

Two-Tiered English Education in Jeju

Mi-Sun Kim

Korea University, Korea
Halla University, Korea

Jeju is expected to be transformed into an international city where English is commonly used since the implementation of the special law for making Jeju a free international city in 2001. Jeju special self-governing province has successfully established globally renowned international private schools with strong competitiveness and high academic achievement to enhance competitiveness of English education through the Jeju global education city project.

The international schools in Jeju have been providing students with competitive English education. For example, they have realized the limitations of the current English education in Korea and introduced English immersion education based on the successful examples of foreign nations that have practiced the immersion education for a long time. They have overcome the markedly low ability of speaking and writing by adopting the English immersion education through Jeju global education city project. Furthermore, Jeju global education city has been facilitating the development of Jeju free international city by establishing a community where people are strongly encouraged to speak in English.

However, the efficiency of English education systems in Korea including Jeju is very poor. There have been a lot of researches regarding problems of English education systems in public schools in Korea compared with the amount of time and money invested into it.

To solve the problems found in English education in Korea, reading and grammar-oriented teaching methods must be changed to speaking-oriented methods to enhance competitiveness of English education in Korea. Furthermore, it is better for Korean companies not to require all the applicants to submit their formal English proficiency test scores. Instead, they can ask applicants who need to use English in their positions to submit their English scores in order to reduce English frenzy in Korea.

Key words :

Jeju global education city project, Jeju free international city, private English education, studying abroad, English sentence translation and grammar, English-medium courses, English immersion education

Author:

Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism English, Cheju Halla University, Jeju, 63092, Republic of Korea (tesol@chu.ac.kr) and Department of English Education, Korea University, Seoul, 02841, Korea

Introduction

Jeju has become a major hub for international tourism in the northeast Asia as well as in Korea and there has been sharp tourism expansion because of increased international awareness of Jeju since the implementation of the special law for making Jeju a free international city in 2001. For example, Jeju was chosen as a “biosphere reserve” in 2002 and added it to the list of world natural heritage sites in 2007. The Jeju development institute (2011) reported that 777,000 foreign tourists or 10.3% of the total number of tourists visited Jeju in 2010 and there has been a sharp increase in the number of foreign tourists after the nomination of Jeju as one of the new seven wonders of the natural world in 2011.

Therefore, it is expected that Jeju will be transformed into an international city attracting a lot of foreign tourists and international conferences. That means that English will be an important communication tool in Jeju. Jeju special self-governing province has successfully established prestigious international private schools including the U.K.’s North London Collegiate School (NLCS) Jeju and Canada’s Branksome Hall Asia. They are all top-class and globally well-known international private schools with strong competitiveness and high academic achievement. These schools have been enhancing competitiveness of English education through Jeju global education city project.

Jeju global education city can now offer international education to global multinational student population not only from South Korea but also from other Asian countries, and eventually from the West. It is anticipated that Jeju will be an English education hub in Korea as well as in northeast Asia. Furthermore, it is expected that the use of English will attract more foreign visitors and this will activate the economy of Jeju by increasing the inflow of foreign capital in the fields of education and tourism.

With the enactment of Jeju global education city project, English education has drawn considerable attention for stimulating an English friendly environment to change Jeju into a successful free international city like Hong Kong and Singapore. Furthermore, the implementation of Jeju global education project will help to make Jeju successful to the globalization of people by understanding foreign languages and cultures.

However, the efficiency of English education systems in Korea including Jeju is very poor. In other words, English education in Jeju could be a serious problem. South Korean students spend most of their time and money for their English education in the world, but their English proficiency is still lacking (Jin, 2006).

This paper compares English education systems between private international schools, such as the U.K.’s North London Collegiate School (NLCS) Jeju and Canada’s Branksome Hall Asia established through Jeju global education city project in Jeju, and Korean public schools and discusses the problems found in English education systems in Korea including Jeju and the ways to reform the inefficient English education systems in Korea.

The Jeju global education city project

Jeju has become a major hub for English education after the implementation of Jeju global education city project. Jeju global education city project, a major project of the Jeju free international city development center (JDC), is a national project of the Korean government to enhance Korea’s competitiveness by providing Korean and foreign students with competitive English education in Korea.

The presidential transition committee proposed international high schools in Jeju in 2008 and they have adopted English immersion curriculum to reconcile Korean English education problems, such as the private education expenses and the low efficiency of English education in public schools. For example, Korean students’ English speaking ability occupies one of the lowest positions in the world despite huge amount of money invested into the English education. Considering the fact that the Korean government has aimed the communicative method as the national object of English education since the 6th curriculum, the results reveal that there still have been systematic problems in the English education methodology in public schools.

Therefore, the English immersion education through Jeju global education city project was first introduced to enhance English competence and cut down private lessons for English. The project of Jeju global education city has opened three schools for domestic and international students since 2009. They are North London Collegiate School (NLCS), a prestigious school of the United Kingdom, Branksome Hall Asia, a prominent girls’ school in Canada, and Korea International School (KIS), the first public international school in Korea. In addition, St. Johnsbury Academy (SJA) in the United States is expected to establish its branch school here in 2017.

Jeju has revitalized the nation’s international education for domestic and international students so far. All the lectures in these international schools are provided in English except Korean language and its history and the students are required to use English in and out of school. Moreover, the curriculum is identical to that being taught at the

institute's headquarters. In other words, they award a diploma that can be recognized at their home countries and a local (Korean) diploma so that their graduates can apply for schools abroad as well as in Korea. Consequently, many graduates from these international schools in Jeju have been admitted by world's top universities, such as Cambridge, Oxford, Yale and Stanford. Furthermore, these international schools incorporate the International Baccalaureate (IB) program which is widely used in admission evaluations by universities worldwide. Many renowned universities in the world select their students based on an IB education. Students are offered various admission benefits such as scholarships and priority admission when they enroll in universities in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada if they take the IB program. Moreover, these international schools promise to offer many extra-curricular activities that take advantage of the island's natural resources such as horse riding, hiking, golf, sea kayaking and scuba diving.

The project of Jeju global education city has also provided continuing education programs in English, an English education center for English teachers, and art and cultural complex. The city's education, culture and art centers offer over 2,000 programs throughout the year. For example, they provide not only seminars, workshops and exhibitions of various themes such as art, science, religion, sports but also operas, musical performances and theaters. The centers provide cultural and fitness facilities as well as various welfare services in one place.

They also have other related education institutions as well as residential and commercial facilities in an English-speaking environment with the infrastructure such as sign boards and names of streets and places written in English. More importantly, all the commercial and residential facilities in Jeju global education city have been established in an environment where English is the first language used as a communication tool. Therefore, it helps residents in Jeju global education city enjoy comfort and convenience in daily life as well as educational benefits.

However, Korea has still been struggling to improve English proficiency of the whole country even though the South Korean government has tried to reform the English education systems and policies in public schools several times. The dissatisfaction of English education reformation in Korea, combined with the importance of English education, makes South Korean students go abroad to English-speaking countries such as America, the United Kingdoms, Australia, and New Zealand. Many parents believe that their efforts and sacrifices for their children will help their children improve their futures and change their socioeconomic statuses if they have exceptional English competence.

In fact, English proficiency and a diploma from a well known university abroad are very significant factors to be recognized in Korean society, so a number of young Korean students go abroad to study. Some parents even send their children who are one-year-old or above to English-speaking countries. Korea saw a boom in sending young children abroad for studying from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s. If a family decides to educate their children in English speaking countries, the mother usually goes with her children without the father. Home-alone fathers called 'wild goose fathers' in Korean work to support their children and wives living in foreign countries for their children's education.

However, there have been a lot of reports on the adverse effects of studying abroad because of family separations, failure to adjust to foreign education and culture, a brain drain from a country, and economic slowdowns. For instance, Yin et al. (2010) noticed that Korean students had English language barriers, cultural difficulties such as adjusting to a new environment and system, and so on. However, half of the surveyed Korean students wanted to pursue their higher degrees, such as a master or doctoral level (Yin et al., 2010) despite their struggling with these kinds of hardships and frustrations. Yin et al. (2010) also found that the reason Korean students came to the United States to study is "to gain a better command of English and [American culture and] to have experiences that will allow them to obtain desirable employment later" (p. 107).

That's the main reason why the Korean government planned Jeju global education city in 2007 to reduce the number of Korean families who want to be able to keep their families together while providing their children world-class education without the need to travel abroad. International schools in Jeju provide 13-year courses from kindergarten to high school with the annual tuition somewhere between U.S. \$3,100 and U.S. \$4,700 or about half the amount South Korean parents would be paying to send their children overseas. Moreover, Jeju global education city has a plan to establish globally well-known foreign universities with high academic achievement in the future.

There are international schools in other areas in Korea, but they were originally established to educate the children of foreign employees or Korean students who studied abroad because of their parents' jobs. The applicants to those international schools must hold foreign nationalities or must prove their studying overseas at least three years. In other words, there have been restrictions for Korean students to be admitted to those schools.

Because of the restrictions of admissions to those international schools in other regions in Korea, many

parents have sent children abroad so that they can study English and avoid the crushing pressure from the Korean college entrance exam. Government data indicates that country's educational trade deficit continues to increase as more students go abroad to study and learn English. For example, the number of primary and secondary school students who study overseas doubled from 7,944 in 2001 to 16,515 in 2011. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the deficit due to English learning and studying abroad increased more than four times from \$1.06 billion to \$4.41 billion during the past decade. That means a considerable sum of money has flown out of Korea for studying abroad.

Because of the restrictions of admissions to those international schools in other regions in Korea, several hundred students were accused of entering these international schools illegally since their parents manipulated their children's nationalities. Some Korean mothers intentionally gave birth in other countries to receive foreign nationalities for their children.

However, the international schools in Jeju has helped to eradicate those admission scams because of no limitations on the admission rate or qualifications for local students to attend. The Jeju global education city project marks the first time that the international schools in Jeju will be permitted to admit 100% domestic students. International schools in other regions cannot accept more than half of Korean students, but those in Jeju are allow to fill up the entire admission quota.

As mentioned in the above, students are not required to have foreign nationalities or prove the period of attendance at school at least three years in foreign countries to be admitted by those international schools in Jeju. There is no restriction, allowing 100 percent of its enrollment to be domestic students. That does not mean that Jeju is only interested in recruiting Korean students who want to study abroad or who are not satisfied with English education in public schools in Korea. Jeju is targeting something bigger than just the Korean market. Since Jeju is situated in the center of northeast Asia, it is within a two-hour flight from 18 major cities with more than 700 million people. It aims to target the entire northeast Asian population including Chinese and Japanese since Jeju is already a popular destination for Japanese and Chinese tourists because of its tropical climate and natural beauty.

Another main reason why the Korean government planned Jeju global education city in 2007 is to reduce the English market for private education. English market for private education has been considerably increasing due to the problems of English education in public schools in Korea (Hong,

2010; Lee, 2008). Many parents think that English is more significant than Korean, Hangeul, the official South Korean language, which was created by King Sejong in 1433, because of globalization. For example, there is a mania for learning the English language in South Korea today. According to Korea Broadcasting System (2008), "Many kids begin to learn English long before they start attending elementary school. The results of a survey conducted in 2001 showed that of 1,116 private kindergartens nationwide, 64.3 percent teach infants to speak English. According to Hwang (2001), An average of 16.5% of a South Korean family's income is used to provide their middle school child with private schooling. For example, a family consisting of two parents and two children spends one-third of their total income on private costs for education. (p. 611).

Therefore, Jeju has established several world-renowned international schools in an attempt to slash the amount of money spent on private English education as well as studying abroad. For more and more parents, Jeju international schools are becoming a promising and more feasible alternative to sending their children abroad, which would be even more costly, or keeping them in Korean schools supplemented by English private academies.

The obstacles in English education in Jeju

There have been some researches reporting on problems of English education in public schools in Korea including Jeju even though considerable efforts have been made to improve competitiveness of English education. For example, in spite of Korean students' spending almost ten years studying English, starting from primary school, their listening and speaking competence is not satisfactory. Because of the instructional methodology of reading comprehension which focuses mainly on English sentence translation and grammar in English education in public schools, a lot of Korean students have lost their interests in English. The following are the short excerpts from Sunmi and Mijung (all pseudonyms)'s essays. They are the first and second-year undergraduate students in the Department of Tourism English in Jeju in 2011, and wrote about their feelings about English education system in Jeju.

I want to stress that we should be able to speak English in real life. Jeju where we are living has been fostered as a sightseeing and resort city, and was recently selected as one of new seven wonders of nature and also UNESCO cultural heritage. We know that a lot of foreigners will visit our island

and we know that we need the workforce that has a good command of foreign languages. Especially, the importance of the English speaking competence is growing bigger and bigger. However, English educational system in Jeju still focuses on grammar and reading to prepare for the national college entrance exam or TOEIC for getting jobs. Therefore, I want adults who lead Jeju to endeavor to make various programs enhancing students' speaking competence such as providing various English debate contests on issues happening all across the world. By doing this, young people in Jeju can gain competence in their speaking and also understand important issues around the world. (Mijung's essay, original in English)

I have been living in a globalized world. I came to the conclusion that English is absolutely necessary, and I've been interested in foreign cultures. I needed to study hard to get good scores and I couldn't approach the language in various ways when I was in high school. (Mijung's essay, original in English)

Many people study English for many different reasons. It seems like though most of people learn English to go to a famous university or to get a nice job that pays a lot...They are eager to study English for the scores. There are many exams to test our English such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and TEPS. People go to private English schools to get a high score for those exams. They learn skills and techniques for grammar and reading there. What about speaking? I've seen many people who have a high score are not good at speaking English especially in front of a native speaker. I think this is the problem of English education in Jeju. It should focus on giving people more chances to speak English. Also, companies in Jeju must consider not only TOEIC, TOEFL or TEPS scores but also speaking skills when they select their employees. (Sunmi's essay, original in English)

As I have a boyfriend who is a native English speaker, of course I got the benefit from him. I get more chance to speak English than other Korean people. My listening and speaking have got better. However, I don't like to tell people that I have a Canadian boyfriend. Many people think I speak English because of my boyfriend. It's not true though. I've tried hard to learn English for years even before I met him, but many people misunderstand me and don't even think of my effort for English. What I want to say about this is that having a native English speaking boyfriend is not important but having a lot of chance to actually speak English. Korean English education should focus on giving people more chances to speak English. I know it's hard having a chance to use

English in Korea but there can be alternatives like Korean broadcastings put English subtitles on all the programs so that we can get used to English by reading them all the time or Korean public schools make more free English camps so that all the students can participate in those and enjoy speaking English. (Sunmi's essay, original in English)

As you can see in the above, Sunmi and Mijung blamed inefficient English education systems in Korea, including Jeju, compared with the amount of time and money invested into it. The instructional methodology that stresses on grammar and English sentence translation has been criticized for being impractical (Kim, 2004) and mainly focusing on college entrance examination. Since the college entrance exam in Korea does not evaluate students' speaking and writing competence, many Korean high school students' speaking and writing skills among major four sections of English are low compared to students from other countries. The ranking of Korea dramatically dropped from 77th (out of 134 nations) to 111th (out of 147 nations) when the system of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was changed into the new CBT (computer-based TOEFL test). Perhaps most striking, the ranking of the speaking section was the third lowest of all countries tested (Yonhap News, 2007. 4. 18).

Considering the fact that the Korean government has made continued and considerable efforts to improve the communicative competence as the national object of English education since the 6th curriculum, the result indicates that systematic problems still exist in the educational methodology of English education. The biggest obstacle to English education has been how students are acquiring English since many English teachers from primary to secondary schools in Korea including Jeju have been blamed for their simple and routine teaching method such as rote memorizing English expressions, sentence translation, grammar, and reading comprehension. Since a number of English teachers in public schools in Korea including Jeju may focus mainly on reading and grammar due to their unfamiliarity with English listening, speaking, and writing. Nunan (2003) said, "In [Korea], informants spoke frankly of the fact that the quality of English language education in the public sector was so poor that 'no one learns English in school'" (p. 606).

Since most of class hours for English are spent on rote memorization to learn the grammar and vocabulary, this kind of Korean style of learning English has been criticized for a long time. Focusing solely on rote memorization is not an efficient way to acquire a second language. As mentioned in the above in the excerpts from the two students, Sunmi and Mijung's essays, students in Korean

public schools are learning English in order to get high test scores, so conversational skills seem to be given the lowest priority in the classroom. Korean students spend the most amounts of time and money for their English education in the world, but their English proficiency is still lacking (Jin, 2006). In addition, inhibiting creativity and solely relying on rote learning can be problematic since children are confronted with lack of critical thinking skills necessary to take part in meaningful debate.

As Sunmi and Mijung mentioned in their essays, the efficiency of learning and studying English in Jeju is very poor, and English education could be a serious problem. It's not surprising that many parents do not trust public English education in Jeju and choose to send their children to private English academies and even to study abroad programs to English-speaking countries such as America, the United Kingdoms, Australia, and New Zealand. They invest in their children's education because they want their children to have successful lives in their future. According to an article from the *Hankook Ilbo* newspaper, Koreans spend approximately 15,548 hours studying English on average from middle school to university. In addition, they spend about 20,000 hours for early and private education. According to Statistics Korea, the proportion of the students who took part in private educations reached 77.7% in 2007 and the total expenses of the private education are expected to be a surprising 20,040,000,000,000 won a year. Among these total expenses people spent the largest amount on English, ahead of mathematics. Because the above article was published in 2007, the size of the English educational market in South Korea should be much larger now.

In addition, a great deal of money has flowed out of Korea because a number of Korean students have chosen to study abroad for enhancing their English competence. According to the data released by the Ministry of Education in 2010, as of 2008, approximately 40,000 primary and secondary school students studied abroad. Korea loses the foreign currency between \$300 million and \$500 million.

As for Korean higher educational institutions, the government policy has been required to increase the English-medium courses taught by Korean professors at universities and colleges. In Byun et al.'s (2011) research study, they utilized the semi-structured interview method and conducted the in-depth case study in order to collect relevant data on English-medium courses taught by Korean professors. They chose one of the most prestigious universities in South Korea, Korea University (KU), since it has developed various English-medium courses and has required its students to register for a certain number of English-medium courses for their graduation requirement. The researchers

wanted to collect KU student opinion surveys on English-medium instruction's effectiveness through this research study (Byun et al., 2011).

They discovered from their research that a lot of Korean students needed to enhance their English competency and have considerable supports in order to understand English-medium courses even though they had studied English for more than ten years through the primary and the secondary education in Korea. Furthermore, the researchers maintained that Korean faculty members were needed to train their teaching skills for English-medium courses (Byun et al., 2011) despite the fact that many professors received their doctoral degrees from English-speaking countries. Byun et al. (2011) mentioned that some Korean faculty members in Korea University were not able to teach English-medium courses entirely in English. The following is the students' interview transcripts about their difficulties in English-medium courses:

It's impossible to hold a discussion in English. There are some students who can speak English fluently, but most are not fluent, so only the fluent students speak or no one tries to take part in the discussion. Non-native professors explained things briefly and simply. It's hard to understand them when there aren't enough explanations. When asked to clarify, they merely repeated themselves. The class does not move smoothly, and things stall from time to time. And it gets boring when there's a break in the flow. (Byun et al., 2011, pp. 440-441)

As you can see in the above, the Korean government policy to expand English-medium classes at universities has negatively influenced on Korean faculty members and Korean students due to their lack of English-medium pedagogy experiences and their low English proficiency (Byun et al., 2011).

Another reason why Korean university students spend most of their time studying English is to find good jobs after graduation. They mainly focus not on their major subjects but on English because there has been intense competition for college graduates to find good jobs in large companies such as Samsung or Hyundai because of many highly educated candidates in Korea. According to Hadid (2010), "During the late 1990s, the Korean government decided that all Koreans should get a college degree. The government reached its goal in 2000, when 89 percent of Koreans graduated from high school and attended college" (p. 1). There are many highly educated candidates in South Korea because of the government policy, so companies decided to put stricter requirements on hiring job candidates.

These large companies put strict requirements

on hiring job candidates by making them submit their English proficiency test score, such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), International English Language Test System (IELTS), TEPS (Test of English Proficiency developed by Seoul National University), or Oral Practical Interview Computer (OPIc). Job applicants have to obtain at least a score of 800 or above on the TOEIC to be qualified to apply for jobs. Some companies eliminate the majority of candidates who scored below 900 on the TOEIC during the first portion of the selection process (Educational Testing Services, 2011).

Although many companies hardly use English while they work, many South Korean companies require all candidates to submit the high scores of formal English proficiency tests. Therefore, senior college students devote themselves to acquiring high scores on those formal English proficiency tests mentioned above. They spend most of their time improving their English test scores instead of studying their major subjects. Even if they can luckily find their jobs in good companies, they must keep studying English hard to maintain the high scores of the English tests to get promotions. They cannot be promoted and sometimes quit their jobs if they cannot prove their English proficiency.

Conclusion

There is an old saying, "Send people to Seoul and horses to Jeju Island." However, because of the successful implementation of Jeju global education city project, this Korean proverb may have to be altered to "Send people as well as horses to Jeju Island."

Jeju global education city project, an initiative of South Korean government and Jeju free international city development center, has tried to get recognized as the best place for English education in Korea as well as in northeast Asia so that it can contribute to the development of a free international city where English is commonly used.

Top-notch schools from English speaking countries have been invited to participate in the project in an attempt to reduce the amount of money spent abroad and private English education in Korea. International schools such as NLCS and Branksome Hall Asia in Jeju aim to provide world-class educational services to those who are not satisfied with English education in Korea. The launching of the world-renowned, private international schools in Jeju teaching differently from traditional Korean schools has helped Jeju global education city become an alternative to studying abroad.

Those international schools in Jeju have adopted

an English immersion curriculum to develop the unbalanced English abilities due to the failure of English education in public schools in Korea including Jeju. All rote learning mainly focusing on grammar and English sentence translation for college entrance exams has been blamed for its impracticality and it has made a lot of primary and secondary school students lose their interests in studying English. For university students in Korea, they make great efforts to achieve higher scores of formal English proficiency tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, TEPS, or TOEIC in order to get recognition in Korean society. A higher English scores on those tests will guarantee job opportunities as well as their promotion in companies. Therefore, parents want their children to focus on English since childhood because it is considered as the most important subject that can lead the key to success in Korean society.

As the importance of English has been emphasized and the need for English has grown in Korean society, there have been two major obstacles reported on English education in primary and secondary schools in Korea. One is the inefficient English education in public schools, compared with the amount of the money and time invested into English education. Korean students show low proficiency of speaking and writing skills among four major factors such as reading, speaking, writing and listening compared with students from other countries because they devote all their energies to the college entrance exam, in which speaking and writing abilities are not evaluated. Also, there have been many problems reported regarding English-medium courses at universities in spite of various efforts mandated by the Korean government.

To solve these problems found in English education in Korea, including Jeju, Korean education policy must change. It can be difficult for students to enhance their English competence under the Korean English education system, so constant attention should be paid to expand English teaching method that especially emphasizes speaking and writing competence. We must change from reading and grammar-oriented teaching to listening and speaking-oriented methods. Fortunately, there have been some signs of change in government policy. Public schools have introduced TEE (Teaching English in English) certificate for English teachers.

In addition, it is better for big companies not to ask all job applicants to show their English competence by submitting scores of formal English proficiency tests. They can require those English scores only from applicants who need to use English in their particular position.

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