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Teaching English as a Dominant International Language: A Case of Korean Elementary English Program

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The purpose of this paper is to present a qualitative case study on teaching English as an international language in Korean context. The researcher investigated the implementation process of the new elementary English program from the government to local schools to find out to what extent the symbolic value of English as an international language affect the implementation process of the elementary English program. The research result showed that the elementary teachers shared the different views of the status of English from those of government and the parents, and their differing perception of the role of English constantly affected their implementation efforts. The research findings also revealed that the public's concern of English dominance in Korean educational system resulted in the government's 'comprised curriculum' by lowering the learning goals of the English program. The findings also indicated that the introduction of the elementary English program accelerated English dominance in both teacher and student culture. The question of how to resolve the conflict between acquiring English proficiency and its negative influence on Korean culture remains a complex issue in implementing the new elementary English program.

[Elementary English program/Teaching English as an international language, 초등영어 프로그램/국제어로서의 영어 교육]

I. INTRODUCTION

As English has emerged as the language of global communication, the governments of many non-English-speaking countries have been actively promoting English proficiency for the purpose of their nation's modernization and economic advancement (Pennycook, 1994a; Phillipson, 1992; Tollefson, 1995). In this context, language policy, which addresses the role of governments in planning language use and language acquisition, has emerged as an important variable affecting a learner's English acquisition process (Kaplan, 1990; Paulston & McLaughlin, 1994; Ricento & Burnaby, 1998; Tollefson, 1995). Regarding this trend, Tollefson (1989) argues that current SLA (Second Language Acquisition) theory, which generally reflects the North American situation, does not consider sufficiently the role of language planning and policy in English acquisition, since outside native-English-speaking countries, learning variables such as the amount of language input, learner's attitudes and motivation, age of learners, and the nature of learning process are all largely determined by the government's conscious and deliberate language planning and policy regarding English education (Tollefson, 1989).

The formulation and implementation of language policy, however, is not always neutral because at a deeper level, language policy is constantly influenced and constrained by complicated social, political, and educational forces in a society. According to critical linguists who view language as a "social practice" (Candlin, 1990; Fairclough, 1985; Forester, 1985; Pennycook, 1989) language learning is always affected by the social, cultural, and political struggles that the language symbolizes. Thus, the aim of the research on language policy should be to discover and understand how the socio-cultural and political context that the language produces interacts with every facet of language policy and its implementation (Freeman, 1996).

Related to the issue of language policy in English education and the critical linguists' view of language learning and language policy, I was interested in finding out how the implications of teaching English as an international language have affected the every facet of implementation process of the new elementary English program in Korea.

The Korean elementary English program is an exclusively top-down and

government-initiated program designed to support the Korean government's globalization policy (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997a). In 1994, a year after its inauguration, the seventh Korean government began a nation-wide campaign aimed at the globalization of the country as a means of promoting Korea's rapid economic growth and internationalization (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997a). In the course of implementing its globalization policy, the Korean government acknowledged that the existing reading and grammar translation-centered English education did not contribute to developing students' oral English proficiency, a language attribute considered absolutely necessary in international communication (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997a). With this motivation, in 1997, the Korean government launched the new elementary English program where English is taught from Grade 3 by focusing primarily on developing students' oral English proficiency (Im, 1997; Kim, 1998).

With reference to this background, first, I was interested in identifying how the stakeholders' (e.g. teachers, government, and parents) perceived the new status of English as an international language. The elementary English program was the product of the Korean government's perception of the status of English as an international language. Although English has been taught in Korea as a major foreign language for over 100 years in secondary schools, the elementary English program marked the first time that the Korean government officially recognized the status of English as an international language that every Korean citizen needs to learn from the primary years. I was curious as to whether other stakeholders, particularly elementary teachers, who had to implement this program in their classrooms, agreed with the government's altered view of the status of English as an international language, and how their views on the status of English affected their implementation effort of the program.

Second, I was interested in determining how the people's perceptions of the dominance of English affected the implementation of the elementary English program. While English has been emphasized in Korea as the most important tool for survival in international competition, at the same time, in the beginning of the program, there has been a strong nationalistic attitude among the public to protect the Korean culture and language from the influence of Western culture that English symbolizes. For this reason, when the government first announced the plan for the elementary English program in 1995, a significant

concern was expressed that the introduction of an English program at the elementary level might accelerate English dominance in the Korean educational system, which had already been over-loaded with English education (Shin, 1995). Considering this background, I was curious to find out how the people's perceptions of the dominance of English affected the implementation of the program. Further, I wished to determine what possible impact the new English program brought on the elementary schools.

Based on this background of the study, I formulated the following one overall research question and three operational research questions.

Research Questions:

1. To what extent did the symbolic value of English as an international language impact on the implementation of the elementary English program?
 - 1) How did stakeholders perceive the status of English in Korea: International Language or Foreign Language?
 - 2) How did the issue of English dominance affect the implementation process of elementary English program?
 - 3) What impact did the English program bring on elementary education?

With reference to these research questions, this article will present the research results on the implementation process of elementary English program from the point of teaching English as an international language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Critical Theory Approach to Language Policy in the Context of the Spread of English

Though there have been several major approaches to language policy research such as the integrative model (Hornberger, 1994), the rational model (Rubin, 1971, 1986), the orientation model (Ruiz, 1984), the critical theory approach has been considered to have great explanatory power in interpreting how language functions within broader socio-cultural contexts (Ricento &

Hornberger, 1996).

By adopting critical theory, which views language as a “social practice” (Candlin, 1990; Fairclough, 1985; Pennycook, 1989), critical theory approach attempts to examine the broader social, historical, and economic forces influencing language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). They believe that language learning is always affected by the social, cultural, and political struggles that the language symbolizes (Pennycook, 1994b). Thus, the aim of their research on language policy is to discover and understand how the socio-cultural and political context that the language produces interacts with every facet of language policy and its implementation (Freeman, 1996).

Critical theory has been a dominant theory in explaining the implications of the current spread of English as an international language (Pennycook, 1990; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Influenced by theories of relationships between language, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 1985; Kress, 1990; Hodge & Kress, 1996), critical linguists are concerned with the way a language is implicated in the reproduction of, and resistance to, inequitable power relationships or structures in educational settings. Based on this point of view, critical linguists have argued that the current spread of English is neither natural nor neutral, since they believe that it has been deliberately promoted by English speaking countries as a universal “second language” in order to protect and promote “capitalist interests” (Pennycook, 1995). In addition, they do not believe that the spread of the language is always beneficial. They agree that learning English runs along with the spread of the culture and values of English-speaking societies and so constantly threatens the function of local languages and local cultures while English becomes potent weapon for cultural and economic domination by English-speaking countries (e.g., Ndebele, 1987; Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1988; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996; Tollefson, 1991, 1995). From this perspective, critical linguists have attempted to uncover what underlying social, cultural, and political factors cause the spread of English and how these factors affect a nation’s language policy and a learner’s language acquisition.

Considering that the elementary English program in Korea emerged in response to social, cultural, and political forces surrounding English as a dominant international language, I found that the critical theory approach is the

most appropriate approach in my research on language policy for the elementary English program in Korea.

2. Issues of Previous Language Policy Research in Non-native English Speaking Countries

Language policy research involving non-English-speaking countries has been relatively rare compared to that on English-dominant (e.g. Ricento, 1996; Ruiz, 1994) and post-colonial countries (Christ, 1997; Emenyonu, 1989). Most of non-English-speaking countries tend to be monolingual and are located in the Middle East, Far East Asia, and Europe. They normally have no colonial past associated with English-speaking countries and most have taught English as a foreign language at schools, but English has rarely been used in the daily lives of the people. Recently, however, due to the high demand for English bilingual workers, the governments of these countries have vigorously promoted English education from an early age in the interests of their nations' economic advancement and internationalization.

Since non-English-speaking countries tend to be monolingual, studies on language policy of these countries have mostly focused on learners' attitudes towards the dominance of English and the implications of the spread of English in their societies. Research has shown that learners generally have two conflicting attitudes toward the dominance of English in these countries. On the one hand, people in these countries are less sensitive to English dominance, since they see English more as a symbol of modernity and social advancement with a non-national, non-regional, and non-ethical nature (Cheshire & Moser, 1994). For example, Al-Abed (1996) shows that Saudi Arabian undergraduates do not think English education "Westernizes" people or weakens national identity in Saudi Arabia. Berns (1992) also insists that, in European society, English belongs to those who use it, and it therefore has the potential to serve as a means of expression of European identity, rather than rigidly and exclusively identifying English with British or with American culture. Huang and Chang (1994) also argue that most Taiwanese students clearly believe that English is an international language, and thus they do not have a negative attitude toward the introduction of English at the elementary level. Kubota

(1998) also comments that argument about the inequalities caused by the spread of English may not apply to affluent non-English speaking countries such as Japan, Germany, and France.

On the other hand, other researchers have revealed that people in these countries have negative or ambivalent attitudes toward the dominance of English and are struggling with the conflict between the desire for high English proficiency and the fear of losing their unique cultural identities. For example, Dogancay-Aktuna (1998) describes the conflict between the Turkish people's desire to acquire English proficiency and their simultaneous desire to preserve the purity of the Turkish language and retain their unique cultural identity by raising objections to English-medium schooling. The research also illustrates how Turkish people of lower socio-economic status are denied English education which is recognized as a gateway to better jobs and higher income in Turkish society. Droughan and Freeman (1998) also discuss the arrogance and complacency that exists among native-English-speakers with their now-global language, and the resulting sense of grievance and inferiority that has arisen in other language groups.

To sum up, research on language policy in non-English-speaking countries has shown that the phenomenon of the spread of English as a dominant language has been deeply entangled in the formulation and implementation of the educational policy for English education. Although people's attitudes to and perceptions of the role of English are varied according to each country's social and cultural atmosphere in relation to English language, in many non-English-speaking countries the conflict between the desire to achieve high English proficiency on one hand, and the fear of English dominance of the local culture, on the other, has been a recurring issue in language policy research regarding English education.

In spite of these research results, few studies have conducted empirical research on how people's different perceptions of the spread of English and the dominance of English have affected the actual implementation of language policy regarding English education in these countries. In order to bridge these research gap, by employing the critical linguists' view of language learning and language policy the researcher investigated the formulation and implementation of Korea's new elementary English program at three levels: government, schools, and

teachers.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

1. Qualitative Case Study

Research on the implementation of language policy is a complex process because there are complicated variables affecting each level of the implementation. In order to identify variables and to describe the complexity of implementation process, I chose a qualitative case study method as the method of inquiry of the school implementation of the elementary English program. Case study research has been recognized as the most effective approach for improving the understanding of the dynamics of certain aspects of practice (Merriam, 1998). Particularly, multiple case studies is a common strategy to enhance the external validity or to generalize the finding, since the more cases are included in a study, the greater the variations across cases and the more compelling the interpretation becomes (Merriam, 1998). Based on this literature on case study, I selected three different elementary schools from different locations as case sites for the research and used a variety of data collection procedures in the research process, including:

- 1) Interviews with policy makers, school principals, elementary teachers, and staff in local school boards.
- 2) Questionnaires involving English teachers, parents, and students
- 3) Classroom observation with video and audio-taping, plus field notes
- 4) Documentation related to the educational policy for the elementary English program.

By adopting triangulated research methods through questionnaires, interviews, observation, and documentation, I attempted to reduce researcher bias and enhance the validity and credibility of my research findings.

2. General Research Process

The research conducted for six months from Sept. 1998 to Feb. 1999. Before starting the research in the schools, I first conducted an interview with five policy makers in the Ministry of Education and three university professors who played significant roles in the planning and implementation of educational policy, teacher training, and curriculum development of the elementary English program. During this time, I also documented important government handouts, statements, and booklets related to the elementary English program.

After obtaining information on issues at the government level, I selected three elementary schools located in Seoul, Inchon, and Goyang city respectively and interviewed the principals and teachers. Since my goal was to find out the general pattern of the implementation process of the elementary program, I tried, if possible, to select the schools from different locations. Table 1 shows the total number of interviewees who participated in the whole study.

TABLE 1
Total number of Interviewees in the study

Position	Total
Policy Makers	5
Professors	3
Principals	3
Staff in three local school boards	3
Teachers	
School A	4
School B	6
School C	7
Grand Total	31

3. Information on Three Schools

1) School A

School A was a relatively new school which was opened in 1992 when several new residential areas merged to form a new city. It is located in Inchon

city near Seoul with approximately 1800 students. The staff complement totaled 52 teachers (20 male and 32 female) and average age of teachers was 43 years. School A provided English class by two special English teachers, who only teach English subject to students. Thus two special English teachers teaching grade 3 and 4 participated in my research. Due to the influx of high-income families from Seoul, the socio-economic status of parents was relatively high, and thus parents generally displayed great interest in their children's education, particularly in their English education. Besides having regular English classes at school, according to student survey, about 66% (n=52 in 79) of the students were identified as receiving various forms of private English education outside the school (e.g., weekly English workbooks, English tutors).

2) School B

School B is smaller (1027 students) than School A (1850 students) and is located in an apartment complex in Goyang city about 40 minutes away from Seoul. The number of teachers totaled 34 (21 female, 13 male), and teachers' average age was 35 years, younger than that of teachers in School A. School B provided English classes by the regular classroom teachers who teach English to their homeroom students. Thus, 7 classroom teachers in grade 3 and 4 participated in my research. The socio-economic status of the parents was relatively high and most parents had college education backgrounds according to teachers' comments. During the research period, about 71% (n=96 in 135) of the students responded that they were also receiving private English lessons from a variety of sources.

3) School C

School C is a large, old inner city school which opened its doors in 1937 in the northern downtown area of Seoul. At the time of my research, 2,335 students were enrolled in 60 classes in the school. There were 72 teachers on staff at the school with an average teacher age of 39 years. Unlike School B which consisted of mostly young teachers, 80% of the teachers in School C had more than 10 years' teaching experience. School C offered English class taught

by classroom teachers; thus in my research, 7 teachers in grades 3 and 4 participated in my interview, while 20 teachers participated in teacher questionnaires. Because of its location, the socio-economic status of most families was generally low and therefore, parents heavily depended on the school for their children's education. Many students in this school attended the "after-school English program" administered by the school rather than receiving private English education outside the school. According to student survey, while 60% (n=64 in 106) of the students responded that they received private English education, 40% (n=26 in 64) of those students were registered for the after-school English program at school.

4. School Research Procedure

The first teacher questionnaire¹⁾ was conducted at the beginning of the research as a preliminary research to gain background knowledge of the teachers' perception of the program and to use in subsequent interviews. After identifying the general issues regarding teacher implementation, I conducted teacher interview to probe more deeply teachers' perceptions of the government and school policies concerning the English program. All interviews were conducted in Korean and were audio-taped.

After interviewing each teacher at three different schools, I began classroom observations at each school. The observation hours were different in each school ranging from one to four hours per one teacher depending on each teacher's willingness to accommodate me in the classroom. When permitted, the session was audio- or videotaped. After the class observation, I conducted the second teacher interview with the teachers whose classes I had observed. The purpose of this interview was to discuss my interpretation of the class and their perspectives on English teaching.

During this time, I also conducted parent and student surveys in each school to find out their opinions about the elementary program. I also traveled to the offices of three school boards in charge of my research site schools to verify

1) Due to the restriction to the length of the article, the questionnaires used in the study are not included in the article. The reader interested in the questionnaires may request a copy from the author.

their policies regarding the elementary English program. Table 2 presents detailed numbers regarding the number of the questionnaires and classroom observation hours collected in each school.

TABLE 2
Number of the questionnaires and classroom observation hours collected in each school

	School A	School B	School C	Totals
Class Observation Hours	8	4	8	20
Teacher Questionnaires	2	7	20	29
Parent Questionnaires	50	96	70	216
Student Questionnaires	79	135	106	320

III. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Conflicting View on the Status of English in Korea: English as a Foreign Language vs. English as an International Language

One of the issues related to English education as an international language is people's complex views regarding the status of English and the dominance of English in their societies. (e.g., Master, 1998; Peirce, 1989; Pennycook, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Phillipson, 1992; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996). In the context of globalization, the status of English has been diversified as its role has been changed. English has been EIL (English as an International Language) or EGL (English as a global language) besides its conventional status as EFL (English as a foreign language) or ESL (English as a second language) while it becomes the major medium of international communication. As with its changing role, people's views of status of English in their societies are complicated and are not unified even within one society. While some people consider English more a symbol or a means to modernization and social advance and see its identity as a non-national and non-regional international

language (e.g., Cheshire & Moser, 1994), other people view English as a language of a certain nation or culture, and thus they present negative or ambivalent attitudes towards the spread of English as a dominant language, vacillating between the desire for high English proficiency and the fear of English dominance (e.g., Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998). Consequently, the conflicts caused by differing views about the status of English and the dominance of English have constantly affected the formulation and implementation of language policy for English teaching in an international context (Olshtain, 1989).

From my research, I found that teachers' views were greatly different from those of the government and parents, and their different views constantly affected their attitudes toward the implementation of the elementary English program. From the government's point of view, the elementary English program was the clear outcome of its changed view of the status of English from "the major foreign language" to "an international language." The elementary English program was created as a result of the Korean government's perception that "English should be promoted as an international language in the global age" (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997a) to support its globalization policy.

Parents also shared the same view as the government. Across three schools, 79% (n=171 in 216) of parents agreed with the statement that English should be emphasized in elementary schools as an international language. These results indicate that the majority of parents who took part in the study viewed English as an international language and acknowledged English proficiency to be a fundamental skill that their children had to acquire in order to survive in the global community.

The teachers in my study, however, held different points of view from both the government and the parents. Unlike the government and the parents, only 38% (n=11 in 29) of the teachers recognized English as an international language and agreed that English should be emphasized as a major subject in elementary schools. On the contrary, 62% (n=18 in 29) of the teachers still viewed English as a foreign language and held the view that English should not be unduly emphasized.

During my research, I noticed that, unlike other subjects such as math, science, and social studies, many teachers openly considered English not as their "own" subject to teach, but as "other" subjects. It seemed that English would

not belong to their world as long as it has foreign identity. Thus, teachers felt uncomfortable and deprived when they perceived that English was being unduly emphasized, as the example of excerpt indicates:

“There are some teachers who have an ambiguous hostility toward English as a subject. Their point is, why people only emphasize English, and are not concerned about other subjects?” (Grade 3 teacher, School B)

On the other hand, teachers who openly considered English an international language were willing to accommodate English as their “own” subject in which they had to invest their time and effort as stated below:

“I often use simple English expressions like ‘It’s time for lunch’ or ‘Let’s start the class’ during lunch hour or recess time to remind the students what they learned in English class. I wish we have had English class more often, so that students would not forget their previous lesson.” (Grade 3 teacher, School C)

The teacher survey results also showed that teachers’ differing views of the status of English also affected their implementation effort of the program. For example, teachers in School C, which has most active principal in English education and strong English teacher group, showed higher percentage in viewing English as an international language than counterparts in School B, who showed more negative attitudes towards English teaching. While 48% of the teachers in School C viewed English as an international language, only 16% of the teachers in School B shared the same view. Most of the special English teachers in School A or head English teachers in School B and C stated that they view English as an international language and actively promoted English teaching in their schools.

Teachers’ perceptions of English and their attitudes towards teaching English seemed to be related to the identity of English. To those who viewed English as an international language, the identity of English is trans-national and thus English becomes a “neutral” skill to acquire as a world citizen. Therefore, teachers who held this view could justify their emphasis of English because

they believed that English proficiency was an important skill that their students had to acquire. On the other hand, the majority of elementary teachers who viewed English as a foreign language still viewed English as a language of a specific nation and thus, for them, emphasis on English represented an emphasis on a certain culture and certain languages over Korean language and culture. Thus they felt reluctance or indifference towards the concept of emphasizing English because they could not find sufficient personal grounds for motivating themselves to do so.

2. The Impact of Issues of English Dominance on the Elementary English Program

My second research question was to determine how the Korean people's perceptions of the dominance of English affected the implementation of the program. The public's concern about English dominance was the great issue from the beginning of the planning of the elementary English program. In a situation where English had already become a central subject in secondary schools in Korea, the introduction of the elementary English program raised a great concern among people in that first, it might foster the dominance of English in the Korean educational system more, and this in turn would increase the incidence of private English education as parents sought to bolster their children's performance at school (Shin, 1995), which outcome would nullify the government's intention to discourage private English education by means of creating the new elementary English program. Second, people were also concerned that it might give negative impact on the development of elementary students' Korean literacy and identity, since elementary schooling is regarded as the most important period for establishing students' cultural identity and Korean language proficiency (Lee, 1992).

During the research process, I found that the conflict between the desire for English proficiency on the one hand, and the fear of English dominance among the stakeholders on the other hand constantly affected the implementation of the elementary program in Korea at different levels. First, at the government level, the fear of English dominance caused the aims of the elementary program to be lowered, and this consequently affected the quality of the program. When the

government first conceived the elementary English program, its aims were to develop students' communicative ability while motivating students' interest in learning English (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997b). However, as a result of the public concern that the introduction of the program may accelerate the dominance of English in the Korean educational system by emphasizing English from the elementary level, the goal has been changed to "teaching very easy and simple English" as one policy maker stated:

"The first principle of creating the curriculum for the elementary English program is "elementary English should not be difficult." We really worked hard to make the content easy for students and to promote the concept that "English is easy and fun." In the review process of the first draft of the curriculum, we got rid of most of the difficult words and expressions."
(Chung, Policy maker)

The pressure to teach "very easy and simple English" resulted in severe restrictions being placed on the amount of vocabulary, sentence length, and communicative lengths for each grade. For example, for grade 3, 13 communication functions, 32 example sentences, and 100 words are suggested. The sentence length is restricted to seven words per sentence (Korean Ministry of Education, 1997b).

Due to the change of goals of the program, I found that teachers showed a wide range of perceptions regarding the aims of the program. Although most elementary teachers seemed to be well aware of the goals of the elementary English program, a predominant number of teachers (64%) stated that "promoting students' interest in English" was the goal of the program. Only 28% offered "promoting communicative ability" as the goal of the program, although it was clearly stated in the national curriculum as a goal of elementary English program (Ministry of Education, 1997a). The teachers who viewed the goal of English teaching as "promoting students' interest" tended to de-emphasize English to the students because promoting proficiency was not perceived to be the goal of their classes. As one teacher stated:

"I don't want to emphasize English in the students' daily life. The purpose

of English class in elementary school is not to promote fluency, but to make students' interested in learning English. If my class meets this goal, I think that's enough." (Classroom teacher, School B)

Given this situation, the question remains as to whether the Korean government's vision of an elementary English program that provides Korean citizens with English proficiency, is being realized. As the principal of School C stated:

"The current elementary English program pursues the lowest goal, "to make students interested in English," but I think this program should at least promote an ability for students to express themselves in English. Then it could serve the purpose of this program." (Principal of School C)

Furthermore, it is questionable whether or not the program satisfies parental expectations of an intensive English program. Unlike the government's and teachers' perceptions of the goals of the program, most parents had high expectations of the elementary English program. According to the results of the parent questionnaire (n= 216) across schools, 70% of the parents wanted the elementary English program to improve their children's speaking skills, and 66% of the parents wanted English teaching hours to be increased to more than once or twice a week. 84% of parents also thought English is the essential skill for their children's success.

Not only did the fear of English dominance cause the aims of the elementary program to be lowered and affect the quality of the program, I noticed that but also it affected the content of the English program. During the research period, a number of teachers commented on the unbalanced content of English textbooks which generally ignored references to English-language culture. Teachers stated that the situations in the English textbooks were primarily based on Korean contexts focusing on expressing Korean student's life and experience in English rather than introducing a foreign culture. As two teachers commented:

"In teaching English, students are very interested in knowing differences

between English culture and Korean culture, but there is not much mention about cultural differences in the textbook.” (Min Sook, School B)

“Rather than showing the difference between the two cultures, the textbook promotes only Korean culture. I guess it would be much better to promote a mutual understanding of both the cultures to students.” (Hwa Sun, School B)

In fact, in the first teacher questionnaire, 80% of the teachers pointed to the lack of foreign culture as a major shortcoming of their textbooks because most students are keenly interested in learning about English culture while learning English.

The lack of foreign culture in English textbooks was partly attributed to the government’s defensive response to criticism of the program’s possible cultural impact on Korean children. When the textbook was undergoing development, it was mentioned that the government strongly defended the position that the English textbook must reflect EFL situations where people use English in their local contexts rather than in the context of an English-speaking country. For example, scenarios in the textbook focus more on introducing Korean culture to foreigners rather than on introducing foreign culture to students. As one professor who was involved in developing the textbook commented:

“The purpose of learning English in elementary school is not to have our students prepare for living in a foreign country. Its purpose is to have them prepare for dealing with foreigners who visit Korea. Thus the situations in the English textbook should be based on Korean situations, not the foreign situation.” (Kim, Professor)

In contrast to the government’s intention, however, the results of the student questionnaire across the schools showed that over the half of the students (56%) chose “to use English abroad” as their goal for learning English. The lowest percentage of students (five percent) agreed with the government’s intention “to deal with the foreigners who come to Korea” as their reason for learning English. These results indicate that students firmly believed that the

purpose of their learning English was to deal with foreigners when doing business, studying, or living abroad, rather than dealing with foreigners in a Korean context.

Second, at the teacher level, I noticed that teachers' concern about the dominance of English in elementary school and students' lives also constrained significantly their implementation effort of the program. Across three schools, I noticed that most of teachers, even active English teachers often stressed the point that they did not emphasize English to students. The teachers frequently made comments like "I don't emphasize English to students" or "I deal with English as I do with other subjects." Consequently, contrary to the government's expectations that classroom English teachers who teach English to their homeroom students would provide sustained English input during the school day, only 33% of the classroom English teachers responded that they sometimes used English with the students outside the English class. The rest of the teachers responded that they did not use English at all because they did not want to emphasize. Even active classroom English teachers gave similar responses, as follows:

"The purpose of the English program is to provide a chance for students to be exposed to foreign language and foreign culture, so that students come to accept cultural differences and language differences through foreign language education. I try to do my best in English class to achieve this goal, but I don't want to emphasize English outside the English class."
(Jin Ah, School B)

Most teachers I interviewed constantly displayed strong reservations in emphasizing English as noted below:

"I rarely use English in other classes. I don't think I have to use English all the time just because I am teaching English." (Grade 4 teacher, School C)

"I tried to use English in other classes in the beginning of the program, but I became worried about whether I emphasized English too much to the

students and became concerned about how I looked to other teachers.”
(Grade 3 teacher, School C)

Teachers’ hesitation to emphasize English to students was also partially attributed to their concern about the possible impact on students’ acquisition of Korean language. In elementary schools, the acquisition of Korean proficiency is regarded as the most important objective in elementary education. In particular, great emphasis has been placed on teaching students the correct use of Korean, for example, by instructing them not to mix foreign words in with their Korean conversation to keep the purity of the Korean language. In this situation, I found that the elementary teacher’s status as a strong advocate of correct Korean usage, while simultaneously having to teach English, often led to confusion in their English teaching and de-emphasis of learning English to their students. As two teachers said commented:

“For example, after English class, in Korean class I have to emphasize the correct use of Korean and not to overuse foreign language in speaking. Then I was sometimes confused about how I could make a balance between promoting English usage and banning the use of foreign words in Korean speech.” (Grade 4 teacher, School B)

“In Korean language class, I teach the students not to mix in foreign words in order to keep the purity of the Korean language. For example, ‘TV’ or ‘Bus’ can be used because these are borrowed words. But ‘Color’ should not be used because Korean has a word to correspond to the same meaning. I frequently felt this dilemma whenever I teach both English and Korean language classes.” (Grade 3 teacher, School C)

3. The Impact of English Program on the Elementary Schools: English, Power, and Elementary Education

Critical linguists view the spread of English as not always beneficial since it often runs parallel with the spread of the culture and values of English society and constantly threatens the function of local languages and local culture (e.g.

Ndebele, 1987; Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1988; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996). Many critical linguistic studies have also shown how English becomes a product of global inequalities by means of its power, functioning as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society (Cooke, 1988; Judd, 1989; Peirce, 1989; Pennycook, 1995; Phillipson, 1992). In many non-English speaking countries, English creates social, political, and economic inequalities between the people who possess English skills and those who do not, and maintains unequal power structures as a language of high status (e.g., Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998; Pakir, 1993; Tickoo, 1996).

With reference to this issue, my third research question was to find out what impact the introduction of English program brings on elementary schools. In my study of the implementation of the elementary English program, I was able to observe how the introduction of the English program increased English dominance in students' lives and elementary school cultures and created a new power structure among the elementary teachers. Although the elementary English program has been successful in establishing speaking-focused English class in Korean schools and in bringing about educational change in English education in terms of teaching materials and teaching method, the social and cultural impact of the program on the students' lives and on the elementary school system has been equally significant.

First, despite the government's efforts by means of the careful design of the curriculum and textbook to prevent the possible cultural influence of English, the research findings showed that students' preference for the English language over Korean was very obvious. The results of the student questionnaire across three schools showed that while only 10% of the students chose Korean as their favorite subject, 55% of the students selected English as their favorite subject in school. Across the schools, 87% of students wanted to learn more English, but only six percent responded that they did not wish to do so. Teachers attributed the students' extreme preference for English to its appealing teaching methods. As one teacher commented:

“Students like English class more than Korean class because of the different teaching methods. While the Korean class requires lots of thinking and practice, English is more fun and provides lots of interesting

activities, and students seem to enjoy them so much.” (Grade 4 teacher, School B)

Parental emphasis on English and the high status of English in Korean society also accelerated students’ preference for English. As two teachers commented:

“Nobody appreciates a student’s good skill in Korean, but if they are good at English, everyone appreciates that. This situation motivates students more to learn English.” (Grade 3 teacher, School C)

“For example, if we hold a Korean speech contest, parents rarely participate in the event. But in the case of an English speech contest, the parents’ enthusiasm is amazing. They bring the movie camera from the third round to film their children. The parents’ enthusiasm for English is really strong. Consequently, students think English is the most important subject.” (Grade 3 teacher, School B)

Faced with this reaction, some teachers were concerned that the students’ strong preference for English might undermine their commitment to the Korean language and cultural practices. As one teacher commented:

“There are many more students who are interested in English than in Korean. I think it is natural for the students to be interested in other cultures and languages, but I am sometimes concerned that students might ignore and disrespect our culture and our language.” (Grade 4 teacher, School B)

English dominance in the elementary school system was also noticeable. Several teachers expressed the concern that the elementary English program promoted the dominance of English in the elementary school culture because of the government’s emphasis on English. As one teacher stated:

“Many teachers question why so much money should be invested in

English while ignoring other subjects.” (Grade 4 teacher, School A)

English dominance in the elementary school system has also created a new power structure among the teachers. In Korea, as in other developing countries, English proficiency has already become a critical factor ensuring higher income and social promotion in every walk of life. After the introduction of free trade and the opening of local markets to foreign countries, the role of English in Korean society has become increasingly significant. I found that the introduction of the elementary program has reinforced the significant role of English in elementary schools where English skills have not normally played a role in securing teaching positions. Across all the case studies, teachers agreed that, since the implementation of the program, high English proficiency had become a significant factor in the hiring and promotion process in elementary schools. The government has increased English classes in the curricula of nine elementary teacher-training universities and included an oral English test in the national teachers' examination. In addition to the hiring process, a number of teachers reported that English proficiency had become a critical factor in obtaining promotion in the elementary schools. Apparently, a teacher's survival and progress in the elementary school system has become dependent on English proficiency. As two teachers commented:

“In the current situation, teachers feel that they should invest their time in learning English and computer skills because without knowledge of English and the computer, it is hard to survive in elementary schools” (The principal of School A).

“If you look at the current educational situation, it seems like computer skills and English ability are the most important qualifications in judging competent teachers. There are a lot more important qualifications to be considered for qualified elementary teachers” (Grade 3 teacher, School C).

Consequently, teachers who either already possessed English skills or an English teaching background actively accommodated and supported the introduction of the program and used this as a springboard for their career

development. Other teachers who did not have the same skills or experience regarded the elementary English program as too sudden a change and constantly complained about the harsh reality that English skills had become an important qualification for assessing the competency of elementary teachers.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the study of Korean elementary teachers' implementing process of the elementary English program, I found that English teaching practice in the context of the spread of English as a dominant language is not neutral: Rather, it is constantly affected by the social, cultural, and political struggles that the English language symbolizes to Korean society and it plays a powerful role in the construction of roles, relations, and identities among teachers in Korean elementary schools.

The elementary English program in Korea is a product of the Korean government's perception of English as an international language, a vehicle to achieve the globalization of Korea. It is a symbol of Korean government's unprecedented commitment to implementing the spoken English program at the elementary school level. In spite of Korean government's committed huge support, I found that, on a broader level, the implications of what English represents as a dominant international language affected the overall implementation process of the program.

First, the changing status of English in Korea from that of major foreign language to an international language caused a discrepancy in the stakeholders' views of the status of English in Korea. While the government and most of the parents (79%) viewed English as an international language and English proficiency as a fundamental skill that elementary students would have to acquire, the majority of the elementary teachers (62%) still viewed English as a foreign language, and thus they did not think English should be emphasized in the elementary school curriculum. The more teachers viewed English as an international language, the more active they were in the implementation because they strongly believed that high English proficiency was an absolutely crucial skill for the students to acquire.

Second, I also found that public's concern of English dominance in the elementary education system and in the lives of students resulted in the government's "compromise curriculum" by lowering the learning goals of the elementary English program and by restricting the number of words and the number of communicative functions students can learn. This curriculum leaves a question about whether this program could in fact serve the purposes of the government to promote oral English proficiency, and satisfy parents' expectations about English education. Concerns about the students' possible assimilation into English culture through early English education also resulted in the production of local context-dominated English textbooks. This contrasted with the desire of students to learn foreign culture and cultural differences through English education. Elementary teachers' concern about the possible dominance of English in elementary education also constrained subconsciously their implementation effort of the program by deliberately not emphasizing English to students.

In spite of the government's best efforts at ensuring against the possible negative impact of early English education, however, the introduction of the elementary English program accelerated English dominance in both teacher and student culture. As for the students, concerns were raised about the fact that students much preferred English to other subjects due to its appealing teaching methods and parental emphasis on English. With regards to teachers, the emphasis on English in elementary schools resulted in an increasing role of English proficiency in the hiring and promotion of elementary teachers. Consequently, it created an unequal power structure between the teachers who possessed English skills and those who did not.

The elementary English program in Korea has had a powerful impact on the English education in Korea by bringing about profound change in teaching methods and curriculum. However, I found that the implementation of language policy for the elementary English program in Korea constantly involves the conflicts between the desire for English proficiency and the fear of English dominance on local cultures and local identities. In this context, whether English can become an additional language, which co-exists in harmony with the local culture and language, is likely to be an on-going issue in planning language policy for English education in Korea.

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예시 언어(Examples in): English
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적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): College

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