



**SPACE FOR INDIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS IN CURRENT DISCOURSE ON
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA**

Shashi Kumar Mishra & Dr. KonchokTashi

Assistant Professors, Centre for Far East Languages

Central University of Jharkhand (Ranchi)

Abstract:

In last decade of 20th century and first decade of 21st century, South Korea has seen a very rapid growth in English language learners. Korean Government has shown a keen interest in increasing the number of English speakers in the country to compete in the world of globalization. Apart from government's effort, parents have also been trying their best to provide a better English education to their children. Earlier Korean government has been inviting only native English language teachers but recently under CEPA(Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement), South Korean Government has agreed to invite non-native English language teachers. A radical social and educational change in a monolingual country like South Korea has given a large space for a great discourse on English Language Education in Korea. This paper deals with the current discourse which is going on in South Korea on the issue of English Language Education and observes the space for Indian English Teachers in South Korea.

Keywords: *Native English Language Teacher, CEPA, South Korea, etc.*

Introduction:

“The source of this problem lies in the fact that the outcome of studying English is minimal and has not cultivated a true competence, and such a criticism may be valid depending on the viewpoints. In Korea, English knowledge has been provided to the students by schools or publishers for several decades. However, as to the question whether the entire society or individuals have gained anticipated effects, except those very few who have experienced the mastering of the language in special living environments, most people have a feeling that, though they have a memory of learning English, it all has become useless” (InseopJeong, ChosunIlbo, June 1, 1929).

“There is a great scarcity of competent English teachers in school classrooms who can teach English properly. There are also many teachers who are having difficulty in catching up with advanced students. This is why school English education is still stuck to ‘reading-and grammar-centered English’, not moving to ‘communicative English’” (Joong-AngIlbo, April 13, 2006).

As far as English language teaching and English language teachers are concerned, South Korea has made a very clear choice: people from developing countries, regardless of how gifted they may be at teaching English as a foreign language, are not welcome, and no exceptions are made. Korean laws state that to teach at the English Program in Korea or Teach and Learn in Korea programs, applicants must be from one of these seven wealthy, mostly monolingual English speaking countries: Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., Ireland, South Africa, the U.S. or Canada.

Teachers from aforementioned English speaking countries are privileged to stay longer to teach English in South Korea. There is not much space for Indian English teachers in South Korea as South Korean government has not given enough space for Indian English teachers in its English Language teaching policies and even Korean parents strongly reject non-native English teachers including Indian English teachers as their emphasis is strongly on native English teachers from aforementioned countries and which has given birth of current discourse on English language in Korea.

In 2010, South Korean Government has shown flexibility under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) as it allows teachers from India to stay in Korea for one year. It is also a very bitter truth that South Korean government gives them lower pay. One can find a visible distinction in the payment as Indian English teachers are paid lower than the teachers of English speaking countries.

In the last decade of last century, South Korea was developing rapidly and was increasing its relationship with other foreign countries and at that very time the South Korean government started a globalization campaign in order to catch up with the advanced countries. One of the main goals of this campaign was to improve the English proficiency of Koreans by native English language instructors. The traditional English education was always considered not to be effective in training future experts specialized in using English. In South Korea today, there is a mania for learning the English language. Many parents and the South Korean government now think that English is a need for Korean because of globalization. According to Korea Broadcasting System (2008), "Many kids begin to learn English long before they start attending elementary school. Parents push their children to go to private English institutes to learn English, even though their children cannot speak Korean at all, because the parents think that when their children learn English early, they can have more of an opportunity to be a native English speaker. Moreover, parents send their children to more than one English institute per day.

In the last decade of 20th century and first decade of 21st century, the South Korean government put large amount of money towards English Education and frequently revises the entire English education system to improve students' English proficiency but now it has put a check on that as it has decreased the number of native English teachers. In addition, South Korean students not only study English for numerous hours, but their parents are also willing to invest in their children education by sending them to private English tutoring services and institutions where native English language instructors are appointed. The cost of sending their children to these private schools is often more than half of their income. This kind of phenomenon could be hardly seen around any other Asian or European countries. The global importance of English education has significantly influenced the entire society of South Korea. As a result, a new discourse related to English language has emerged at government level and at public level in South Korea on the following issues:

- English as a lingua franca in the age of Continentalization & globalization
- Maintenance of national identity
- English education as a tool for enhancing the nation's power
- Koreans are commercially being Exploited
- Native like English or Communicative English?

English Education Policy:

English education policies have been made mostly by non-English-educators. All subsequent English education policies were made either by government officials or statesmen. In more recent years, there have been many instances of English education policy changes initiated by outsiders. The Current Situation and issues of the Teaching of English in Korea and changes initiated by the government and outsiders are following:-

- a. Introduction of optional English into elementary school in 1982: President Chun Doo-hwan
- b. Introduction of mandatory English education into elementary school in 1997: President Kim Young-sam
- c. Teaching English in English in 2000: Minister of Education Moon Yong-Lin
- d. Gyeonggi English Village in 2004: Governor Sohn Hak-gyu
- e. Legislations about English education: National Assembly men (e.g., Lee Juho)
- f. English Town in Jeju (2007): Korean government and Jeju
- g. Songdo International City, Incheon: Korean government and Incheon City
- h. English as the official language in some major business sectors

Commercial Exploitation of English Learners in South Korea:

Many Koreans believe in some myths about English and English learning, which are often exploited by commercially minded people. They create havoc among them and they deeply cultivate a sense of fear of learning English language. They strongly create an artificial environment and spread that if they want to learn English, the followings are the most important area to take care of:

- a. Pronunciation is the most important.
- b. The best English teacher is a native-speaker teacher.
- c. The best way to learn is to go to an English-speaking country.
- d. English should be learned through rote memorization.
- e. School textbook English is different from the college entrance exam English.
- f. English can be mastered by memorizing a given number of sentences
- g. English can be mastered within a given number of months

There may be some English language teachers who believe in some of these myths, but no reasonable English Language professional would endorse these myths. Take, for example, the myth about the importance of pronunciation. There are many variations of English throughout the world. Despite studies finding that bilingual people tend to be more sensitive to language use and are often better able to understand and explain the complexities of syntax, semantic nuances, and cultural pragmatics, most Koreans believe that when speaking two languages, one gets in the way of the other. When Koreans send their children to study English abroad for several years (there are 200,000 such Korean families, mostly living in New Zealand, the U.S., the U.K., Canada and Australia), parents often make sure that their children have no Korean friends and have as few opportunities to speak Korean as possible.

Economic & Social Changes and Emerging Issues:

Recently, especially in the past ten years or so, Korea underwent drastic social changes that presented quite a different context for English language education. The number of students going abroad has increased yearly. Native-speaker teachers now outnumber Korean English teachers. English language teaching and testing businesses flourished, threatening school education. And people now have more knowledge and higher expectations about English language education. Each of these issues will be briefly discussed below.

Korean Students' Move towards English Speaking Country:

Since the year of 1997, when the economy collapsed, the number of students going abroad to study English or for general education has steadily increased. The sharp increase of young students is especially noticeable in 2005. As the number of returnee students increases, English teachers are pressured to cope with these good speakers of English in the classroom. Accordingly, a higher level of English proficiency is expected from school teachers. For more than a decade, no Korean had ever thought of going to non-English speaking countries.

But these days a change is visible in the mind set of Korean parents as some of them have started sending their children for learning English language in India especially in some International schools of hill stations like Massuri and Dehradun and some in institutes of Delhi. If it is going to be continued, it will be a great opportunity of employment for English language teachers in India.

Native English Teachers' Move towards Korea:

It has been observed that the total number of legal and illegal native-speaker English teachers in Korea is greater than the regular Korean school English teachers. Considering the fact that illegal teachers are mostly in private institutes teaching primary and secondary school students, primary and secondary school English education does seem to be influenced by native-speaker teachers as much as, if not more than, by Korean teachers of English. A very unique and unusual phenomenon found only in Korea is that a great number of elementary and secondary school students take the TOEIC. Why are they taking the TOEIC? To get a job in business? There used to be a very strange policy of so-called "special-purpose high schools"; they required a TOEFL, TOEIC, or TEPS (Test of English Proficiency Developed by Seoul National University) score from the prospective students. This requirement made middle school students take the tests in order to check their readiness for such high schools. Besides, some universities are also giving extra points to those submitting high test scores when they apply for admission to such universities. Because of this test, demand of English language teachers has increased and parents keep inviting native English teachers/instructor/tutors for their children. And which results into a great financial burden as native English teachers demand high payment.

Expectations of the People and Society:

As the education level of parents and the society has been raised, the general level of people's English abilities also has been raised. Naturally, a higher level of English proficiency is expected from the students and the teachers. Such high expectations put pressure on the teachers and English language teaching professionals. And the fact is that, there are a number of native English teachers teaching in Korea are not of that standard as they do are not so educated and do not possess any professional English language teaching qualification. This crisis of qualified teachers has given birth of a new discourse on English language education that South Korea wants simply a native English Speaking teacher or a qualified English language teacher. Perhaps, in coming years this discourse will open the door for Indian English teachers and also Indian English language teachers are going to have a bright future in South Korea.

Government's Response:

The discourse which is going on English language education in South Korea has caught the attention of the government and the government is forced to take some steps to give a new shape to English education. Recently the Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) announced following three initiatives to improve and enhance English education in the country:-

1. Developing the National English Competence Assessment Test
2. Increasing the class hours of English in elementary schools, and
3. Hiring English conversation instructors (native as well as non-native under CEPA.)

The third decision of Korean Government is a good sign for Indian language teachers. Though, they are allowed for short period of time, yet it is a good opportunity at initial stage.

Conclusion:

To sum up we could say that as to South Korea, though, Korean English language teaching has made important progresses, yet there are still many challenges facing the Korean English language teaching professionals. What can and what should the English language teaching professionals do to solve the societal problems related to English teaching in Korea? If Korean English language teaching professionals are to accomplish their mission to renovate English education in Korea, they should respond to the above challenges. Educational innovations and renovations need orchestrated efforts by the government, the English language teaching professionals, the society, the parents, and the students. More than ever before, the Korean English language teaching professionals are challenged with the mission to initiate and coordinate their efforts to improve English education. There are no signs that the law specifying which countries' citizens can teach English will change, despite formal protests from diplomats residing in Korea. The debate about whether Korea should emphasize qualifications rather than citizenship has been going on for years, but as there has been a 10 percent decrease in the number of foreign English teachers between 2012 and 2013, employers are increasingly looking into qualifications as the competition for jobs gets tougher.

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To Cite the Article: *Mishra, Shahi, Kumar & Tashi, Konchok*, “Space for Indian English Teachers in Current Discourse on English Language Education in South Korea”. *Literary Cognizance*, I-4 (Mar., 2016): 34-38. Web.

