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Ideological Dimensions of English Language Policy in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

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South Korea's English language policies have addressed the acquisition of English as a foreign or additional language. This kind of language planning, known as acquisition planning, concerns how the language users will acquire the language (Cooper, 1989). Understanding language planning issues provides insights into language ideologies related to English, the discursive construction of English, and the assumptions about language education, namely how those in authority perceive English and manage the language behaviors of students and teachers. Specifically, this paper examines the Seventh National Curriculum, the Teaching English in English (TEE) policy, and the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education's implementation of TEE. A discourse analysis of these policy documents uncovers the ideologies underlying this kind of acquisition planning. The analysis is also complemented by participant observations and interviews with Korean English teachers at an English-training facility to gain their perspectives on TEE and the certification process. The findings shed light on the discourses of globalization and neoliberalism that fuel the study and teaching of English, serving both the state and the public's perceived needs. Teachers also reveal their support of the TEE policy but suspect the policy and certificate serve to support economic and political agendas rather than improved English education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Given the high degree of status conferred on English by South Korea (hereafter, Korea), the Korean Ministry of Education (MOE) has paid considerable attention to the role of English in each revision of the National Curriculum since the 1960s in hopes of bolstering Korea's international competitiveness through English competency. The movement known as segyehwa ("globalization") championed by President Kim Young-Sam (1993-1998) yielded radical educational reforms of English learning. In 1997 under the Seventh National Curriculum, English was introduced as a regular subject in elementary school beginning in the third grade for one hour a week; this change pushed English study four years earlier as opposed to an extracurricular subject that had been offered in elementary schools mainly in urban areas (O. Kwon, 2000). The assumptions underlying this change presumed that earlier introduction of English would result in more effective language learning although second language acquisition theories still remain divided about these beliefs. Another major change occurred in 2001 with the implementation of the Teaching English in English (TEE) policy. As indicated by the title, the policy promotes the teaching of English through the medium of English, as opposed to Korean. This policy suggested that teaching English classes in Korean was ineffective in the acquisition of English especially with regard to speaking proficiency. As can be seen

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in the latest revisions, the curriculum has undergone major changes with English as a formal subject beginning earlier, increases in instructional hours, more use of English, and greater emphasis on oral communication skills. In this climate, it is especially urgent to investigate the impact of language policies on English education in Korea. This paper begins with an approach to language policy using a language ideological framework followed by a discourse analysis of official policy documents and interviews with elementary and secondary school English teachers in Korea.

II. A LANGUAGE IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE POLICY

1. Language Policy and Language Ideologies

The study of language policy is supported by a view that contends a language policy "cannot be understood or analyzed as free-standing documents or practices" (Ricento, 2000, p. 7). For an expanded view of language policy, Spolsky (2004) proposes a model that consists of 1) language practices, 2) language beliefs or ideologies, and 3) language management or planning. To fully understand what is involved in a particular language policy, one must examine these three components. First, language practices represent the language(s) or language varieties that members of a community use for communicative interaction depending on the context and often, in spite of what a language policy aims to achieve. The language beliefs or ideologies reflect what a particular community thinks about the language(s) and language use. Lastly, language management or intervention and planning are the actions taken to influence or modify the language practices.

Of direct relevance to this study is the focus on language ideology as an area of inquiry. Wortham (2008) characterizes language ideologies as reflections of certain linguistic features with typifications of certain people that can magnify social and power relations in a particular context. Recent applied linguistics research on language ideologies has documented the diversity of language ideologies that thrive in various linguistic communities. In particular, investigations have flourished that examine ideologies tied to the status of English around the world demonstrating that language policies frequently advance the political agendas of particular groups (Canagarajah, 2005; De Costa, 2010; Kubota & McKay, 2009; J. Park, 2010; Ramanathan, 2005; Ricento, 2000; Seargeant, 2009). On a broad level, these critical studies on the consequences of global English reveal how different groups in power promote English, frequently at the expense of marginalizing other languages thus enacting political, social, or economic ideologies as a form of control.

2. Language Ideologies Circulating in Korea

In the Korean context, research on global English has uncovered language ideologies that support the study and use of English. One ideology that is not unique to Korea but found in many parts of the world is the ideology of necessitation (J. Park, 2009). Necessitation stems from a neoliberal and instrumentalist perspective where English is seen as essential for surviving in the new global order. Without mastery of English, one's ability to compete in a knowledge-based economy is considered to be limited.

The ideology of necessitation is also linked to the ideology of neoliberalism. Block, Gray, and Holborow (2012) note that under neoliberalism, authoritarian groups enforce capitalist practices that become naturalized and are represented in discourses about English-language education such as English as necessary for competitiveness. Minimal state intervention, deregulation, privatization of social services, and labor flexibility to ensure economic expansion are all key features of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). As such, social mobility requires hard work, where socioeconomic disadvantages are perceived to the responsibility of the individual (Macedo, 2003) Studies investigating language and education in Korea indicate the intensification of neoliberal ideology as practiced in daily life and its impact on obscuring social inequalities. S. J. Park (2011) examines the new role of educational manager mothers (*maenijeo eomma*), who are responsible for ensuring that their children's academic success, especially in English, leads to entrance in elite universities, specifically through private afterschool institutes. Mothers, typically from the upper-middle class, are afforded the time and resources to navigate special networks and devote themselves to shaping their children into creative, competitive citizens.

Research from Piller and J. Cho (2013) on Korean universities' efforts to elevate their international rankings also reveals the link between language policy and neoliberalism. Operating under capitalist business models, Korean universities opt to institute English-as-medium-of-instruction language policies to raise their international rankings, attract international students, and enhance their reputations as competitive institutions. Such policies legitimize the need for extreme competition and the use of English as common sense. Within the university, neoliberal standards premised on productivity, another hallmark of neoliberalism, undergird the assessment measures imposed on Korean professors. H. Lee and K. Lee (2013) discuss how neoliberal ideology is enacted in university publishing requirements for professors in Korea. Yearly evaluations require internationally indexed journal publications (i.e., SCI(E), SSCI, and A&HCI) for promotion, which typically means English-language publications. In this context, neoliberal ideology masks the institutional discrimination against non-English scholarship in the name of competition while reinforcing the ideological dominance of English-language publications.

As seen in these studies, the ideologies of necessitation and neoliberalism figure prominently in the pursuit

of English in Korean society, as well as in the education system. This paper expands on these studies but focuses on English language education policies. In light of the demanding and unforgiving nature of these ideologies, it is reasonable to predict that education policies regarding English that the study of English in Korean schools will intensify and the projected importance of English will strengthen.

III. METHOD

1. Ethnography of Language Policy

To uncover the language ideologies shaping English education language policy in Korea, I employ a relatively new methodological direction in applied linguistics research referred to as ethnography of language policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2009). As Johnson (2009) indicates, previous empirical studies of language policies have oftentimes lacked a critical component in understanding the covert agendas that underscore language policies, whereas critically driven research has tended to downplay the agency of individuals given the hegemonic language ideologies that tend to guide language policies. To address these limitations, ethnography of language policy marries the main principles of ethnography and critical discourse analysis to examine the multi-layeredness of language policy with a critical stance. Approaching language policy in this manner foregrounds a commitment to social justice that advocates for language minorities and gives voice to their agency. In this way, the advantages of ethnography of language policy become apparent not only to researchers but also to local communities and policy makers. Researchers gain a more enriched perspective of how micro- and macro-level processes impact each other.

To conduct an ethnography of language policy, Johnson (2009) identifies five key features of research that serve as entry points to examine a particular policy: 1) agents; 2) goals; 3) processes; 4) discourses; and 5) social and historical contexts. Agents include both the authority figures at the institutional level who develop the policy and the communities that are responsible for carrying out the policy (e.g., educators, community leaders) or those for whom the policy is intended (e.g., students). The goals of a policy state the explicit objectives, typically in a policy document. The processes and discourses in tandem encompass the actions of the agents and the covert and overt agendas that operate among circulating language ideologies and power dynamics locally and in society at large. Understanding the social and historical contexts within which a language policy is situated brings into relief other contributing factors that may account for why a policy is enacted, why actors respond and in certain ways, and how and why the goals are or are not achieved. While not meant to be exhaustive, these five features offer productive ways to research the language policy in Korea. In the following sections, I begin with a critical discourse analysis of the most recent reforms, the Seventh National Curriculum and the TEE policy. Then I focus on the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education's (SMOE) TEE policy and TEE certification scheme.

2. Subjects

As prescribed by the ethnography of language policy, I incorporate interview data from English teachers who were participating in a five-month, MOE-sponsored training course at the Seoul English Center (SEC).[1] During this time period, I conducted participant observations of the teachers' training courses and interacted with them during club activities, break times, and meals to build rapport. At the end of the five months, I conducted one-on-one interviews with 37 English teachers and four program administrators. Among the teachers, there were 22 from elementary schools with an average of 9.5 years of teaching experience and 2.4 years of English teaching experience. Of the 15 secondary school teachers, the average length of English teaching experience was 19.6 years. The four program administrators included two elementary school teachers and two secondary school teachers who were dispatched from their schools in Seoul and assigned to run the teacher training program.

These interview data, which are drawn from a larger ethnographic study, offer a local perspective and interpretation of English policies to understand the circulating language ideologies about English. The analyses of the policy documents and interview data were coded iteratively. Recurrent themes were then extracted and further examined to uncover the language ideologies of necessitation and neoliberalism.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Discourse Analysis of the Seventh Curriculum Reform

A close examination of the MOE's written policy highlights problematic areas of the Seventh National Curriculum's early English education policy. The MOE (1997, p. 73; original in English) issued the following statement regarding foreign language education indicating the overt rationale behind the new English curriculum and implicit ideological forces guiding the new changes:

> As we are in the midst of globalization, it is necessary for us to acquire cross-cultural understanding and leadership qualities. Additionally, we have to be open-minded toward the world and behave in a globally acceptable manner.

[1] All names of places and people are pseudonyms.

> Also communicative ability in an international language is required for every citizen in order to become a member in the global society. To achieve this end, all the citizens are expected to be able to communicate in at least one foreign language. Therefore, more emphasis has been placed on foreign language education.

As revealed in the above statement, globalization discourse lies at the heart of the MOE's plan for foreign language education. In the neoliberal marketplace, communication skills constitute what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as *linguistic capital* or commodities for upward social mobility that often rely on English (Block & Cameron, 2002). The traditional ties that have coupled language with identity become more flexible in favor of treating language as a marketable commodity under the global economy (Heller, 2003). Wee (2003) refers to this reinterpretation of language as *linguistic instrumentalism*, "a view of language that justifies its existence in a community in terms of its usefulness in achieving specific utilitarian goals, such as access to economic development or social mobility" (p. 211). The concept of linguistic instrumentalism is highly compatible with the Korean neoliberal order espoused by the state through its education system.

The MOE seems motivated to enhance Korea's growing economic status and efforts in international relations and predicts that communication skills in a non-Korean language are necessary to meet those needs (Y. G. Cho, 2014; J. Chung & T. Choi, 2016). However, the rhetoric of the policy document veils the needs of the state and projects membership in "global society" as in the best interests of the individual to develop marketable skills or "communicative ability in an international language." Unspecified in this statement, but easily deduced from the school curriculum is the intention for English to be the *only* target language of foreign language education or the *de facto* foreign language. English is a compulsory subject for elementary and secondary students. In middle and high school, students can select an additional foreign language or coursework in Chinese characters depending on the schools' available resources, but since 2009 the study of additional foreign languages is no longer a curricular requirement. These languages are dubiously referred to in the secondary school curriculum as "second foreign languages." This designation simultaneously conveys the subordinate status of non-English languages and the hegemony of English as the preferred language of global society.

The lack of choice to learn English and the value conferred on English according to the MOE frame the study of English as common sense. The 1997 curricular reform reflects the growing concern to prepare Korean students to play a more active role globally, which would presumably occur through English. To employ a term by Grin (2006), the *counterfactual* of this policy would be to not enact a language policy for English education in Korea. Thus, according to the MOE's statement, the counterfactual would be to act irresponsibly, neglect Korean students' potential for success, and consequently result in Korea's failure to compete internationally. In this way, neoliberal ideology is activated and English is presented as a logical choice.

One major impetus that bolstered support for early English education was the Asian financial crisis of 1997 that left Korea and other Asian countries economically dependent on the International Monetary Fund (R. Shim, 2002). During this time, unprecedented layoffs and lack of full-time employment opportunities with benefits were major sources of anxiety as the middle class began to shrink, and consequently Koreans pursued new ways of developing marketable skills including English study (H. Koo, 2007). This major financial setback was often blamed on Korea's incompetence, including lack of English proficiency, on the global stage as opposed to inherent problems in the economic marketplace, an attribution that naturalized the belief that English is a necessity for Koreans (J. Park, 2009). The sharp economic decline motivated the Korean government to intensify their educational efforts to be able to survive in competitive international markets, thereby requiring a higher mastery of English.

Companies and universities also reinforced the ideology of English as a necessity by requiring high scores on internationally recognized standardized English tests such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Regardless of whether one's position requires the use of English, Korean companies regularly used and continue to use TOEIC scores to make hiring and promotion decisions (S. A. Choi, 2002). Similarly, universities usually set specific TOEIC scores as graduation requirements for all students irrespective of major (O. Kwon, 2000). With English skills used as a gatekeeper in various domains of Korean society, the significance of English and the reasons to learn it are presented as self-evident although the actual economic returns associated with English mastery are debatable. For example, research on linguistic instrumentalism in Japan by Kubota (2011) indicates that investment in learning English did not necessarily result in economic gains but rather, material benefits were constrained by gender, geography, and ideological factors. Nevertheless, the ideology of English as necessity and neoliberalism obscure these realities by attributing lack of economic success to an individual's shortcomings or, more specifically, inability to develop linguistic capital.

Another common feature in globalization discourse related to foreign language learning is the goal of cross-cultural understanding. The MOE's assumption that language learning will engender "cross-cultural understanding" is questionable given the curricular resources available. In S. Yim's (2007) study of Korean middle school English textbooks published under the Seventh National Curriculum, the presentation of non-Korean cultures was mainly represented by the white, middle class living in major U.S. cities partaking in activities such as windsurfing and surprise parties. Similar to Kubota's (2002) investigation of English textbooks for Japanese students, these images present a narrow and embellished view of the imagined "global society" in which Koreans are expected to interact.

Furthermore, the MOE in 1995 established the English Program in Korea (EPIK) to employ university-educated, native English speakers to co-teach English in Korean schools and promote cultural awareness. However, under EPIK, "cultural awareness" is limited to interactions with native speakers from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the U.K., or the U.S. With the exception of South Africa, applicants from the so-called Outer Circle countries such as the Philippines or Nigeria, or skilled non-native English speakers for that matter, are not eligible to teach in EPIK.

Additionally, English textbooks also devote significant attention to Korean culture and how to introduce it to foreigners. Each of the English textbooks examined by S. Yim (2007) presented an ethnocentric and nationalistic view that hailed the achievements of local Koreans and the Korean diaspora in an attempt to build national pride with chapter titles such as *We Are Proud of our Culture*. S. Yim also reports of dialogues where speakers express their preference for Korean artifacts such as kimchi over hamburgers. While the histories and achievements of other countries are also mentioned, they are often juxtaposed with the superiority of Korea accomplishments. Ultimately, the content of the English textbooks and employment policy of EPIK pose formidable challenges to MOE's objectives of cultivating "open-minded" students who comport themselves "in a globally acceptable manner" when essentialized and culturally biased content is presented to students.

As the analysis of the written policy has shown, the discourse of globalization appears to undergird the motivation for the early English education in the Seventh National Curriculum. Guided by linguistic instrumentalism and neoliberal ideals, the MOE's promotion of foreign language learning, specifically English, frames foreign language not merely as a tool for communication but an economically valuable and desirable commodity that will facilitate an individual's engagement with the global world, which is believed to contribute to Korea's global competitiveness. However, the government's goal of promoting cross-cultural understanding raises concerns because of limitations of the prescribed English textbooks and interactions with certain types of English speakers. In the end, Korea's education system is actively responding to the perceived needs of the global and neoliberal marketplace by pursuing a language policy that attempts to change the language behaviors of students to support the state's interests and restore the public's confidence in English education.

2. The Introduction of TEE

In light of the undisputed status of English as the global language and the ideology of English as a necessity for Koreans, parents desired more opportunities for their children's English study to ensure a competitive edge for their future, especially in a time of economic uncertainty caused by the Asian financial crisis. In 1997, half of all elementary school students enrolled in English-language private institutes compared to 4% in 1990, leading to households spending almost 10% of their earnings on private education (Seth, 2002). Historically, families of all income levels have entrusted private institutes with providing their children extra education in all subject areas for entrance exam preparation, a service that is considered to be lacking in public schooling due to large class sizes and a uniform curriculum. In spite of curricular reforms designed to improve academic standards, the general public doubted the effectiveness of the public education system given the intense competition to enter an elite university (J. Park, 2009). Consequently, many parents resorted to English preschools and private institutes, while the most affluent sent their children for an overseas education in an English-speaking country hoping to provide better opportunities for educational success. Government authorities since the post-war era have always been sensitive to the expenditures for private education that burden families, and presidential administrations have built their political platforms around reducing these expenditures since Korean parents have consistently voiced their dissatisfaction with the Korean education system and costs of private education (H. Koo, 2007).

An attempt to improve the quality of English education and reduce the exorbitant expenses to families for supplemental English study both domestically and internationally occurred when the MOE implemented an amendment to the Seventh National Curriculum in 2001 to improve the quality of English education and called, "Teaching English in English" (TEE). As its name conveys, the TEE policy requires that English classes in elementary and secondary schools be conducted through English by Korean teachers. At first glance, TEE seems reasonable; when learning a foreign language, why wouldn't exposure to the target language, English, be desirable, especially when students are not likely to encounter English outside of class? However, careful scrutiny of the aforementioned historical and sociopolitical factors of English education in Korea reveals that implementing TEE is not a simple matter.

3. SMOE's TEE Policy

The preceding sections have focused on the MOE's national projects for English education. Although Korea's education system is highly centralized through its uniform national curriculum and top-down policies, each province exercises some autonomy in deciding how TEE will be carried out. Now I focus on Seoul's interpretation and implementation of TEE, whose actions often serve as models for other provinces. I introduce the formal, written document of the TEE policy as a starting point to uncover the intentions, motivations, and agendas behind the policy, keeping in mind Spolsky's (2004) observation that "an explicit written policy may not be implemented" (p. 39). Figure 1 is SMOE's official statement on TEE for elementary and secondary teachers (original in Korean is available at www.sen.go.kr; English translations are my own).

What is TEE?
TEE = Teaching English in English
- The teacher uses English with students and students use English with each other in class activities to create meaningful interactions.
- Generally, teachers will provide the maximum number of opportunities for students to use English, except for explaining difficult grammar explanations, etc.
- Depending on the students' level and degree of understanding, the teacher can flexibly adjust the amount of English used during the first session of the lesson unit.

Objective
- To improve the English teacher's TEE ability in order to increase the students' communication skills.
- To ensure that the best English teachers continue to teach.
- To provide fun, exciting, and student-centered English classes.

FIGURE 1 SMOE's Official Statement on TEE (from www.sen.go.kr)

As indicated in the description and objective of TEE, the policy is motivated by the main tenets of CLT, that is, meaningful interactions, maximum input and output in English, and student-centered instruction (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Like the reforms of the previous fifth and sixth national curricula that tried to promote CLT, the success of TEE is contingent upon teachers who are trained in CLT methodologies that are relevant to their classroom context; simply requiring teachers use English as the medium of instruction cannot guarantee that students will develop communicative competence in English. Additionally, CLT comprises a multitude of definitions and interpretations that can lead to misconceptions in its implementation, which can be overwhelming for practitioners (Spada, 2007).

Past research in Korean contexts illustrates that despite teachers' positive support of CLT methods, classroom practices did not necessarily reflect CLT and were constrained by teachers' English proficiency, large class sizes, and broad gaps in students' English proficiency (S. Choi, 2000). Based on the document, SMOE appears to assume that if teachers are capable of using English in the classroom, then they will be employing CLT methods. While SMOE offers voluntary TEE training for English teachers such as SEC, other short-term workshops that often focus on teaching methodologies, and access to Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) online English courses, it remains to be seen if and how English teachers implement CLT in their instruction under the TEE policy.

Although the name, TEE, may imply that English classes be taught exclusively through English, SMOE recognizes that Korean still has a place, albeit somewhat vague, in the English classroom. Incidentally, some English teachers in S. A. Kim's (2002) study assumed that TEE required 100% English only. T. H. Choi (2015) and I. Jo (2011) also mention teachers' uncertainty in how much English is acceptable under TEE. The confusion surrounding what TEE actually entails may require more active dissemination of the policy in order for teachers to implement TEE. While the use of Korean is not explicitly endorsed, it is implicitly acceptable in instances such as "grammar explanations, etc." In such cases, the teacher can be judicious about when Korean can be more useful than English. In addition, the statement, "Depending on the students' level and degree of understanding, the teacher can flexibly adjust the amount of English used during the first session of the lesson unit" also suggests that using Korean can be useful for introducing new content when presenting the first session of a new lesson unit. These considerations of the role of Korean in English classrooms correspond with research that supports the use of the L1 in foreign or second language instruction to facilitate target language intake (Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 1999). Turnbull (2001) also supports use of the L1 in addition to maximum use of the target language but urges policy makers and curriculum developers to make explicit guidelines based on empirical research and language acquisition theories on what "maximum use" should entail according to the teaching context. Therefore, the question of how much exposure to the target language is required for TEE is still up for debate, and recommendations for when it is appropriate to use Korean in a systematic and beneficial way for improving language proficiency are still needed.

4. The TEE Certificate

With the acknowledgment of the use of Korean under the TEE policy, the bilingual ability of the Korean English teacher is viewed as an asset compared to the usually monolingual native English speakers of the EPIK program. In this respect, TEE heralds an ideological shift from projecting native speakers as the ideal teacher to conferring legitimacy on local teachers. One mechanism that further validates English teachers' competency in carrying out TEE is the TEE certificate program established in 2009. This scheme developed by SMOE certifies teachers as TEE Ace or Master level.

To qualify as a candidate for the TEE Ace certificate, teachers must have at least three years of teaching experience including one year or more as an English subject teacher and a minimum of 12 professional development points (where 15 hours of training equals one point) earned in SMOE-authorized English training programs. Eligible candidates must first take a 30-hour online course from the Educational Broadcasting System that covers second language acquisition theories and teaching methodologies and then pass the TEE Test of Knowledge (TKT), an online, multiple-choice exam based on the 30-hour course. After passing the TKT, candidates take the TEE Practice Test (TPT) where they can choose to submit a video recording of an actual English class or invite evaluators (i.e., SMOE administrators in the English division and TEE Master certificate holders) to a live class. The TPT is based on the quality of teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, and promotion of students' communication skills. The benefits of passing the TKT and TPT to earn the TEE Ace certificate include tuition remission for three months of English study at an SMOE-approved private institute, paid registration fees for professional conferences,

and a stipend for buying English-related materials for the classroom or professional development.

TEE Ace-certified teachers can then apply for the TEE Master certificate if they have seven years or more teaching experience, at least 28 professional development points, and a recommendation from their principal. Candidates must submit a portfolio that demonstrates their activities related to English education and professional development experience, as well as participate in an interview conducted in English. Upon successful evaluation of the portfolio and interview, teachers become TEE Master-certified and are required to participate in Trainer of Teachers (TOT) training sessions during school vacations. This two-week course conducted by university professors and supervisors in SMOE's English division provide TEE Master recipients with training to be mentors, TEE Ace evaluators, and English lesson consultants. These opportunities offer TEE Master teachers with financial incentives, in addition to the material benefits available to TEE Ace teachers. As of February 2013, 1,324 teachers had earned the TEE certificate, but this number was not disaggregated to indicate how many Ace and Master teachers there were (SMOE, 2013).

5. Teachers' Reactions

Previously, TEE Master teachers could participate in a one-month study abroad course after earning the certificate; however, this benefit was eliminated due to budget cuts in 2011. During my interviews with elementary and secondary teachers at SEC, teachers expressed great disappointment about the downgrading of benefits for the TEE Master certificate. Among the teachers with over 15 years of teaching experience, many said that they were not interested in attaining the TEE certificates. With the cancelation of the study abroad benefit, they suspected that few would be motivated to make the extra effort to apply for the TEE certificate. For secondary teachers, many felt that the certificate was meaningless since they could not use TEE in their classroom due to pressure to prepare students for the CSAT. Thus, they did not regard the certification as an indication of an effective English teacher. However, one secondary teacher, Richard, mentioned that the process of preparing for the TEE certification would be valuable because he could challenge himself while reflecting on his teaching, lesson planning, and knowledge of language acquisition theories.

A few teachers speculated that the TEE certificate program would be eliminated because of continuing budget cuts. The TEE Master study abroad course has been cut while the six-month program at SEC for March 2012 was converted to a one-month program with no study-abroad component. Another deterrence to attaining the TEE certificate was the fear that teachers would be given extra responsibilities if they were identified as TEE Ace or Master even if they were financially compensated. With teachers already overwhelmed by the demands of administrative work in addition to teaching duties, many teachers doubted the feasibility to prepare effectively for the TEE tests and were discouraged about the prospects of more work if they earned the certificates.

For the teachers that demonstrated enthusiasm for the TEE certificate, they cited a boost in their confidence as an English teacher, as well as the accumulation of credentials that might be useful for promotion to an administrator in the future and for applying to certain professional development programs. Some elementary teachers noted that earning a TEE certificate would serve as leverage for securing a position as an English teacher when applying for teaching assignments each year. Other teachers cited recognition from peers, principals, and parents, especially when the credibility of Korean English teachers is often doubted. Supervisor Ma from SEC acknowledged the distrust from parents toward Korean English teachers and the importance of the TEE certificate as he states in the following:

> I think that for the teachers themselves they have some confidence because they passed. The certificate means their level language level and teaching levels are high by the approval of SMOE. Yeah, so if they have that, get that certificate it means they passed the test, or TKT Knowledge and Practice Test. So it makes the English teachers confident, confident to teach English. Yes, to the kids, to the students and then the others, parents or parents or students, especially parents, if the teachers, English teachers has a TEE Ace or Master certificate then the parents can trust their English teachers.[2]

As described by Supervisor Ma and other teachers, the TEE certification serves as a tool to gain the parents' confidence in public school English education. Kelly, an elementary school teacher, also noted the negative image of school teachers as *cheol bab tong*, literally meaning "steel rice container," but figuratively meaning indestructible or unable to be fired regardless of their quality of teaching. But with TEE certification, Kelly reasoned that parents and fellow co-workers would be less likely to have misgivings about teachers' English-teaching ability. Kelly also suspected that the uncertain job conditions might require TEE certification, as she explains,

> Every job is changing. Also, so teacher will be not the *cheol bab tong* anymore in the future. I think. So I have to prepare something. So TEE is one of them. Yeah and most parents and students and teachers, everyone think English is very important compared with other subjects. So maybe getting TEE certification is very good.

This observation from Kelly, as well as other younger

[2] All interviews reported in this study occurred in English, as most participants wanted the opportunity to practice English. In cases where Korean words and phrases were used, they were transliterated into English. Also the interviews are transcribed exactly as they were spoken. I refrain from using sic to indicate errors in English so as not to detract from the substance of the data.

teachers, reflects the perception of changing conditions in the neoliberal labor market, even in the public service sector where jobs are typically full-time and guaranteed for life. Seen in this light, the process to earn TEE certification is an example of the continuous self-development and self-improvement that the individual must undertake to meet the demands of a competitive workplace. Although TEE certification is presented as a choice, some teachers worried that in the future they would be negatively evaluated and ineligible for career advancement if many obtained TEE certification and they did not.

As critics have argued, neoliberalism frequently foregrounds individual talent and downplays the inequalities embedded in institutional structures (Harvey, 2005; Macedo, 2003). Indeed, TEE certification is premised on the illusion of choices, where it is promoted as up to teachers to decide whether to take the test. The stiff requirements to be eligible for the TEE Ace entail passing a 30-hour online course and completing at least 180 hours of professional development training and 420 hours of training for the TEE Master on top of the TPT.

To participate in long-term professional training, teachers must make sacrifices to attend, which can be difficult for teachers with school-related administrative duties and familial obligations. For programs like SEC, which can be used to satisfy the professional development points, teachers must negotiate with their principals, who are often reluctant to allow teachers to attend long-term programs because of the difficulties in finding a substitute teacher. SEC since its inception consistently had difficulty attracting teachers because of uncooperative principals and teachers who had families to look after. Consequently, only teachers who have the resources and can make the extra effort to participate in long-term professional development required for TEE certification can gain recognition as a competent English teacher.

However, the current system is not necessarily effective for identifying capable English teachers. In a conversation about TEE certification, Hilda, an elementary school teacher, mentions the case of one of her co-workers named Teacher Jang, who wanted to take the TEE test. Because of her extensive experience and reputation as an excellent English teacher, Teacher Jang was frequently asked by SMOE to lead afterschool workshops for English teachers, co-author elementary school English textbooks, and hold TEE demonstration classes for English teachers in her district. Due to her extracurricular responsibilities and childcare obligations, Teacher Jang did not have time to attend professional development courses and thus was unable to apply for the TEE certificate. Hilda lamented the onerous requirements for TEE certification and that an effective teacher like Teacher Jang could not qualify for the certificate.

The case of Teacher Jang illustrates the shortcomings of the TEE certification process, and reciprocally even if one is TEE Ace or Master, it does not guarantee that TEE will be used in the classroom. While teachers are required to hold two or three open classes a year for parents, teachers, and administrators, SMOE has no way of policing the TEE policy in the classroom. Another complicating factor is that even elementary teachers with TEE certificates are not always working as English subject teachers. Such was the case for Jisoo who became a TEE Ace Teacher but was not able to teach English because the principal at her school chose to fill the English positions with more senior teachers who wanted to teach English even though they did not have TEE certificates. In this instance, the principal prioritized teacher seniority over credentials. Presumably, the TEE certificate program was designed to support the use of TEE in the classroom, but the reality does not always reflect this assumption.

With the uneven implementation of TEE and TEE certification, critical scrutiny of the TEE policy reveals broader political and economic agendas. Elementary school teachers Hilda and Nicole noted, in a conversation with me, their suspicion that an increase in the number of TEE certifications would be used to justify discontinuing the costly practice of employing native English-speaking teaching assistants (NESTAs). In 2012, SMOE aimed to reduce 4.4 billion won (USD $3.9 million) of the budget by letting go 255 NESTAs employed at Seoul high schools, except for 20 teaching at special foreign language schools (S. H. Yim, 2011). By February 2013, middle school positions would also be eliminated leaving approximately 1,000 NESTAs only at elementary schools (S. Kim, 2012). Hilda reasoned that the decision to eliminate secondary school positions was perhaps due to the fact that secondary school teachers majored in English and also there is an extreme focus on test preparation, thus making NESTAs expendable since they were hired to teach conversation.

Nevertheless, both Hilda and Nicole felt that cutting NESTAs at the elementary level was imminent once SMOE had certified a substantial number of TEE Ace and Master teachers. A few other teachers at SEC and Supervisor Ma also thought that if there were enough talented elementary English teachers, SMOE would not continue to hire NESTAs, and the certification would serve as evidence for letting them go. Elementary-school teacher, Dana, also believed that one objective of TEE certification was a cost-cutting measure to "send native speakers home" explaining that, "some native speaker are not trained. They are not teacher. I think. I can feel when I teach English in English camp, also I know that their English is better than me. But teaching is different, right?" While Dana and other teachers acknowledged that there were some effective NESTAs, many teachers I interviewed felt that the cost of recruiting and hiring them did not yield the returns they expected, citing lack of teaching expertise and practical training. If as Hilda and Nicole predicted the MOE decided to terminate the hiring of of NESTAs seems, the decision would fall in line with neoliberalism's emphasis on efficiency and efficacy. However, the decision to maintain NESTAs at elementary schools has remained as of 2018.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have progressed from the macro to the micro level by focusing in on the last curricular reforms, the TEE policy, and the TEE certification process. As can be seen, policies addressing the learning of English in Korea appear to reflect the interests of the administration in power and significant political events of the time. Beginning in the 1980s, the discourse of globalization projected the importance of English in the curriculum as integral to raising Korea's expanding global status and competitiveness. With the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, English became a more explicit priority in curricular reforms and the public began to associate English as a vehicle for social mobility. The neoliberal restructuring of the economic system and unstable employment aided in creating a national obsession with English leading many families to seek a competitive edge through private English education and study abroad. Since private education incurred sizable expenses for families, the MOE attempted to appease the public by implementing early English education, the hiring of NESTAs, and the TEE policy and TEE certificate to improve the quality of English teaching and reduce expenditures for families. Here the language ideologies of English as necessity and English as the language of globalization figure prominently and contribute to the valorization of English in Korean society. However, the hegemony that English wields is not without consequences, especially in the context of neoliberalism. As these policies attempt to manage the language behavior of teachers and students, tensions arise in how English is being promoted in curricular materials, the implementation of the TEE policy, and the TEE certification process. As long as dominant ideologies prevail, teachers and students can likely expect the intensification of language education policies and more rigorous study and teaching of English. Nevertheless, how teachers interpret these policies reflect their own interests and contexts, which may or may not result in upholding the policies. Finally, it is duly noted that this research is a qualitative, interpretive study with a limited sample size that may call into question issues about generalizability. However, I reiterate that the analysis and findings of the study can nonetheless offer valuable insight into how a particular community interprets and implements a given language policy that can potentially guide future language policies in ways that better address the needs of the community to improve language education.

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