globalization. What they suggest is that language and cultural identity develop together, and so promotion of a foreign language doesn't cast positive effect on the nation's own national and cultural identity. As globalization almost always carries with it the English language, this spread of English is

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<sup>1</sup> The College Entrance Academic Proficiency Test (*DaeIpHakRyukGoSa*) was renamed in 1993 as the College Scholastic Ability Test (*DaeHakSuHakNeungRyukShiHeom*), and this newly titled exam has innovative changes in its features: 1) emphasis on communicative competence, 2) introduction of 'a listening comprehension test', 3) fluency over accuracy, 4) no paper-and-pencil test on pronunciation and spelling (O. Kwon, 2000).

seen more of a negative form of influence on developing the nation's own identity.

But Korea's response to globalization seems to be, in nature, a case where more emphasis is given to solidifying its national cohesion which the nation believed to be achievable through the process of globalization, rather than focusing on the transition from national to transnational. In other words, the nation's political endeavor to face globalization is pursued in the government's initiative to promote its national identity. This can be illustrated in ELT methodology, and one case in point is seen in the English language textbooks for Korean children authorized by the government in which the images and topics are replete with contents of Korean culture that inculcate national pride as Koreans and national identity (S. Yim, 2003). This revelation of the nation's consciousness to construct its national and cultural identity is based on the nation's political intention and its worldview demonstrating global awareness and responsibility (S. Yim, 2003).

This political initiative to raise the nation's standard in the world is fully presented in the government's determination to prepare its students to meet the challenges from an ever-increasing scale of globalization. To achieve this aim, educating Korean students to become proficient in English had to be the central goal of its language education. This instrumental reason attached to English language policy is an indication that English education in Korea is a nationalistic project to promote the nation's globalization while maintaining its national identity. As such, English in the contemporary Korea is the result of government's principled efforts to achieve its global competitiveness as a nation and education policy has played a key role in that effort as a core step to achieve that aim.

### 3) Methodological Conjunctions of Input and Critical Period Hypotheses at the Societal Level

The policy ideals formerly described manifested themselves in series of education policies and practices. Among others, the most significant political input on ELT in Korea came with the introduction of English to the elementary school level. The Korean government issued a new policy in 1995 that stipulates the mandatory implementation of English teaching in the elementary school level starting 1997, lowering the age of compulsory English language education in the nation. Up to this point, English was introduced at the secondary level from 7<sup>th</sup> grade (R. Shim & M. Baik, 2004). Following the government-led initiative to implement mandatory teaching for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, English was officially recognized as a global language and its spread continued to the point that official English education was expanded to 4<sup>th</sup> graders in 1998, to 5<sup>th</sup> graders in 1999, and finally in the year 2000, all students from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade received mandatory English education (O. Kwon, 2000; R. Shim & M. Baik, 2004).

This lowering of age for official English teaching at the elementary school level is seen

not simply an adjustment of education age in language teaching; it actually provided the base for the growth of private institutions that seek to offer authentic input using native speakers of English. Based on this introduction of English to the elementary school students in conjunction with the introduction of ‘listening’ to the national assessment, CSAT, the social interest in oral English and also the societal motivation for nurturing the elementary youth with genuine input have been raised at the noticeable level. It is the nation’s belief that the school youth’s ability in English communication plays a central role in realizing the nation’s objectives to meet globalization and this effort can easily achieve its goal when English is taught at an earlier age, presenting a methodological conjunction of input and critical period hypotheses at the societal level. Table 1 summarizes the contents of the impact of EGL discourse on ELT in Korea.

**TABLE 1**  
The Impact of EGL on English Language Teaching in Korea

	Specificity	Relevance to SLA theories
Emphasis on Communicative Competence	Beyond grammar Promoting functional syllabi	Communicative approach
Emphasis on Authenticity in English input	English-Only discourse: Teach English Through English English-medium instruction	Input hypothesis
Lowering the Age of Compulsory English Education	Introducing English to the primary school level from 3 <sup>rd</sup> graders	Critical period hypothesis

#### 4) Principles and Assumptions Underlying the Current ELT

To implement the objectives inscribed in the NEC, Korea has relied on certain methodological principles for practicing English language teaching. The review of these ELT methods adopted by the government indicates that there are certain ideological constructs in these methods for English education. As indicated in the objectives of NEC, Korea has its own philosophy for educating its school youth; for example, foreign language education always carries an emphasis on national identity alongside, the nation also seems to share certain common features with other nations of the Expanding Circle which seek after appropriate ELT pedagogy as a national agenda (McKay, 2003; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Seidlhofer, 1999; Tollefson, 1991). While many of these practices are adopted from western ELT methodology, particularly from U.S. educational system, these practices adopted by the government suggest that the nation has its ideological underpinnings for its ELT methods which are described below.

The primary principle supporting Korean ELT is found in the government’s belief that

communicative language teaching (CLT) provides the most productive method for ELT. This conception is explicitly indicted in the national curricula where the nation's primary educational mission is to prepare their people to be able to communicate with the world, and to this end, they believe English is the key. Also noticeable is that the development of communicative competence as an essential purpose of English education is seen as congruent with the public's conviction that the grammatical syllabus doesn't help students develop communicative ability, and most importantly, the adoption of CLT is often seen as the root of the social issues that arose associated with English education (Y. Kim, 2006; E. Kim, 2008).

Given the wide range of scholarly accounts examining the feasibility of implementing the CLT in the EFL setting like Korea, whether or not CLT is the ideal methodology for language teaching is still an open question (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; McKay, 2003). The practical effectiveness of CLT in the local English classroom of Korea has also been examined, but was found to be socially and contextually less appropriate in local contexts of Korea due to compounding factors such as local culture of learning that promote mechanical learning, exam culture, or other socio-cultural reasons specific to Korea (Y. Kim, 2006; Li, 1998; R. Shim & M. Baik, 2004). Despite all of these concerns, CLT is the current philosophical orthodoxy in Korean curriculum on ELT, which is evident in official government rhetoric as seen in the NEC Charter.

Another principle underlying Korea's English education policy is the nations' belief that English is better taught in English – so called, English Only (EO) discourse. One example to the point is the policy of 'Teaching English through English (TETE)<sup>2</sup>', which stipulates the use of English as an instructional medium for all English classes in the primary and secondary school levels.

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<sup>2</sup> As part of the implementation of Communicative Approach, Korean government promulgated a policy in 2001 that requires all English classes at the primary and secondary levels be taught in English.

**TABLE 2**  
Percentage of English-medium Instruction by Institutions

Institutions	English-medium instructions (%)
KAIST	91
Pohang University of Science and Technology	57.8
Korea University	40
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	36.4
SungKyunKwan University	35.7
Kyung Hee University	34.2
Yonsei University	28.5
Sogang University	25.7
Chung Ang University	19.8
Seoul National University	15

Retrieved from [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2011/02/23/2011022300159.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/02/23/2011022300159.html).

The impact of this policy has been far-reaching; first, the exponential growth of the number of students seeking after their own solutions from private lessons outside the school to catch up with this newly adopted English teaching methodology. Another impact from this EO discourse is found in the adoption of English as an instructional medium across the higher education institutions nationwide. Up to 2005, the major universities in the nation (about 200 institutions) have chosen to adopt this English-medium instruction policy and also used it as their institutional guideline for faculty hiring. Table 2 provides detailed information on this. This trend among universities seems to be unavoidable in the matrix of international competitiveness of institutions and the increasing social demand for English communication skills in higher education as shown in the following quote from a media report:

It looks like an unstoppable trend for most universities to adopt English-medium instructions as their institutional policy. There are several reasons for these institutions' rigorous adoption of such a policy. The role of English as the principal language in the knowledge-based society is the primary reason; in the era of globalization and internationalization it is hardly possible to acquire global knowledge without knowing the international language, English.  
(Newsweek Korea, Vol. 767, 2007.02.13)

While this policy, English-medium instruction, is an attempt to emphasize communication ability among its learning population, but it seems to be not fully answered whether it actually yields expected results. For many of Korean students who typically have learned the foreign language in the classroom setting, such removal of their native language in the class may potentially incur psychological stress; hence, the learning only through English may provide an enhanced form of input but not enhanced motivation.

To summarize, the guiding principles embedded in the ELT methodology in Korea, as reviewed above, are often seen to generate unrealistically heavy emphasis on English language competence often overriding the classroom reality, and this is conceived as evidence for how ELT in Korea is engendered by political motivation by the government as a condensed form of social ideology wherein English proficiency is an essential objective to promote for the society as a whole. Below I continue to examine teachers' perspectives on English teaching in Korea.

## 2. Analysis of Teacher Discourses on Teaching Korean EFL

This section is primarily based on the data collected through the survey and interviews with 16 Korean English teachers teaching in high schools and 3 native English-speaking university instructors. Teachers' general assessment of pedagogical reality is not congruent in itself, and thus, the themes emerging from teacher discourses are varied, among which the most noticeable are the following three categories.

### 1) English for All: Unrealistic Goal

Teachers' views on English teaching in the contemporary Korea simply converge on their shared conception of *too much English* in Korean society, suggesting that *English for all* is an unrealistic goal to achieve in actual classroom teaching. Given the observation that English matters to *all* in Korean society nowadays, most participants believe there should be some leeway in implementing English teaching to such an intensified degree as is now. In their view, the current atmosphere of the society in which English is seen as compulsory for all students in the nation is wrong. This negative attitude to the social fever for English in the nation was repeatedly articulated by fourteen teacher participants who stated that English is absolutely necessary but only for those who are genuinely interested in the language, not for all. In their view, the overriding emphasis on English in Korea that mainly requires students' commitment to English learning is not conducive to students' overall foreign language achievement. Teachers' perceptual evaluation of English in Korean society as such is well illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

As an English teacher, I am concerned about the overheated necessity for English in Korean society. I feel skeptical about the reality pervading in our society where English is required for all. In my view, English should be taught only to those who really need it, not to all students. I believe this is the right direction for Korean English education to take. (Teacher Survey #2)

Teachers' negative attitude to the compulsory nature of the English language for all students with the requirement of a very high-level proficiency is also testified in many cases of their interviews; in their point of view, the unidirectional push for English on all students casts a strong doubt on the productivity and actual effectiveness of language education. The following quote from a teacher interview elaborates on this point:

If students could put all of their time and efforts into the area of their actual interest, the nation and the society as a whole, as well as students themselves, could develop further. English is a skill, when I see students skilled in a different area robbed of their time and energy to study the language, as a teacher, I feel so sorry. English should be taught to only those who need it.

(Teacher Interview #4)

On the other hand, the remaining five participants showed positive attitudes, and much of this positivity is mostly based on their perception of practical values of English learning beneficial to their students; that is, the core of these teachers' assessment is that the benefits from knowing English overwhelm any form of costs from their students. However, this sense of positivity doesn't override teachers' overall negative views. Detailed reasons for their decisions are provided in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
Teachers' General Assessment of English Learning Fervor in Korea

	Positive	Negative/ Undecided 2
Number/ Gender	5 [F4/ M1]	14 [F12/ M1/ Unspecified1]
Average Years of Teaching	7	9.1
Reasons	Need English for - international communication - contact with foreign culture - access to wide range of information - coping with globalization Unavoidable - as long as English is required subject in college entrance exam	English should be taught to only those who need it Not all students need English nor native-like proficiency Too much investment is not desirable All-in only for English is not justifiable Mushrooming of cram schools is problematic English reflects social structural problems Rearrangement of educational system needed

## 2) English Proficiency Gap and Student Motivation as Teachers' Primary Challenge

One of the dominant messages from teacher participants is that students' English learning is highly influenced by external causes; many teachers state that their students'

motivation in English learning is very sensitive to the educational context variables. They listed external causes such as college entrance exams and frequent changes in educational policy for high school students and high standard in English ability for the university group. The significance of these social factors lies in their observation that these social influences serve as factors detrimental to language learners' motivation. Teachers' attribution of the failure in high-level motivation among students is directed to socio-structural problems relating to English education in Korea. Teachers assessed this 'imposed' learning as the major cause for lack of motivation among students in English classes, for some students, causing feelings of frustration in their mind. English learning for exam purposes is not a formula for actual success in motivating students in the classroom. The exam culture and English as required learning unexceptionally to all students appear to be one dominant reason these teachers believe to be responsible for students' struggling motivation.

Another source of de-motivation is attributed to the learner's undetermined self-perception and lack of self-confidence in English learning. Most of the teachers testified that the primary challenge they face in the classroom is students' motivational deficiency, enumerating those factors such as lack of awareness in the relevance of English learning, fear of making mistakes and, for some students, total absence of learning goals.

But it should be addressed at this point that some of the teachers indicated students' low-level motivation and lack of interest in English learning is not solely attributable to learners themselves; there is obviously some portion for social reasons. One example pointed out by teacher participants pertains to the exam-oriented syllabus typical in their English classroom. Teachers proffer a view that the lesson for exam practices doesn't actually contribute that much to introducing communicative language teaching during instructions in the end, broadly widening the gap between national ideals and actual teaching in class.

Given the social causes controlling student motivation, such influences are expandable to students' English achievement; teachers' discourses present that their students' achievement gap is also stemming from social factors. Many teachers state that the divide in English achievement among students is closely related to their familial socioeconomic status. That is, students' access to English and its quality input is more likely to be conditioned by their parents' social and economic ability. One teacher who observes the gap between well-to-do family and those with less economic prosperity expresses that such a gap is more noticeable in productive skills, rather than receptive ones, which are not mainly covered in school education, as shown in the following quote:

The English achievement gap between high and low performers is particularly noticeable in speaking and writing. The current school system in our society doesn't cover such productive skills, and thus students have to rely on private education system on their own, and to do so, the biggest parameter is parents'

economic status. Students with high achievement continue to perform better, while low achievers still perform less, and therefore, the division like such relating to English education is widening in the repetitive spiral of familial socioeconomic status.

(Teacher Interview #6)

These testimonies of English divide among students as described above is an indication that English in the contemporary Korea is more of a social phenomenon, beyond the realm of individuals' choice, and accordingly students' engagement in English learning is mainly conditioned by social factors.

### 3) Difficulties in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching

Up to this point, we noted the heavy focus on English education in Korea these days is mostly the product of the government's intentional efforts to modernize the nation and in this process English serves as a functional tool such that the social promotion of students' English proficiency needs to be understood as such.

The political ideals embedded in the educational policies and practices in the nation are essentially seen to be perceived by teachers of English. Yet it is also in teachers' perception that these ideals are not fully realizable through instructional classroom teaching for now. Teachers' perceived necessity for communicative language teaching and their recognition of pedagogical reality that cannot successfully implement such objective seem to form the two sides of their assessment of teaching Korean EFL. Table 4 provides the factors hindering a successful implementation of CLT as presented by teachers.

**TABLE 4**

Perceived Difficulties in Implementing CLT

Difficulties caused by	Contents
Educational System	<i>Suneung</i> controls everything in class Destabilized school education Increased role of private sector widening gap in student achievement Little promotion of speaking and writing
Teacher	Deficiency in oral English Lack of socio-cultural knowledge of English Little expertise in material development for CLT Deficiency in developing effective teaching methods
Students	Lack of self-confidence and little motivation Wide gap in English proficiency Lack of self-awareness of the need for English study Few opportunities to access genuine input

The primary reason for the crippled operation of CLT pertains to the heavy influence of CSAT on school curricula. The current test-driven syllabi must focus on practicing reading and listening as the major tasks that need to be completed to teach in class and this doesn't help students develop balanced ability in 4 skills. Broadly, this too much focus on receptive modes in language teaching, ultimately providing causes for the two versions of English learning in our society, namely '*Siheom* English' and '*Euisasotong* English', essentially deprives both students and teachers of their motivation for learning and teaching English for communicative purposes. Additionally, the factors from social causes are attributed in some portion to the exponential growth of private institutions for English teaching; many teachers suggest normalizing school education as a pressing agenda that should be addressed by the nation's educational system. It is teachers' belief that reducing the gap between the two versions of English learning in society, *Siheom* English and *Euisasotong* English, by introducing productive skills to language pedagogy and assessment is a potential solution for implementing CLT in school-based language education.

Another factor that blocks the easy introduction of CLT to classroom teaching is ascribed to teachers' own imperfection in oral English. This was noticed among teachers with longer experience of teaching; their experience as former EFL learners and also teachers who were trained for translating English grammar and reading into Korean doesn't serve any longer as the base for adopting new conception and methodology in English teaching. Another layer of difficulty caused by teachers themselves is found in their lack of expertise in developing materials and pedagogical methods necessary for communicative language teaching. Many participants confessed there is little time for professional training by themselves or as participants in the official training program to meet the challenges they face to become functionally skillful in managing the classroom teaching. Mostly importantly, this lack of expertise in developing language materials and teaching methods is based on their own perception of the deficiency in understanding sociocultural backgrounds of the English language. These factors hindering teachers' own professional development, wherever the reasons are, suggest that their self-confidence as language teachers is not that strong.

The factors that demotivate the successful implementation of CLT are not limited to teachers; students also provide causes for this deficiency. The biggest challenge perceived by teachers is ascribed to students' lack of motivation in class in general. While quite a few teachers state the reasons for low-level motivation as having few opportunities to gain access to genuine English input, yet in these teachers' assessment, little motivation and lack of desire for English learning among students are more likely to be explained by the gap in levels of English achievement between themselves (M. Seong & H. Chang, 2009). One teacher with more than 15 years of teaching experience seriously posits that students' overall English ability is not irrelevant to his or her parents' economic strength. She

continues to argue that those students with prosperous familial backgrounds usually perform better in general in English than those with less prosperous backgrounds. She further adds:

Some students pay a considerable sum for private school tuition to purchase quality-input, and we know this is all thanks to their parents' wealth. Hence, when we see students functionally fluent in English either speaking or writing, we definitely conclude he or she is from a rich family. I believe levels of English proficiency among students are strongly related to their familial socioeconomic status within society. (Teacher Interview #2)

To summarize, teaching English for communication appears to be not an easy task in the current school-based English education. The factors described so far range from the national educational system to teacher- and student-engendered problems; yet the significance of each causal factor may differ, but the highest weight is given to the nation's educational system. It is these teachers' belief that the change in language teaching in actual classrooms should begin with the change in education policy, and in which the most significant step should come with change in the national assessment, CSAT, giving more flexibility to testing components of English to include speaking and writing. It is hence teachers' overall suggestion that when school education teaches all four skills on a regular basis, including speaking and writing, it should be a genuine start for teaching English communicatively.

## V. CONCLUSION

We started with the discourse of English as an international language in the global society and as part of this global trend, Korea has its own development of national discourse on EGL, and as we noted through an overview of the major characteristics and features of national policy for English education, the policy ideals embedded in the nation's ambition to realize its national objective in ELT mainly center around fostering the school youth's functional ability to use the English language. These ideals, giving the primary focus to enhancing English language proficiency, manifested themselves in many aspects of ELT practices as widely known in promoting English-only classes in an unprecedented rate and expanding the compulsory language education by lowering the age of initial start.

However, teachers' assessment of the pedagogical reality in the contemporary Korea is seemingly not in a precise match with the goals professed by the government. The gap

between policy deals and pedagogical reality is not solely based on the deficiency from students' or teachers' side; rather, it is basically based on socioeducational and sociostructural factors that are related to English language education. And these factors are essentially connected to many of the government's political decisions on language policy. As articulated in teachers' discourses, various factors are enumerated for this purpose and among which the test-driven language pedagogy stands as the first hindrance to implementing communication-oriented teaching in the school-based English education. Also, teachers' linguistic and sociolinguistic deficiency in handling spoken language is another factor that is responsible, though partial, for their unsuccessful bid for CLT. These perceived difficulties were well indicated in their professed needs for retraining and self-development as language teachers that can be conceived as evidence for their awareness of the essence of the nation's EGL discourse.

Despite all these obstacles, teachers' perception on teaching Korean EFL itself also sheds light on our understanding of the future of English education in Korea. They posit that English teaching can be better in many aspects when it accompanies changes in the current conceptions and methods, and among the changes necessary for this purpose, the primary one should come with the genuine adoption of functional syllabi entitled with 'English for communication' and for this change to occur, the prerequisite should be including both speaking and writing in CSAT. It is teachers' suggestion that this is the way it works to reduce the gap between policy objectives and classroom reality.

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**Examples in: English**

**Applicable Language: English**

**Applicable Levels: Elementary, Secondary, College**

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