

The Impact of Globalization on Language Education Policies in Japan and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Globalization on English language education policies has been felt throughout East Asia. The impact effects language learning, policy decisions, curriculum development, and teaching (Nunan, 2003). The common theme from nearly all East Asian countries' educational ministries and governmental institutions is the discourse of globalization – with linguistic capital a country can be competitive in the global economy. This paper examines the discourse surrounding globalization and English language by comparing South Korea and Japan and how the impact of globalization has impacted English language policies and practices on these two countries.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has had a direct affect on shaping English language education policies throughout East Asia. Globalization impacts language learning on multiple levels including policy decisions, curriculum development, teaching and learning (Nunan, 2003). A theme that emanates from nearly all East Asian countries' educational ministries and government institutions is the discourse of globalization – the linguistic skills, specifically English, translates to linguistic capital in which a country can be competitive in the global economy (Block & Cameron, 2002; Paik 2008). Globalization levels the playing field for countries and individuals allowing for a chance at a better life, and English language is the key. As McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) contend, “the powerful narrative of English acquisition leads learners to believe that if they ‘invest’ in English learning, they will reap the benefits of social and intellectual mobility” (p, 9). With the advent of the Internet and new technology, people are no longer confined to their local communities and have the ability to communicate with one another from across the globe (Garcia, Flores & Chu, 2011). The whole notion of social space has changed. Borders once dividing countries and cultures are now porous with the ability to easily access vast amounts of information (McKay & Bohorst-Heng, 2008; Clyne & Sharifian, 2008).

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The role of English in a globalized world may be about communication and access to information, but governments shape the discourse. As a result language is not neutral, but rather there are political and cultural ideologies embedded, which in turn directly affects governmental policies related to English language. The role of government both shapes these policies in order to promote national interests as well as makes decisions related to educational issues such as entrance examination tests (Lee, 2011).

Many Asian countries including Japan and South Korea require entrance examination tests in order to move from elementary school to junior high school or to determine which university a student will be able to attend. Examination tests act as the gatekeeper to access to top schools. With such access means the opportunity of gaining better jobs and a higher social status in life. However, not everyone has the opportunity of achieving higher social status through education resulting in economic disparity. Thus the success or failure of passing entrance exams has far-reaching affects at the social level. For example, wealthier Japanese and Korean families tend to spend a significant amount of money for their children to attend after school programs called cram schools in order to prepare for and pass examinations to enter prestigious schools.

The discourse of globalization policies ensures that English remains the dominant language in order to serve the “haves” and limit the “have-nots”. Park (2011) argues that an economically motivated way of thinking has permeated language teaching by promising a good job, upward mobility and a new life. The language teaching industry has reinforced this view in order to meet the needs of their students. Furthermore, the teaching industry has expanded significantly from not only cram schools in Asian countries, but also the textbook industry. There is so much at stake, so much money to be made in the teaching of English that it is important that it remains the dominant language for study (Phillipson, 2001).

The economics of language calls into question the discourse of globalization and whether or not it is realistic to think that there is an opportunity for everyone to improve social standing by learning English. There are implications and costs of teaching in countries where English is learned as a foreign language. That learning English may help a country become more competitive is a narrative prevalent at the governmental policy-making level. By putting so much emphasis on learning English, in order to become globally competitive, this takes the focus off of other areas of education such as math and science, both areas necessary at creating an educated populace and competitive workforce. However, in many Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, learning English may be important, but only for a small percentage (Lee, 2011; Phillipson, 2001).

This paper examines the discourse surrounding globalization and English language in South Korea and Japan and how it is impacting English language policies and practices. The result has been a gap between policy decisions, implementation and the reality in the classrooms. Comparing the two countries’ educational policies will highlight the reasons why English education policy in Japan has not succeeded with improving the ability for Japanese to communicate using the English language, whereas South Korea has met with some success.

The first section will be on the discourse of globalization and how it relates to the spread of the teaching of English language. The next section will look at the historical view of English language development in South Korea and Japan and compare two programs, South Korea’s EPIK (English Programme in Korea) and Japan’s JET (Japanese Exchange and Teaching) programme. Then the discussion will turn to an overview of the English educational policies and implementation in both South Korea and Japan. Following that there will be a discussion on the

future and potential solutions to the problems related to educational policies and implementation. Finally, the paper concludes with a review of the discussion and an alternative approach to English language policy and discourse.

The discourse of globalization and language

Since the mid 20th century there has been a continuing dominance of the United States' and what is called linguistic imperialism (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). The new changes after decades of British rule are attributed to factors such as technology, mass communication and the ease of transportation. Because of technology, the shrinking of space allows for the global to interact with the local. The common feature that binds the global and local is the spread of English. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that most recently globalization has been a term widely used in the 21st century projecting an image of a level playing field in which everyone has a chance at the global market and the opportunity to exchange information and achieve upward mobility. Others such as Phillipson (2001) see globalization as a homogenizing of culture and linguistic diversity and a contributing factor to the widening gap between the rich and poor.

There are multiple distinct viewpoints from which to view the issues of homogenization, linguistic diversity and the gap between the rich and poor. One view is Phillipson's (2001) position that the spread of English is having a homogenizing effect on the indigenous language, which allows the business world access to larger markets resulting in the need for countries to reform their English language policies to remain competitive. On an individual level the homogenizing effect may result in the potential loss of language and culture. Some see the westernization of Asia and the introduction of fast food chains, television programs and movies for example as a threat to Asian cultures. The viewpoint from the U.S. government is that English is meant to serve western countries and support agendas related to economics. However, an alternative viewpoint on the influences of the global spread of English is Pennycook's (2008), counter-argument "that rather than viewing globalization merely as synonymous with economics and disparity, it is more useful to explore the complexities of global flows of culture" (p. 65). Pennycook (2010) continues his argument with saying that "to suggest that globalization is only a process of US or Western domination of the world is to take a narrow and unproductive view of global relations" (p. 65). Pennycook's argument is not just about economics, but rather he goes on to state that it is about the "complex flow of people, signs, sounds, images across borders" (p. 65). What Pennycook is implying is that what needs to be taken into consideration is the strength of a culture. An introduction of a second language into a culture will not diminish that culture in anyway. In fact, what has happened in many cases is that the indigenous culture inculcates a richness and diversity into English. Cultures relate to English in different ways due to the needs of the people and their historical and economic relationship to the language. If that is the case, then English language is considered to be local (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008).

At the local level as Pennycook (2008) explains, "the changing cultural and linguistic worlds in which English users live pose a challenge for how we perceive culture, ethnicity and language" (p. 4). From a local perspective language is reworked to form new identities in areas such as popular culture, resulting in a hybrid form of English that is reworked to match the user's needs, as opposed to governmental policies dictating the needs of the people. However, in many

cases the argument from a cultural perspective is largely overshadowed by the more commonly viewed economic argument by local communities.

The value of English language is considered to be a force dominated by globalization and directly tied to the economic survival of the country. (Hsieh, 2010; Jeon 2009). The argument is based on the fact that English language has been dominant in the world of politics, economics, cultural influences and academics (Phillipson, 2001). The viewpoint of continued dominance is reinforced by government policy and decision makers who are complicit in furthering the discourse of globalization for their own agendas. One common discourse is that by becoming competent English speakers, the people of country can gain a competitive advantage and improve the economic standing of their country in the world. There are a number of examples in which many Asian countries reformed their English language education policy and goals in hopes of making their economies more competitive in the world (Block, 2004; Hui, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Paik, 2008).

Example of the discourse of globalization and the English language

In order to understand the power of the discourse there are two examples from South Korea and Japan. In South Korea, Paik's (2008) article argues that becoming proficient in English will not only improve the chances of obtaining a higher paying job, power, prestige, but also one can become a globalized citizen of the world and gain an understanding of different cultures. This despite the fact that English is not used in everyday life and South Korea is considered to be a monolingual country (Jeon, 2009). A common theme throughout Japan and encapsulated by a study by Kubota and McKay, (2009) conducted in a rural town, is that the advancement of globalization leads to the importance of learning English. Advancing globalization is connected to a belief that in order to communicate with people in the world, whether tourism, business and social media sites, learning English is the key. Regardless of the fact that in the town in their study, besides the population consisting of Japanese, there are immigrants from Brazil, Korea, Peru and China, and English is never really used. The outcome of the study is that there is a gap between what residents see as the need to continue to learn English and the reality of the diversity of languages that are within the community. In the study there was a range of responses to the question "why is English important," which were mainly related to differences to age and gender. For example, older women surveyed responded from an historical and privileged perspective. They learned the language from a young age and continued to study, but not necessarily communicatively. Young respondents thought that English allowed them the potential to speak with other people in the world and a chance for a better life (Kubota & McKay, 2009).

In order to understand the differing viewpoints between the older and younger generations, it is necessary to understand why English language study was introduced, and the history of the development of the English language. The older generation did not necessarily contend with globalization as an issue and communicative ability was not a required skill when learning the language. It was mainly about utilizing the language as part of testing. In the 1990s, young people learning English had become the focal point for policy decisions and the implementation of costly programs related to teaching communicative English (Nunan, 2003). The policy decisions simultaneously evolved in conjunction with the narratives of globalization and the requirement to learning communicative English (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

The history of English language development in South Korea and Japan

There are remarkable historical similarities between Japan and South Korea's connection to the English language. Japan's hosting of the 1964 Olympics thrust them squarely into the international spotlight, and due to their lack of English speaking ability needed to reform English language learning (Paik, 2008). What's more, World War II was still fresh in the people's minds, and perhaps Japan saw that being in the spotlight was an opportunity to re-enter the global community. In the 1980s South Korea hosted the Asian games and Olympics, and because of their international exposure, English education reform related to communicative ability also became part of the discourse of policy makers. However, after the international attention on both countries dissipated, the focus of English returned to its original intent, which was to be used for testing purposes for entrance exams.

In the 1970s in Japan and the late 1980s in South Korea, the emphasis on the English language as a tool of communication was virtually nonexistent. It was meant only as a testing tool for entrance examinations. Consequently, the education system was built up around English as a testing tool. Policy goals and main objectives in both countries had to do with making sure that students passed entrance exams (Browne & Kickuchi 2009). Textbooks were written specifically to aid in helping students pass entrance examinations. Teaching and classroom practices relied on the grammar translation method in which written English is translated verbatim in Japanese or Korean with grammatical explanations given in the first language. Grammar translation helped to assure that students would understand exactly what was being taught in order to increase their chances of passing entrance exams (Nunan, 2003). The focus on grammar translation and passing entrance exams became so ingrained in the system that by the time the discourse of globalization became one of the motivating factors for implementing new policy measures related to English communicative ability, change was slow, especially in Japan.

In the 1980s in Japan, internationalization became an accommodation strategy in response to Japan's economic strength in order to avoid economic conflicts and isolation in the world (Kubota, 2002). In South Korea it was the decrease in their competitiveness after a long period of economic growth that led to a change in policy. In the 1990s *Kokusaika* or internationalization in Japan and *segvehwa* or globalization efforts in South Korea was at the forefront of the debate about how best to implement English education reform (Kubota, 2002; Jeon, 2009). South Korea was more proactive about implementing new policies and adding a communicative component to the curriculum, whereas Japan took a more conservative approach continuing to rely on English as a means of entrance exam testing. But it slowly took on a new importance; that is to foster national identity through learning English. According to Yamagami and Tollefson (2011) "The process of 'internationalization' can be interpreted as one of deconstructing English so that Japan can continue to be successful in maintaining cultural independence by removing English from the core identity of Japan without excluding the language from society" (p. 22). Prior to the discourse of globalization and the need to be competitive, internationalization had more to do with presenting the country and its culture to the world without letting an outside language impede upon its identity.

South Korea's response to English reform was quite different. English gained significant importance and was considered a motivating force for reform in part due to the international exposure of the Olympics, but also in large part to an economic crisis. In order to help further the growth of the economy, the government issued new policies that would introduce English language education and focus on fluency and communicative competence, rather than accuracy. The new policy was introduced from the third year of elementary school (Jeon, 2009).

The divergence between Japan and South Korea is seen in the effort of the South Korean government to become more global and improve their economy by educational reform. Whereas Japan used the idea of globalization to enhance nationalism (Kubota, 2002) and focus on accuracy, which was directly related to entrance exam testing, South Korea reformed their education and implemented fluency and communicative competency as goals (Paik, 2008). South Korea also implemented their program immediately. Japan, on the other hand, debated long-term about what changes to make, how to incorporate the communication component into the curriculum and alter the ways in which teaching practices would be done.

Teaching practice examples in both Japan and Korea are emphasized in two studies. The first study was conducted in Japan by Nishino and Watanabe (2008) which reviewed the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology (MEXT) 1999 "Course of Study Guidelines." Highlighted in the study was the educational reform plan created for the 21st century that would introduce oral communication as part of an overall goal. The plan was expanded and a pilot program was conducted in which native English speaking Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) were introduced into the classroom from the junior high school level. The goal in a five-year time span was to have the students become communicatively functional with the English language (Ohtani, 2010). South Korea also introduced a plan to include native English speaking teacher (NEST) in classrooms as part of plan their reforms and implemented programs in 1997 without a pilot program, at the elementary level and nearly 2 years earlier than Japan (Paik, 2008.) The main difference between the two countries based on the study done by Paik is that the South Korean central government was a strong proponent of implementation, (centralized policy) and put pressure on local governments to implement the policies. While in Japan, despite policy requirements from the central government, it was left up to the local governments and boards of education (decentralized policy) to choose whether or not to implement the policies (Butler, 2004, p. 4). The difference in centralized and decentralized policy requirements resulted in a strong emphasis on communicative English language learning in South Korea and less so in Japan. Both policies would have implications in the future as the countries revised and introduced new policies.

In 2005, South Korea's Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development introduced a "Five Year Plan for English Education Revitalization" in which there would be a NEST in each public elementary and junior high school by 2010, amounting to 2,900 total. It is important to clarify that NESTs were not considered teachers, but rather assistants to the "real" teachers. (Jeon, 2009). The main reason for introducing NESTs into the program was to help support the Teaching English Through English (TETE) program that was implemented in 2001. The long term objectives would be to provide students with more input from native English speakers, a more authentic native speaking environment and a greater cultural understanding. With these new policy changes, textbooks also changed in order to reflect a need for communicative language learning (Nunan, 2003).

Although introducing communicative language into the curriculum was a major part of reform in both countries, there were differences. One major difference had to do with Japan's decentralized policy implementation and South Korea's centralized policy decisions. In addition, Japan introduced the language at the junior high school level, whereas South Korea at the elementary level. The reason for Japan's decision had in large part to do with concerns that introducing English at an early age would have adverse affects on national identity and literacy while learning the first language. The potential adverse affects on the first language were one of the main reasons that policy debates and decisions had been mostly rhetoric and not serious about actual implementation (Hashimoto, 2011; Butler, 2004). The concern over national identity and literacy sent mixed messages to the general public and counter to the discourse of globalization - on the one hand we need English in order to improve our economic status in the world - but on the other hand we do not want it to impede upon our national identity nor affect first language learning.

Maintaining national identity was just one of the many factors attributable to Japan's failure to be competent English speakers. Additional factors had to do with the late implementation of the language from junior high school. Furthermore, the problem was that entrance examination testing did not include a communicative component, resulting in a lack of teaching practices related to communicative language. In addition, there was a lack of motivation by the students due to the fact that they were never tested on their speaking ability and as a result rarely if ever needed to speak English (Howard & Millar, 2008). Consequently, communicative English has had little importance in terms of an academic subject and in fact is considered a nuisance due to the pressure of entrance exams.

In South Korea, there were a number of reasons contributing to its success in having English competence. The first reason is that South Korea was not so concerned about a second language impeding upon the first language and in fact aligned identity with learning English. The second reason is that students began their English language education from the elementary school level. Additionally, English is considered to be an academic subject. And finally, English in South Korea occupies an important place in society and held in high esteem. With all of these factors taken together, the result has been a positive view of the English language.

In South Korea, the impact of introducing language at an early age and not connecting it with testing was a contributing factor to a positive attitude toward the language for both students and teachers. According to Butler, (2004) "motivation is related to the approach and attitude of the language from the teacher who receives 120 hours of in-service training" (p. 267). This support for the teachers has had a positive effect toward attitude and motivation. When compared to Japan, teachers receive less training and the legacy of exam testing still influences teaching practices and attitudes (Gorsuch, 2000). Although successful in many ways in South Korea, both countries have had to contend with problems related to English language programs.

Understanding the problems: A comparison between the EPIK and JET programs

The result of the discourse of globalization is that there have been major English language policy decisions, language reform and costly language programs in both countries. In order to better understand the issues, there will be a comparison between two programs EPIK in

South Korea and JET in Japan, how they were implemented and also a highlight of some of the main problems.

In South Korea, EPIK, a government-sponsored program was developed in response to globalization and the country's need for economic survival (Jeon, 2009). In Japan's case, the JET program was established more than twenty years ago as a response to economic imbalances in the 1980s meant to restore relations between the United States and Japan by promoting international exchange and eventually language education (Kubota, 2002). Both the EPIK and JET programs are examples of programs that have had some success in language education, but fraught with a number of issues.

On the front lines of teaching, the programs in both countries, although well intentioned, had a number of unforeseen problems with implementation. ALTs in Japan and NESTs in South Korea were introduced into the classroom to help the homeroom teachers teach English language classes, but the policy stated that all teachers must teach English through English (TETE). The main problem had to do with the fact that many Japanese and South Korean teachers of English have only received degrees in English literature or equivalent, resulting in very little training in how to teach communicative English (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). In some cases teachers were unable to speak English at all. The lack of ability to teach communicative English hindered the relationships between the ALTs and NESTs when discussing curriculum requirements, objectives or planning classes with homeroom teachers. With a lack of communication between the regular teacher and assistant teachers, when team teaching, often there were disconnects during the communicative English class (Ohtani, 2008). Additionally, both the ALTs and NESTs received inadequate training prior to their teaching resulting in misunderstandings of their job requirements and objectives in the classroom in which they were placed. The problems in turn caused confusion and animosity from both school administrators and homeroom teachers (Jeon, 2009).

Although considered to be successful based upon the perspective of the ministries of education of both countries, the amount of money spent on such programs as the JET and EPIK and the rate of return on the investment is considered to have been a failure if the objective was to develop communication skills. The main crux of the problem lies with the policy decisions, implementation and the fact that the ALTs and NESTs in Japan and South Korea require minimal qualifications to be an English teacher. Furthermore, ALTs and NESTs tend to be young, recent undergraduates, have very little to no teaching experience or training and are viewed by their Japanese or South Korean counterparts as not legitimate teachers (Jeon, 2009; Ohtani, 2010).

ALTs and NESTs sometimes lack legitimacy in the eyes of the students, which affects the student's view of the English communication class. One such example is from the Jeon (2009) study in which the author states that, "Although EPIK teachers are 'teachers' in English conversation classes, their legitimacy as teachers is systematically limited, because what they teach is rarely an integral part of the assessment of students' English proficiency" (p. 239). As a result, from the student's perspective, the communication class is not considered to be a real class and consequently a host of classroom management problems arise. Again these problems relate back to the fact that the legacy of English courses has had very little to do with communication, and mainly with reading, writing and exam testing. However, at the front lines of education, teachers are committed to attempting to teach communicative English. But there are many challenges the homeroom teachers have had to contend with such as high social expectations and a heavy workload resulting in very little time to work with the ALTs and

NESTs to determine lesson plans and how best to team-teach the class (Ohtani, 2010). Both the JET and EPIK programs are indicative of the contrast between policy and reality.

A reason for the contrast between policy and reality has to do with a lack of an official study of the programs. For example, since its inception in 1987 there has not been an official comprehensive review of Japan's JET program other than independent studies and academic research papers (Hashimoto, 2011). In addition, South Korea's EPIK program has not had an official government sponsored study on the efficacy and success of the program, which if done could influence the decisions made in redesigning and re-implementing a more successful program (Kim, 2006). Conducting studies of both programs would determine whether or not language policies are succeeding and show proof of a commitment to improving communicative language education programs.

Policy and Implementation Gaps

Systemic issues surrounding English language in both Japan and South Korea were one of the main reasons behind the gaps between policy and implementation. From a policy standpoint, a study conducted by Howard and Millar (2008) having to do with the challenges with language curriculum innovations revealed the "continued perceptions by teachers in South Korea of multiple interrelated constraints on the implementation of the English language curriculum account for the high level of frustration reported, and also signal an ongoing lack of alignment between the goals of the English curriculum reform in South Korea and the reality of classroom practices" (p. 69). The vision of policy makers and the reality of implementation in the classroom create a gap between the perceived value of communicative English skills and the policy. The results are teachers relying on previous methods of teaching, such as grammar translation and teaching to pass examinations. Two other studies reinforced that the reality and challenges in the classroom had mostly to do with decades of grammar translation, teaching for tests, inadequate teacher training and the teachers own lack of confidence in their own English speaking ability (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Butler, 2004).

The previous studies were viewed from the teacher's perspective. In order to be able to see the larger picture it is also important to look at communicative language from the student's viewpoint. In a study conducted by Browne and Kikuchi (2009), they looked at the issues surrounding communicative English language study from the perspective of Japanese students. Questions posed to the students had to do with how they perceive teaching practices in their junior and senior high school classrooms, and whether or not classroom practices support the goals of English for communicative purposes. The results also revealed a gap between policy and what actually takes place in the classroom. The reactions were quite strong and tended towards the negative. A representative answer for example for the question, "our teacher put a strong emphasis on how English should be used in real situations and helped us do so," "53% strongly disagreed with the statement" (p. 187). The attitudes of students along with the legacy of a policy having to do with students passing entrance exams still influenced teacher and student attitudes and motivation.

Teaching for entrance exams has been so ingrained in the system. These tests placed an exceedingly large amount of pressure on both teachers and students to pass the entrance examinations. The pressure not only comes from the educational ministry and schools, but also at the societal level from the student's parents. What further complicates the issue in Japan is that

the course of study guidelines does not state that students must pass entrance exams, but rather according to Gorsuch (2000), “the exams are the creations of public and private schools and collectively are an institution in Japanese education” (p. 681). Essentially, testing is so systematized that even policies written in which there is a requirement to add a communicative component are often implemented. What the future holds has to do with how best to approach teaching communicative skills while meeting the needs of the discourse of globalization, policy, teachers and students.

The Future and Solutions

In order to come up with solutions to improving student English language communicative competency, both countries need to admit there are issues. In this case the issues are gaps that lie between the stated goals of the ministries of education and teaching practices - mainly the focus on preparing students to pass entrance exams (Howard & Millar, 2008; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Hatori, 2005; Gorsuch, 2000). Teachers of English, along with the ALTs and NESTs have not been very successful in teaching communicative English, although there have been areas of success and things are slowly changing. For example in Japan, a requirement is in the works for university students to pass a minimum level of a foreign language by adding interview and listening comprehension tests with a focus on meaning (Kikuchi & Browne 2007; Gorsuch, 2000). There are also policy changes that will have a direct affect on junior and senior high school students with a focus on improving communicative ability. The policy changes will however put pressure on teachers to improve their own proficiency level in order to be able to communicate and teach the language (Butler, 2004). The changes will need to be reinforced with in-service teacher training and development so as not to lose focus and resort back to what many have been doing, which is preparing students to pass entrance exams. Additional training related to pedagogical methodology and English instructional contexts, as well as how to team-teach with ALTs would also be beneficial.

Prior to any new policy decision, Japan and South Korea’s Ministries of Education and policy makers need to consider the actual uses of English by determining whether the scope of the policies on a practical level is what is really needed and best for the development of the nations (Hsieh, 2010). One viewpoint, as stated by Hatori (2005), is that both countries “could go beyond the notion of development, efficiency, and economic progress as primary objectives” (p. 60). This can be achieved by changing attitudes toward learning English and promoting language as a communicative tool (Kubota, 2002).

There is clearly a call for an international language in order to meet the needs of globalization. English is the language of choice for communicating across borders in the context of business, technology and tourism, to name a few examples. What needs to be reviewed in order to narrow the gap between policy and teaching practices are policy changes that take into consideration the contextual background and whether or not what is decided is what is really needed (Hsieh, 2010). The results of policy decisions can come at a significant financial cost by taking money from one area of education and allocating it towards another (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008). A clear intention and rationale is necessary to address the costs and benefits of policies (Nunan, 2003). In the case of Japan and South Korea, prior to making policy changes, a thorough review is needed of ELT (English Language Teaching) policies, as well as an official analysis and review of what occurs in classroom teaching practices. For example, by auditing the human

and material resources that are allocated to English language instruction, (Nunan, 2003), policy makers can set up guidelines for ALT requirements. Rather than just having a bachelor degree, they can require a teaching certificate, training and experience. Although in many cases initial training has been provided, what is needed is on-going professional developmental support for ALTs, NESTs and Japanese and Korean teachers of English (Kikuchi & Browne 2009).

There is an alternative viewpoint to address the policy issues, which is exemplified by Hashimoto (2011) who argues that rather than making blanket policy decisions, one needs to look at multiple ways to implement policy changes that meet the needs of the students by offering choices. For example, if English testing continues to be part of the system, the implementation of one policy can address the needs of test taking as a tool for entrance examinations. Another policy can be directed at students interested in utilizing the English language as a means of communication. One question that has not been addressed is whether or not prior policy decisions and implementation have taken into consideration how many people in both Japan and South Korea are going to actually use English after completing their schooling. Language needs to be looked at in context and understanding the needs of the language learner. Perhaps in the past, the context of English was one that had to do with test examinations. But with the advent of technology a new alternative viewpoint is needed, one highlighted by Pennycook (2008) in which “there is a need to escape the predefinition of a language user based on geographical location or variety and instead deal with the contextual use of the language” (p. 30). Pennycook is referring to language use in context - meeting the needs of the user by letting the user define their needs rather than having them pre-defined.

If Japan wants to develop communicative English ability, prior to any changes taking place, the system built up around English as a tool for examination purposes would need to change. Although difficult to change, the teaching for-test-taking narrow way of thinking has permeated the perspective of teachers who have only had experience with preparing their students to pass exams. Furthermore, the students themselves strive to perfect outdated grammar structures and phrases that are only studied as a means to pass the test, never to be used for communicative purposes. However, there are noticeable areas of improvement. A new program is in place that allows for Japanese teachers of English to travel overseas to improve their English speaking ability, and also to learn new techniques of teaching communicative English. In addition, various entrance examination tests are beginning to include speaking sections. Also there has been a decrease in the amount of grammar translation methodology of teaching that has been so prevalent in the classroom and replaced with more communicative related activities (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008).

In South Korea, programs have been in place for the last few years, specifically, the in-service training programs. In Butler’s (2004) study, 120 in-service training and subsequent on-going follow-ups have improved the teacher’s proficiency ability (p.267). Additionally, in Igawa’s (2007) study results showed three main differences regarding the reasons why South Korea student’s language ability has improved. First, age of instruction begins at the elementary level, second, equity, meaning every child has access to learning the language, and finally, professional development for the teachers (p. 267).

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how globalization directly affected the shaping of English education policies in Japan and South Korea. Common themes in the discourse have been that by becoming proficient at English one can improve the country's economic standing in the world and increase opportunities for social and upward mobility. The results of policy decisions in South Korea have met with some success with students being able to speak English, whereas in Japan it has been somewhat unsuccessful consequently leaving a majority of the population unable to communicate, and diligently working to catch up with the rest of the world. While policy decisions at the top are partly to blame, the entrance examination mentality has also played a significant role.

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