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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION:**

**POLICIES, METHODOLOGIES IN KOREA**

**AND LESSONS LEARNT FOR VIETNAM**

**(Giáo dục tiếng Anh: Chính sách, Phương pháp ở Hàn Quốc**

**và Bài học đối với Việt Nam)**

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# ABSTRACT

The research sought an understanding of English education in Korea, its successes and problems in order to draw out lessons and best practices for Vietnam in this regard.

The project applied document analysis, desk review and contrastive analysis as the main methods.

The report comprises four chapters. Chapter One presents an overview of English education in Korea and describes major English teaching methodologies. Chapter Two analyses problems in English education in Korea and Korean Government’s policy responses while Chapter Three enumerates similarities between the two countries in languages, cultures, attitudes toward education, and problems in English education. Based on the Korean experience, Chapter Four argues for proposals to be adopted in Vietnam with regards to the Early English Introduction Program; teacher training; teaching, learning and testing; teaching English for Specific Purposes vs. teaching subject matter courses in English; and the need for long-term foreign language policies.

**TÓM TẮT**

Đề tài tìm hiểu giáo dục tiếng Anh ở Hàn Quốc, những thành công và các vấn đề Hàn Quốc đã và đang gặp phải nhằm rút ra bài học kinh nghiệm cho giáo dục tiếng Anh ở Việt Nam.

Đề tài sử dụng phương pháp phân tích tài liệu hiện có và phân tích so sánh.

Báo cáo trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu trong 04 chương. Chương 1 giới thiệu lược sử giáo dục tiếng Anh ở Hàn Quốc và các phương pháp giảng dạy tiếng Anh chủ đạo. Chương 2 phân tích các vấn đề đã và đang gặp phải trong giáo dục tiếng Anh ở Hàn Quốc và chính sách của Chính phủ Hàn Quốc. Chương 3 trình bày một số điểm tương đồng giữa hai nước về ngôn ngữ, văn hóa, thái độ đối với giáo dục, và những vấn đề chung của cả hai nước trong giáo dục tiếng Anh. Dựa vào kinh nghiệm của Hàn Quốc, Chương 4 đưa ra những đề xuất cần áp dụng ở Việt Nam đối với chương trình 10 năm tiếng Anh phổ thông bắt đầu từ lớp 3 ở tiểu học, đào tạo giáo viên, giảng dạy, học tập và kiểm tra đánh giá, tiếng Anh chuyên ngành và dạy các môn chuyên ngành bằng tiếng Anh, và sự cần thiết phải có chiến lược ngoại ngữ lâu dài.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| CEFR | Common European Framework of Reference |
| CLT | Communicative Language Teaching |
| CSAT/KSAT | College/Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test |
| EAP | English for Academic Purposes |
| EEIP | Early English Introduction Program |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| ESP | English for Specific Purposes |
| GE | General English |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| ISP | International Standard Program (at VNU) |
| KAIST | The Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology |
| MA | Master of Arts |
| MEST | Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology |
| MOET | Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training |
| NEC | Korean National Educational Curriculum |
| OECD | Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development |
| SNU | Seoul National University |
| SVO/SOV | Subject-Verb-Object / Subject-Object-Verb |
| TEFL | Teaching English as a Foreign Language |
| TEPS | Test of English Proficiency designed by the Language Education Institute of Seoul National University |
| TESOL | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| TOEIC | Test of English for International Communication |
| ULIS | University of Languages and International Studies  under Vietnam National University, Hanoi |
| USSH | University of Social Sciences and Humanities  under Vietnam National University, Hanoi |
| VNU | Vietnam National University, Hanoi |
| VOA | Voice of America |

**CONTENTS**

[ABSTRACT i](#_Toc326757340)

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ii](#_Toc326757341)

[LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS iii](#_Toc326757342)

[INTRODUCTION 1](#_Toc326757343)

[CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN KOREA 4](#_Toc326757344)

[1.1 Brief History of English Education in Korea 4](#_Toc326757345)

[1.2 School Time Devoted to English Education and Outcome Requirements 6](#_Toc326757346)

[1.3 Methodologies 8](#_Toc326757347)

[1.4 Chapter Summary 9](#_Toc326757348)

[CHAPTER TWO PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION AND POLICY RESPONSES IN KOREA 10](#_Toc326757349)

[2.1 Problems 10](#_Toc326757350)

[2.1.1 English Obsession 10](#_Toc326757351)

[2.1.2 Difficulties 11](#_Toc326757352)

[2.1.3 Fierce Competition for University Education 12](#_Toc326757353)

[2.1.4 Early Introduction of English 13](#_Toc326757354)

[2.1.5 Teacher Quality 14](#_Toc326757355)

[2.1.6 Parental Beliefs 15](#_Toc326757356)

[2.2 Policy Responses 17](#_Toc326757357)

[2.3 Chapter Summary 19](#_Toc326757358)

[CHAPTER THREE VIETNAMESE AND KOREAN - MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT 21](#_Toc326757359)

[3.1 Linguistic, Cultural Similarities and Shared Attitudes towards Education 21](#_Toc326757360)

[3.2 Korean-English and Vietnamese-English in Asian Englishes 24](#_Toc326757361)

[3.3 Similarities in English Education 28](#_Toc326757362)

[3.3.1 Similar History 28](#_Toc326757363)

[3.3.2 Similar Problems 29](#_Toc326757364)

[3.4 Chapter Summary 35](#_Toc326757365)

[CHAPTER FOUR LESSONS LEARNT FOR VIETNAM 36](#_Toc326757366)

[4.1 Early English Introduction 36](#_Toc326757367)

[4.2 Teacher Training 38](#_Toc326757368)

[4.3 Teaching, Learning and Testing 39](#_Toc326757369)

[4.4 Teaching ESP vs. Teaching Subject Matter Courses in English 42](#_Toc326757370)

[4.5 Long-term Foreign Language Policies 47](#_Toc326757371)

[4.6 Chapter Summary 50](#_Toc326757372)

[CONCLUSION 51](#_Toc326757373)

[REFERENCES 54](#_Toc326757374)

[INDEX 59](#_Toc326757375)

# INTRODUCTION

**1. RATIONALE**

**1.1 The Role of English**

Vietnam has been making vigorous efforts in its socio-economic development, industrialization and modernization of the country, and international integration in all spheres of life, which badly requires quality human resources, and among the quality criteria expected of the young labor force in the country, fluency in foreign languages has received substantial attention. As Vietnam wants to be a partner with various countries in the world, different foreign languages have been introduced into school curricula. Yet, English, the “global” language for international communication, definitely plays a dominant role in Vietnam, besides French, Russian, German, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.

**1.2 New Orientation in English Education**

Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is now planning to introduce English to 3rd graders (aged 8) in the belief that the earlier these young generations are exposed to English, the higher fluency they acquire upon leaving school at the age of 18 so that they can be ready to enter the workforce or further their studies at tertiary level. Having been involved in the Ministry’s planning, I came to the realization, like the Ministry leaders and others, that one of the biggest challenges in the implementation of such a plan is the number of English teachers and their qualifications. How to train enough teachers, what level of proficiency in English they should attain before engaging in English teaching at each level of schooling – these are repeated questions in current debates.

In the attempt to find answers to these questions, and seek help, we surely have to look out and see what other countries have done, or are doing in similar contexts, and Korea stands out to be a rational choice of place to pursue this learning.

**1.3 Why Korea?**

As far as English, a foreign language to both countries, is concerned, I have observed that a good number of Korean students as well as Korean expatriates far surpass their Vietnamese counterparts in English use, particularly in listening and speaking skills, but writing is no less problematic. What are the underlying factors to such a phenomenon? How is English taught and studied in the Republic of Korea? How early are youngsters exposed to English in the Korean educational system? Which skills receive more attention from Korean educators and policy-makers and are more valued in Korean society? How can the Republic of Korea prepare sufficient teachers with proper proficiency in the English language and qualifications in English teaching to ensure quality and efficiency? What can Vietnam learn from Korea in these respects? These questions can be answered after undertaking a project like this one.

**2. BACKGROUND**

At individual and institutional levels, numerous research projects have been conducted in Vietnam, focusing on various issues of language education in general, and foreign language education in particular. Their results have been published regularly on such renown journals as *Linguistics* and *Language & Life*, or institutional newsletters. Of national importance are papers addressing the question of *introverted* and *extroverted* foreign language training (i.e. serving domestic and international needs of the country, respectively) by Bui Hien (1999, 2009); Nguyen Van Khang’s works on language education policies in Vietnam in the new era (2003, 2009); and Tran Tri Doi (2011) on the matter of language preference, use and education among ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Also, a whole issue of Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU) *Journal of Science* in 2007 was dedicated to problems in foreign language training in which one of my papers got published. In the Asian TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Conference hosted by our University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) in 2010, to which a number of professors and English-teaching professionals from Korea came to share their insights, several issues of interest to our Asian countries were raised for discussion, and many questions remain unanswered. My proposed project here fits nicely in and certainly contributes to this scholarly endeavor, which has long been my interest as a language instructor and middle manager at the University.

**3. AIMS**

Generally, my research aims at:

* Securing an understanding of foreign language education, particularly English education, in Korea;
* Discovering effective English teaching methodologies applied in Korea’s educational system;
* Reviewing policies on English education in Korea;
* Drawing lessons and best practices for English education in Vietnam.

**4. SCOPE, TASKS AND METHODOLOGY**

**4.1 Scope**

The project investigated English education in Korea throughout Korean educational system, with strong focus on secondary and tertiary levels.

**4.2 Tasks**

To achieve the said objectives, the project explored the following issues:

* Foreign language training: what language is opted for? what is the role of English in the system? at which grade does it start? what skills get focused upon? how much time is given to English in school curricula? how is teacher training delivered?, etc.
* English teaching and learning methodologies in Korea;
* Policies on English education in Korea at national and institutional levels.

**4.3 Methodology**

The project applied the following methods

* document analysis/ desk review
* contrastive analysis

**5. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The main body of the report comprises four chapters as follows:

As an overview, Chapter One presents a brief history of English education in Korea, followed by a description of school time devoted to English education and outcome requirements, and concludes with major features of the prevalent methodologies applied in English education in Korea.

Chapter Two analyses problems identified in English education in Korea and policy responses by the Korean Government.

The results of the comparison between the two countries are presented in Chapter Three in the form of similarities discovered in Korean and Vietnamese languages, cultures, attitudes toward education, with particular in-depths of Korean and Vietnamese Englishes among Asian Englishes, and problems shared by both countries in English education.

On the basis of the Korean experience and similarities analysed in the three previous chapters, Chapter Four argues for proposals and approaches to be adopted in Vietnam with regards to the Early English Introduction Program (EEIP); teacher training; teaching, learning and testing; teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) vs. teaching subject matter courses in English; and the need for long-term foreign language policies.

The report ends with the Conclusion, list of References as a grateful acknowledgement of all the authors and contributors cited, and the necessary Index.

# CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN KOREA

## 1.1 Brief History of English Education in Korea

Possibly, English language education was first officially introduced into Korea in 1883, when the Joseon government opened *Dongmunhak* *(동문학)*, an English language school for interpreter training (Nguyen, 2006; Finch, 2011; Kim, 2012, inter alia), although it is undeniable that Koreans had come into contact with English centuries earlier, together with European languages which had probably been taught privately since 1836.

Nevertheless, by 1910, Korea became a protectorate of Japan, and the Government Foreign Language School was closed the following year (1911). Japanese language education was intensified, while English was offered as an elective subject in secondary schools alongside Chinese, German, and French, and even the use of the Korean language was severely restricted until 1945, the end of the colonial period.

After that, English became dominant over other foreign languages, as stipulated in the first National Educational Curriculum (NEC) released in 1955 and continued to be emphasized in subsequent NECs[[1]](#footnote-2). In the first National Education Curriculum (NEC), middle school students could select English as an optional subject and high school students could select one or two languages among English, German, French and Chinese as an elective. In the second NEC enacted in 1963, English became a mandatory subject in both middle and high schools, and high school students could optionally select one or two more foreign languages among advanced English, German, French and Chinese. English was apparently a prominent foreign language taught at school since then.

Between 1950 and 1970, however, English was taught in Korea largely for military purposes because of the US army’s presence in the country. Korea had to train its citizens to be able to communicate with their United States ally. Despite such goals, what was taught in class was mainly grammatical structures of the English language with Korean as the means of instruction, while English speaking was almost totally absent, which was evidence of the prevalence of grammar-translation language teaching method, not only in Korea but around the globe.

After 1970, the South Korean economy grew considerably and the Government expected students to have "business" knowledge of English, while attention was also paid to some other foreign languages. In the third NEC then, the emphasis on English was increased by including Advanced English as a mandatory subject while Spanish and Japanese were added to the list of optional foreign languages to be studied in high school. The fourth NEC continued to maintain existing policies on foreign language education except that the list of optional foreign languages put Spanish before Chinese. Foreign language education, especially English education, continued to play an important role in the fifth NEC adopted in the period when South Korea hosted the Seoul Asian Games (1986) and Seoul Olympic Games (1988). In the sixth NEC, the English curriculum was modified with more emphasis on listening and speaking, on everyday speech and expressions rather than on specific grammatical knowledge. In the meantime, other foreign languages became less important as college entrance examinations removed the test on optional foreign languages in 1977. Therefore in the following years, optional language classes turned into self-study periods or supplementary classes for mathematics and English in high schools.

In mid-1980s, a number of foreign language high schools were established, in which students could select a major language (among English, French, German, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese) and receive specialized training in addition to the regular curriculum. In addition, a new law on English education was enacted for the upper graders (i.e. those in grades 4, 5 and 6). Textbooks were written by various scholars and authorized by the government in 1996. In 1997, English was introduced as a mandatory subject to third graders in elementary school. Students in the fourth or higher grades continued to receive English teaching through extra-curricular provision**.**

Communicative ability in English was acknowledged as vital for business, science and international politics. The curriculum in current use is the seventh national curriculum adopted in 2000 with the main objective ‘to promote student’s learning according to their aptitudes, talents and abilities. The common course is intended to equip students with basic life skills such as the traditional three R’s, foreign language, literacy in information technology and interpersonal skills’ (Kim, 2002:37). This 7th NEC also tries to promote English education by stipulating that English would become a mandatory subject in common national basic curriculum from 3rd to 10th grades. For 11th and 12th graders, in addition to English as a common basic subject, they could select French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, even Arabic as an elective subject of second foreign language.

In a 2006 plan, even more ambitious goals were set: English would be taught from primary first grade, with a focus on speech (as opposed to grammar); one native English teacher would be placed in every middle school by 2010; incentive points would be given to English teachers of Korean nationality who possessed English certificates and qualifications, and English immersion education would be piloted (Choi, 2006; Andrew et al, 2007:15). Since then, English has been compulsory for high school graduation and college entrance, and is considered a powerful means to gain social prestige, personal, professional and economic success.

Definitely, these have driven learners at all levels of the Korean educational system into an ‘English fever’, as Park (2009:50) describes, “These days, a huge amount of money is being spent on ‘English education’ (*yeongeokyoyuk - 영어교육*) in South Korea every year. Children as young as five years of age as well as school-age students are studying English until late at night in tens of thousands of cramming schools called *hagwon (학원*). A great number of children are being sent to foreign countries for the purpose of early ‘English education’ and the number is increasing year by year.” Kim (2012) also quotes a report by Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI) that Koreans spend about 15 trillion won (15.8 billion US dollars) on English learning a year, and they pay 700 billion won for English examination fees. Another author presents a figure of 2.9 trillion won spent on private English education alone in 2008, and the total number of hours spent on learning English by the time a Korean graduates might be about 100,000 hours (Park, 2009; Kim, 2012).

How is this amount of time distributed throughout the educational system in Korea? The next section will give a sketch of such allocation in the Korean system and some comparison with the Vietnamese counterpart.

## 1.2 School Time Devoted to English Education and Outcome Requirements

Since 1997, English education starts from Grade 3 with one class hour a week and increases as children go on to higher grades, as the following table shows.

**Table 1. Designated English Classes at Schools in Korea**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grades** | **Instructional Hours per Week** | **Hours per Grade** | **Sub-total** |
| 3rd and 4th | 01 | 34 | 68 |
| 5th and 6th | 02 | 68 | 136 |
| 7th and 8th | 03 | 102 | 204 |
| 9th and 10th | 04 | 136 | 272 |
| 11th and 12th | 08 | 272 | 524 |
| **Total** |  | | **1204** |

*(Source: Nguyen, 2006)*

However, 11th and 12th graders not only have to study English; they also are allowed to take elective courses of other foreign languages, and intensive elective courses to further their English with English I (08 hours/week), English II (08 hours/week), English Conversation (08 hours/week), English Reading Comprehension (08 hours/week), and English Composition (08 hours/week).

It is important to note that school children in Korea, like in many other countries, just move up grades according to their ages, i.e. a child who does poorly on several subjects of a grade does not have to repeat that grade but continues to the next. This results in classes of mixed abilities which present teachers with great challenges, and the situation can be worse for English classes, as it is difficult, if not impossible, for teachers of English to tailor the content of the lessons and refine their methodology to suit any particular groups. Some children who may have taken English classes elsewhere and earlier may feel bored when they have to start from ABC with complete beginners; on the other hand, children who just begin to learn English feel frustrated and discouraged when they fail to catch up with a number of their peers. There are no clear outcome levels of English for each grade except that by the end of their high school, they have to take an examination in English as part of the core subjects, apart from Math and Korean, in order to graduate. It is becoming more evident that active student use of the English language in Korean high schools is increasingly necessary for students to enter top universities in Korea as well as abroad.

At college, many students sit for TEPS (Test of English Proficiency designed by the Language Education Institute of Seoul National University SNU, widely recognized in the country and around Asia, including Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia). Examining SNU admission requirements, one can infer that applicants must have a minimum TEPS score of 550, or 5.5 IELTS in order to gain entry to undergraduate programs. Other universities like Hanyang University have similar requirements, with 550 TOEFL paper-based or other equivalents. That can be roughly equivalent to B1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Comparing this against the amount of time children spend on learning English at school, by the time they finish the 7th grade (after 4 years of study), they should reach level A1 in CEFR; another 3 years should improve their English to A2 (after Grade 10), and the last two years at high school should enable them to achieve B1. This is comparable to Vietnam’s goals in English education by the year 2020 for school children, with a slight difference that Vietnamese children are expected to reach A1, A2 and B2 by the time they complete elementary, middle and high schools respectively, which means 3, 4 and 3 years of English study for each level.

At tertiary level, however, generally in Korea there are no fixed outcome levels of English. Undergraduates at SNU, for instance, merely have to earn 2 to 4 credits from one or two of College English 1, College English 2, and Advanced English courses. At the beginning of their undergraduate courses, based on their TEPS scores, they can take the English course(s) that fit(s) their level among the available options above. Only some colleges may require a particular TEPS score as one of the requirements for graduation in addition to the required courses. Meanwhile, many higher educational institutions in Korea merely offer their undergraduates Conversational English courses, or Professional Academic English of 3 – 4 credits in the case of Hanyang University.

As can be seen, the average official hours a student spends on learning English from elementary school through university come up to around 1,500 hours. The figure reported in the SERI survey (cited in Kim, 2012) stands at 100,000 hours, which means the Government educational system can only cover 1.5 – 2%, the remaining 98% or so is provided elsewhere, mostly by an overseas provider in an English speaking country (which is increasingly favored by Korean families who can afford such studies for their children) or by local private, for-profit institutions or cramming *hagwons (학 원)*.

This is also the case in Vietnam tertiary educational institutions, although in its policy, the Ministry of Education and Training intends to impose B1 as the level of English achievement for university graduates who have completed the 14 credits of the English program, and some programs at certain universities have made this a compulsory requirement: graduates cannot be awarded with the Bachelor degrees unless they present evidence of their B1 English proficiency or equivalents (in the form of internationally recognized test scores such as IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC, etc.) Requirements can be stricter for special programs, for example B2 for fast-track students, and C1 or higher for students of the so-called ‘international standard programs’ (ISP) in which many, or all, subject mater courses use English as the medium of instruction.

In language learning, it is widely agreed that time is a critical factor of success, but equally, or even more important is how one embarks on the tasks of learning and using that language. The following section will describe the major approaches to the teaching and learning of English in Korea.

## 1.3 Methodologies

As has been described in diverse literature (Cho, 2004; Park, 2009; Finch, 2011; Kim, 2012; Fouser, 2012; to name a few), in the two decades between 1950 and 1970, grammar-translation was the sole method, no conversation was heard in class; classes were taught in Korean and much of what was taught was English grammar so that they could translate. Exam questions were in Korean, and students had to answer in English. In the following years, students were put under pressure to write and speak English properly, asked tricky grammar and vocabulary questions, and were rebuked when they made mistakes. The curriculum continued to be essentially grammar-based and test-based: students were tested and heavily sanctioned if they made mistakes speaking English. They therefore viewed speaking English as a continuous test and thought that native speakers were actually evaluating them when they were speaking, and Koreans were obsessed with "mistakes". In Korea, the audio-lingual method never took hold because it did not fit with the reality in schools at the time. Korean teachers of English were comfortable with grammar-translation, few native-speaker teachers were available, and language labs were expensive. As a result, the grammar-translation method continued to dominate English education in Korea until the 1980s when a new generation of English teaching experts familiar with communicative language teaching began to push for reforms that were realized only in the 1990s.

Since communicative language teaching became dominant, reforms to middle and high school English education focused on reducing the influence of grammar-translation by strengthening speaking and listening components of the curriculum. The importance of communication skills in English has been reﬂected in English education policies, including the national English curricula and numerous teacher education programs to prepare teachers for the curricular reforms based on communicative approaches. Rather than focusing on grammar and translation, the latest national curriculum stresses developing learners’ communicative competence. Notable steps taken since the 1990s have been the inclusion of a listening component in the English section of the university entrance exam and the hiring of a large number of native-speaker assistant teachers, as in 1997, the Korean government decided to bring native speakers to help students focus on "communicative competence", that is, to communicate effectively with American businessmen. As communication skills and authentic language use have been emphasized, the desire for native speaking teachers has been increasing in various educational settings. These rising demands for native speakers are based on the assumption that native speakers have the authority as authentic language users for non-native speakers to follow in order to master the English language communication needs and opportunities. Soon after, the 1997 financial crisis delayed the project, and once Korea recovered, native speakers were invited to the country. To many people’s frustration, alhough the government wanted students to focus on their ability to communicate with foreigners making colloquial use of English, students and companies focused on "performance": the fewer mistakes you make, the better you are, regardless of whether you are actually able to converse with foreigners or not. Test scores became primordial, and surprised and disillusioned English teachers ended up torn between teaching "performance" and "communicative competence". While the Government keeps reiterating its idea that Koreans should focus on "communicative competence", students return to "performance" ([Adid](http://www.blogger.com/profile/05981726851859220405), 2010). There was no significant and effective change in the way English was taught and learnt. Like the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching developed from the premise that teachers, if not native speakers, have near-native ability and confidence in the language, which makes it essentially alien to Korean teachers.

The current approach toward English education in Korea could be called the “test-score approach” in which a variety of methods are used ad hoc to raise test scores. The important question here is whether such an approach is best for the nation and, if not, what should be done to change it (Fouser, 2011).

## 1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a brief history of English education in Korea, the time allocation to English learning in the Korean educational system, and predominant approaches to English teaching in the country. Apparently, English has been introduced into Korea for more than a century if we counted from the time *Dongmunhak* was established. The way English is taught has undergone several changes with varied foci in tandem with worldwide trends in language learning/teaching and the particular needs of the country in each period of time. The fact that English learning is mainstreamed into official curricula of the Korean educational system as early as third grade of elementary school, and even earlier as being planned, demonstrates the Government and the people’s attitudes to the importance of English to their socio-economic development and personal well-being. The Korean successes are evident, but no pearl is free of stain*,* as the saying goes. So what are current problems in English education in Korea and how have they been addressed? The following chapter will present some major concerns extracted from various sources of literature to date.

# CHAPTER TWO PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION AND POLICY RESPONSES IN KOREA

## 2.1 Problems

### 2.1.1 English Obsession

The front page of *The Korea Times*, the Nation’s First English Daily on Friday, April 6, 2012 immediately hits the reader’s eyes with the following article by Kim Tae-jong, right next to headlines about the upcoming National Assembly election, April 11, 2012:

***Many Koreans suffer ‘English stress’ and a few snap***

The Korea-born gunman who killed seven people at a Christian college in California alleged he had been regularly teased by his peers over his poor English skill, and that might have made him snap.

… Back home, many of the Korean campus shooter’s compatriot suffer from a great deal of stress from advancing their English proficiency, although at different levels without going down the same extreme path as he did.”

The article describes Koreans’ obsession with efforts to improve their English not only for the purpose of securing a good job, but also for gaining “a symbol of cultural and social status as much as French wine and golf clubs”. It quotes Professor Lee Byung-min at the English Education Department of Seoul National University saying that despite such obsession, “the irony is that Koreans do not have many chances to speak English.” This is further illustrated by Lee Eun-kyeong, a 29-year-old office worker in Seoul, who is puzzled “I’m not sure why I should study English, as there is little chance for me to speak English”; still, she is studying hard to prepare for an English speaking test because she needs a high score to be promoted at her company. Korea’s top universities have also “joined such a trend by expanding classes that are conducted entirely in English in recent years in attempting to globalize their education”, the article points out. It then claims the linkage between English obsession and tragedies in the country, with 5 students from the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) having committed suicide because of such “unnecessary stress”. The article ends with strong criticism from Professor Choi Gwang-mu of KAIST saying, “Having English lectures is downright crazy. Just because you learn a subject in English does not mean you are globalized. Students should have pride in their mother tongue. It’s wrong to force them to study English.”

Although the afore-mentioned apparently extreme opinions are suspected to have been politically driven against certain candidates for the National Assembly, the fact that this article is front-paged amidst vigorous election campaign activities emphasizes the importance of the problem, which must be properly dealt with.

### 2.1.2 Difficulties

Several difficulties contribute to the low effectiveness in English learning by the Koreans; some are believed to originate from the nature of the languages themselves; others derived from teaching and learning methods; still, a number can be attributed to the learners’ motivations and needs.

Typologically, Korean is an agglutinating language with typical SOV syntactic structure; that is, the object comes before the verb in a sentence. In other words, it is a Head-final language. Meanwhile, though not as highly synthetic as Russian, French or German, English is an inflectional language with SVO structure. Korean writing system is phonetic, simple and easy to combine the letters together to read the words out loud, while there is no clear correspondence whatsoever between English spelling and its pronunciation. These differences, along with different sound systems of the languages, cause difficulties to Korean learners of English. For instance, it is hard for Koreans to correctly pronounce *coffee* with the fricative consonant /f/ instead of the Korean plosive /p/, or *zoo* with /z/instead of the Korean affricative /dƷ/. It is equally hard for them to distinguish the minimal pairs of voiced and voiceless consonants such as /b/ and /p/, /d/ and /t/, /g/ and /k/ in English. There is no consonant cluster either in initial or final position in Korean syllables, which prevents them from correctly pronouncing English consonant clusters. When they speak, their habit of syllabizing such clusters may make their speech hardly intelligible. Another considerable difficulty is the confusion of /l/ and /r/ among the Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai as well as Laotian learners of English, which may put an unaccustomed native English speaker to utter bewilderment upon hearing that *lice*, the parasitic insects on some people’s heads, are their staple food. Mispronunciation and its consequential low listening comprehension capacity may lead to fatal effects, as exemplified by the court case related to the death of Yoshihiro Hattori, a Japanese exchange student who was believed to have been shot on his way to a Halloween party due to his misunderstanding of the shooter’s “Freeze!” for “Please!”. This was a controversial case which was given central coverage in the world’s media by the end of 1992 and early 1993[[2]](#footnote-3). The Vietnamese learners definitely experience similar difficulties with other English sounds which do not exist in the Vietnamese language, and to many Korean and Vietnamese learners, English is “totally unspeakable” (Park, 2009). This is a true burden given that English is compulsory at most, if not all, levels of schooling, in academic endeavors, employment and promotion systems, and businesses.

Culturally-conditioned practices are the second source of barriers to effective language learning by Koreans and Vietnamese alike. Heavily influenced by Confucianism, on the one hand, both peoples cherish high respect to and zeal for learning for centuries; on the other hand, such respect has made the teacher the dominant, if not, say, the sole source of knowledge transfer, and learners are supposed to listen, write down and memorize the knowledge imparted in a passive manner. Questions from learners are not encouraged, and even considered intolerable, let alone open discussions in which learners can challenge the teacher. Grammar-translation language teaching method therefore finds fertile land to grow, while chances are rare for communicative practice and competence development. Even when opportunities are created, learners’ deeply rooted passivity discourages them from making use of such opportunities. They then fall into a vicious circle: they do not dare to speak, they do not practice what is taught, which results in their low proficiency, and in turn such low proficiency makes them inconfident language users, and end up like “dumb” people in English speaking situations.

Such discouragement and inconfidence certainly exert negative impacts on learners’ motivation which plays a significant part in achieving success in language learning, as is widely known and scientifically proved. A number of Korean learners of English are, however, believed to have low motivation, and needs are hardly visible, as the office worker Lee Eun-kyeong in the said story reveals. They are mostly driven by pressure, instrumental and extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation and individual needs (Guilloteaux, 2007). According to Park (2009), English learning in Korea is driven yet tampered by three ideologies: i) the ideology of *necessitation*, which means English is a must for financial success in a global economy; ii) the ideology of *externalization*, because English is the language of an Other, and therefore the mastery of English can conflict with their identity as Koreans; and iii) the ideology of *self-depreciation*, which identifies Korean people as poor English speakers no matter how much investment and effort they put in learning English, partly because many learn English for purposes unclear to them, or imposed on them rather than purposes derived from their own needs, and this contributes to the low effectiveness of their English learning.

### 2.1.3 Fierce Competition for University Education

Another problem that doubles the jeopardy inflicted upon Koreans is the fierce competition for university education, which is seen by many as the sole path to career success and the economic as well as social gains it brings. Unfortunately, universities do not have places to admit them all on the premise that university education is for the ‘elite’ rather than the masses (again the question whether university should be ‘elite’ or popular has been a controversial one internationally for years, particularly now that many countries around the world are striving to provide ‘education for all’, ‘lifelong learning’ and build up a ‘learning society’ as basic human rights).

As a result, exams must be administered to screen out those seemingly ‘without academic potentials’. Such formidable exams as the CSAT or KSAT (College/Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test) include English; and fearing that schools do not provide them enough to pass the test, students take extra classes after school, not only for learning English but also for other subjects to be tested while sidelining the subjects that are not. These extra classes are largely offered by *hagwons*. Unfortunately, these institutions mostly provide students with test preparation skills rather than necessary language use skills. The need for CSAT test preparation is also one of the reasons why hired native English teachers are not assigned to teach 11th and 12th graders, as they are believed to be unable to prepare Korean students for such tests, which means Korean teachers take care of Korean students by the time they are ready for high school graduation and university entrance. Sadly enough, such test-driven approach only intensifies traditional, teacher-centered, accuracy-based and/or grammar-translation language teaching methodology against the Government’s good-will policies to improve Koreans’ English communicative competence. Again the vicious circle repeats itself: Korean students are good test takers but by no means fluent users. Teachers find it difficult to teach innovatively and communicatively while class sizes may come up to 35-40 students, and they normally have to resort to teaching what is tested rather than the other way round. This is also the case with Vietnamese educational system (Pham, 2007; Hoang, 2008; Nguyen, 2009).

### 2.1.4 Early Introduction of English

Young children seem to enjoy certain advantages compared to adult learners of foreign languages: they may better memorize new words; it is easier for them to develop native-like accent, and earlier exposure to foreign languages means the time they spend learning them is longer and thus their proficiency levels can heighten when they complete high school, etc. Such faith is common among the general public, as revealed in Linse’s finding (2011:484) that as many as 84% of her respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Korean parents believe the earlier a child learns English the better. But what exactly is the relationship between age and language learning? These and other common beliefs are simply not true. Numerous studies have shown various mere myths and misconceptions with regards to the relative abilities or inabilities of language learners of different ages. Children do not necessarily learn language faster than adults, and it is not ‘Mission Impossible’ for adults to achieve fluency and acquire a native-like accent. In fact, adults may learn more efficiently. Furthermore, there is no loss of language ability or language learning ability over time. Age is not a detriment to language learning, and by all accounts, learning a second (or third etc.) language actually keeps the older language learners’ mind active. People of all ages can benefit from learning languages (Schleppegrell, 1987; McLaughlin, 1992; Jaspa, 2010; inter alia).

However, these myths and misconceptions are most probably the motives and justifications behind the policies of both Korean and Vietnamese governments to introduce English to third graders, and even as early as first graders. It is undeniable that they bring about certain positive impacts, yet not without problems, as illustrated below.

Pressurized by English requirements at elementary school, and possibly wanting their children to perform well there and ‘always be Number One’, parents often send their young kids to private institutions, preferably those staffed by native teachers of English, especially Americans, in the hope that the children can develop more confidence and pick up native-like English as early as when they prepare to start their first year of elementary school. As has been described, one of the Government’s intended targets when introducing English into elementary school is to allow children longer exposure to English learning, thus reducing the need for *hagwons*. Unfortunately, the unexpected outcome turns out to be the opposite: *hagwons* even find more demands to make their business lucrative. Also, the trend is popular among city dwellers, those who can afford such private tutoring for their children as part of their ‘cosmopolitan striving’, while most people in rural and remote areas are unable to do so, which gives rise to increased inequality and widened divide between the *have’s* and the *have-not’s* (Park and Abelmann, 2004; Igawa, 2007), and that is also an unintended consequence of the early English introduction program. Such problems dictate the need for careful research on policy impacts and efficiency, and cautious preparation before policies are enacted, which seem to have been inadequate in this case of Korean English education.

### 2.1.5 Teacher Quality

Another huge challenge to the early English introduction program is the lack of qualified teachers. Miller (2006), Igawa (2007), amongst others, report that a number of Korean teachers of English at middle and high schools have low TOEIC scores, and sadly many can barely speak it, especially those in rural areas. Another author (Sabio, 2007) strongly criticizes the Korean Government for the lack of qualified English instructors in Korean schools. With regards to native English speakers, any foreigners “with a valid passport from an English speaking country, a filled-out E-2 class visa application form, a diploma from any discipline from a university located in an official English speaking country and transcripts of academic records from an institution” can be admitted into the country and work as an English instructor. No requirements are stated by the Ministry of Justice in relation to their teaching certification, experience or relevant qualifications and competencies, while it is widely known that not all native speakers of a language, despite their naturally unquestionable language use competencies, may be able to teach it effectively, even to their own children, let alone teaching English to speakers of other languages. In order to be a language teacher, it is required that you not only *know* the language, but also *know about* the language and all other pedagogical psychologies and methodologies concerned. For the part of local Koreans, any Bachelor-degree holders from any disciplines can be accepted to work as English instructors without the employers’ knowledge of their English proficiency or teaching capacity. That means, as Sabio claims, ‘a Korean can teach English without really knowing the language’. Apparently, the truthfulness of such an outrageous claim is subjected to further verification, and may contradict what had been reported earlier by Kim and Han (2002), but somehow it reveals the need for better quality control by educational authorities to ensure that their children and students have access to proper English instruction (Igawa, 2007). “You may not succeed without teachers” and “like teacher, like student”, as the sayings go.

Sabio’s suggestion is not new by nature. It merely sonorantly echoes the need for teacher quality improvement as Choi (2006) and Andrew et al (2007) already point out, “teacher certification is not needed for you to become an English instructor if you are a graduate from a teacher education program”. This is not enough to ensure effective English instruction. It is good that teachers’ evaluation is made, based on which tailor-made re-training or refreshing programs can be designed for existing teachers of English, such as the intensive semester-long English teacher training program being delivered by the Department of English Education, College of Education at Seoul National University. For candidates to English teaching jobs, they should be tested with regards to their teaching methods and practices before they can be qualified to teach.

To compensate for the weak English proficiency of Korean teachers, the Government has tried to bring native speakers into schools. However, the use of native teachers of English in Korea in a number of cases does not reach the effectiveness level as expected, either. A middle school, for instance, was allocated one native teacher, and this teacher was assigned to teach several classes, meeting each class only once a week for one hour or so, which puts him/her in deep waters. It is widely known that in order to provide the best help to language learners, the teacher should develop a strong personal rapport with them, understand their weaknesses and strengths, keep track of their progress, and accordingly tailor instructional inputs, both in content and methodology, all of which in turn require frequent contact and individual attention over time. This is not possible while the native teacher has to keep running from class to class in the case of Korean schools. Evidently, many schools are not prepared to receive native English teachers; they have not received proper training on how to make the best use of native English teachers allocated to them by the Government, so many even do not know they are going to have one or what to do with native teachers (Miller, 2006).

### 2.1.6 Parental Beliefs

Problems may not derive from the Government’s policies, or the quality of English teachers alone. Parental beliefs also add to the pressure upon Korean kids. Assuming that their children can benefit from a learning environment where English is the sole medium of communication free from first language influence at home, many better-off families send their children abroad, and the most favorite destination is, of course, the United States, since Korea is by and large biased to American economy and culture. American English accent prevails in the country, and is seen as a token of pride and status. The next English speaking countries of their choice are Canada, Australia, the UK and New Zealand.

Closer to home, with less tuition and living costs, and more convenient for parents to accompany, or once in a while visit, their children is the Philippines. Suplico-Jeong and Arcilla (2012:87) cite the following figures from the Philippines Bureau of Immigration: “issuances [of Special Student Permit SSP] reached 26,823 in 2010 with South Koreans topping the list of nationalities with valid SSP, higher than the numbers of Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese.” The top five reasons for them to opt for the Philippines include the knowledgeable teachers, conducive facilities, competitive costs, satisfactory course content and encouraging teachers. In a subsequent paper (2012), these two authors also identify that South Korean families influence the choice of ESL destinations, with the mother being the influencer, gatekeeper and decider, who often travels abroad to live with and take care of the children while the father stays home, continuing to maintain their family’s economic wellbeing to support the whole family and pay for their children’s overseas education – the typical situation commonly referred to by Koreans as ‘wild goose family’ or ‘wild goose father’ (Choi, 2005).

In addition to the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia are also favorite Asian destinations to Korean students, especially elementary children and pre-university students who stay there for a relatively short period of time, usually from 1 to 3 years. This mode of educational migration is called *jogi yuhak (조기유학)* in Korean, which literally means ‘early study abroad’. Park and Bae (2009:367) quote figures from some other sources, saying “24,000 students left Korea in 2006, more than a threefold increase since 2001. This increase is particularly explosive among elementary school children, whose numbers have multiplied nearly 40 times over the past few years.” The motives behind such “mass exodus of students” are explained as the belief that “good competence in English can only be inculcated effectively through exposure to an English-speaking context during one’s childhood years, after which one’s ability to acquire English successfully will be seriously compromised” (Waters, 2006:186, cited in Park and Bae, 2009:368) and “globally dominant ideologies of English that constitute highly specific views of language, place and social space” (Park and Bae, 2009:368).

Korean parents’ influence on their children’s English learning is demonstrated not only in their decision to send their offsprings overseas. Their beliefs also affect how English is taught at school in their home country. Linse (2011:475) reports,

Korean teachers of English working with school-age learners in Korea have complained in my professional preparation classes that they are often under a great deal of pressure from parents. In one of my MA TESOL classes in Seoul, a secondary school teacher said that students’ parents complained because she was using too much English in class. A primary school teacher taking the same course said that one student’s mother pointed out that the child’s private tutor did a wonderful job of teaching English and did not use Korean when teaching English. Both of these teachers working with different age groups felt burdened by parents even though there was considerable variation in what the parents believed to be the teachers’ shortcomings.

In her survey, Linse (2011:479-488) finds out that 94% of her participants said “parents believe memorizing vocabulary items is important”, an indication of the Korean culture which “puts a high premium on rote learning.” The second finding also helps illustrate the afore-mentioned motives behind *jogi yuhak*: only 5% of survey participants disagreed with the statement that the best way to learn English is to travel to an English-speaking country, while 75% agreed or strongly agreed. Even though it must be acknowledged that many locals are excellent and effective teachers of English, the respect to native English teachers in an English speaking country, or right at home, means devaluation of local teachers, as illustrated by Linse’s third finding: 62% of her participants either agreed or strongly agreed that parents believed native English speakers were better English teachers than nonnative English speakers. When parents do not highly value local teachers, their children’s English learning definitely suffers.

In a nutshell, although Korean Government has invested huge efforts and state budgets in promoting English education, and even more time and money have been spent by individual Koreans and their families on English learning, cost-effectiveness is far below expectation. Many fail to communicate in English, and their average TOEFL scores ranked the 93rd among 147 countries in 2004-2005 (Park, 2009), which contributes to a kind of antipathy directed towards Koreans. Above are merely some most fundamental problems in English language education in Korea so far, many of which are inevitable and occur not only in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) situation like Korea but also in ESL (English as a second language) among communities residing right in English speaking countries such as the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom, as shown in various literature. So how has Korean Government dealt with these problems over time? The next section will describe some major Korean Government’s policy responses as an answer to this question.

## 2.2 Policy Responses

In the late 1990s, amidst the impacts of the IMF crisis, the Government tried to curb increased spending on private education with stricter controls only to meet with public agony and frustration. To the Government’s astonishment, one of the unexpected outcomes of these policies was that private education continued to flourish, and English education intensified both officially at schools and unofficially elsewhere, particularly after the Kim Young Sam administration launched the new English program to as early as third graders, even when state regulations on the market were lifted by April 2000 (Park and Abelmann, 2004; Lee, 2011; inter alia).

The early years of the twenty first centuries witnessed further revision in the Government policies, especially in the seventh National Educational Curriculum adopted in 2000, in which English education had its focus shifted to communication and reading skills. To strengthen their efforts, in 2004, a Public Education Enforcement Policy was issued. This policy included many provisions aimed at addressing the various concerns about equity in Korean public education, making periodic reforms as warranted and conducting national evaluations of schools. Also, this policy aimed to remove the desire and need for private tutoring by bringing these services into the public education sector, strengthening public education and, over time, by changing attitudes toward private tutoring. Furthermore, this policy addressed the concern of “school collapse” by promoting character development education and enhancing teacher morale.

In their report to the OECD, Kim and Han (2002:42) of the Korean Educational Development Institute describe:

The Korean government attempts to supply foreign teachers in two ways. First, the ‘Project to Invite Native Speakers as Assistant English Teachers’ is aimed at elevating English communication ability of primary and secondary school teachers and improving instructional and learning methods for English language. Those invited foreign teachers are placed in the educational training institutes of the metropolitan and provincial offices of education and are utilized as English instructors of teachers. Their status is of the assistant teachers and they are hired by a yearlong contract, which is renewable upon expiration. Second, government invited native speakers of English as English instructors, two of them each in 11 universities of education for the purpose of improving English proficiency of the students of universities of education, who will teach in elementary schools. These native speakers are recruited from six English-speaking countries, namely Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and are required to possess either teacher certificate or English teaching certificate. Every year, 200 such foreigners are hired.

Educational policy reform continued to be initiated by the Korean Government in 2007, including English education while maintaining previous intentions to introduce English to first graders, pilot English immersion program by 2008, and place around 2,900 native English speaking assistants in middle school by 2010 (Andrew et al, 2007), which would be a substantial increase from the total number of only 1,950 native English teachers employed in Korean educational system in 2006 (Park, 2009). Such attempts led to the establishment of several English-only villages or towns with native speakers as inhabitants, and more of such villages are already in the pipelines, even though it seems that President Lee Myung-bak has given up his plan to implement the English immersion program, as Kim (2012) reports, “the annual task report that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology presented to him included no mention of English immersion programs. This illustrates just how difficult it is for the government to introduce English language education policies that satisfy the majority of the citizens while having long-lasting positive effects.”

Conversational English continued to be top priority now that focus had been shifted from grammar-translation to communicative competence, and on April 6, 2007 an English TV Channel was launched for the sake of improving Koreans’ English conversational and business English skills. More multimedia facilities saw their presence and application in the classroom, and online programs were made available as well.

Like teachers of other subjects, English teachers in Korea receive regular in-service training to help them improve their quality, particularly in the training-through-experience programs and field-training – the former provides them with opportunities to take part in two-week visits to educational institutes, schools and cultural facilities in Asian countries, the United States, Europe, and Oceanic countries, etc., while the latter provides 4-8 week learning experiences as well as learning opportunities for Korean teachers of English (Andrew et al, 2007). A flexible level-differentiated curriculum was developed on 3 fronts:

* core subjects such as Math and English was divided into 8 and 20 levels, respectively;
* a supplementary curriculum was provided for students who were either moving ahead or falling behind; and
* the last two years of high school were reserved for electives, which were available to students based on career path and abilities, offering languages other than English when they were opted for their second foreign language.

Classes taught in English or other foreign languages were also encouraged and increased as the Government planned to attract about 50,000 foreign students to Korean universities and colleges by 2010.

In the late 2000s, the former Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development underwent significant re-organization and merger, and now the Government agency responsible for education is the new Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). In its 2011 plan, MEST expected to continue the educational reform in which teachers would get evaluated, and based on the evaluation results, they would receive proper re-training to improve their quality, and this would be put under public, especially parents’, scrutiny and monitoring.

Meanwhile, schools increased extra class time for English as a way to reduce private tutoring. The existing curriculum would also be revised with focus on improving students’ core competency, including English proficiency. Similar revision would be made to the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), the one used for selecting freshmen to colleges and universities among high school leavers. CSAT changed to the multiple-choice, language-as-code, discrete-item format, which brought it closer to internationally recognized tests of English such as TOEFL, IELTS, and more comparable to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The Ministry even planned to take focus away from English by separating the English section out of the CSAT, or replacing it with State-run English test from 2016 (Finch, 2011).

As can be seen, realizing these problems in English education in the country, the Korean Government has tried to address them with various solutions, many of which have brought about positive impacts, some others not as effective as expected, and the latest ones need more time to bear fruits. Still, new problems emerge, which is natural. It is true that once promulgated, any policies have their own justifications; there are positive motivations behind them, and policy makers definitely have invested their time, effort, thought and good will into such enactments. What is missing, I believe, is research-informed knowledge of the impacts of those policies and their consequences, both expected and unexpected, positive and negative.

## 2.3 Chapter Summary

The second chapter has identified several problems currently experienced in English education in Korea, namely obsession with English learning on the part of Korean people and students, inherent difficulties caused by the different languages and cultures, competitive university education, early introduction of English, teacher quality, and parental beliefs. These problems have been responded to by various policies and efforts of the Korean Government, including programs for improving teachers’ English proficiency and teaching methodology, inviting native teachers, adjusting English tests in college entrance examinations, etc. Still, there remain several concerns to be addressed.

Since this chapter is a description of problems and policy responses, its nature obviously casts a predominantly gloomy tone over the picture of English education in Korea. In fact, it should be noted that the actual situation contains more silver linings than has been sketched. The first Koreans I worked with were several executives of the Daewoo Group involved in the development of a Master Plan for Hanoi Development in 1995 whose highly fluent English made my interpretation easy and impressive to top leaders of Vietnam then. More recently, during a week-long workshop on capacity building for green growth from December 12 through 16, 2011 in Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences within Korea-Vietnam cooperation program, in which I was hired as an interpreter, only one out of the 14 Korean speakers had to use Korean in his highly specialized presentation while all of them communicated with ease in the English language.

A recent instance was upon my arrival at Incheon Airport, while waiting to be picked up by KFAS staffs, who had native-like English, I had an interesting talk with a 10-year-old Korean schoolgirl and her peers who obviously had come back from an international event, and their English was beautiful. These Koreans and many others I have come into contact with, including KFAS and SNU staffs, demonstrate a truly good command of English, which are the silver linings of the situation.

There are a lot more that we Koreans and Vietnamese share, not only linguistically but culturally and educationally as well; there are a lot that Koreans far surpass the Vietnamese and thus a lot in Korea for Vietnamese to learn, as seen in a number of findings which I have managed to discover so far and will be presented in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER THREE VIETNAMESE AND KOREAN - MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT

Recalling a discussion at the 8th Asian TEFL conference hosted by our University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), VNU in 2010, I heard an English teacher raise such questions as “Can we speak English the Asian ways?”, “Can we use Asian idioms like *they are just pots and pans, you can’t be both the soccer player and the referee at the same time* instead of the American *they are just Coke and Pepsi* or the British *you can’t be both the judge and the jury* *at the same time* respectively?” “Can we make ourselves understood when speaking Asian English?” “What should we teach our students in this regard?” etc. These have been controversial topics of numerous debates among Asian English teachers to date, and I tend to agree with many of them that Asian English, or rather Asian Englishes have all the rights to be recognized as varieties of the English language (and they have truly been), and cross-cultural communication via the medium of English is always possible because we human beings are in fact more alike than different, as evidenced in the Vietnamese and Korean idiomatic expressions I have been able to find with my still very limited knowledge of the language.

In this chapter, I would like to present my preliminary findings of the linguistic, cultural similarities, and shared attitudes towards education between Vietnamese and Korean peoples before going into further details of English education in the two countries.

## 3.1 Linguistic, Cultural Similarities and Shared Attitudes towards Education

Vietnamese and Korean languages share a large number of words originated, or borrowed from the language of our common neighbor – Chinese, with necessary modification in pronunciation to fit our own languages, for instance, *đại học, khoa học, học sinh, công chúng, mâu thuẫn* in Vietnamese, and *tehak (대학), kwahak (과학), hakseng (학생), kongjung (공중)*, *mosun* *(모순)* in Korean. It is estimated that words of Chinese origin can account for as many as two-thirds of Vietnamese and Korean vocabularies. However, the two languages coincide in more ways than that.

From an interesting book I found in KFAS library by Choe Sang-Hun and Christopher Torchia (2002) *How Koreans Talk* – *A Collection of Expressions*, I learned that conceptually, in describing a cold, indifferent, hard-to-tempt person, the Vietnamese say *con người gỗ đá* while the Korean say *mokseok (목석)*; short but gritty people are called *small pepper [is hotter] (bé hạt tiêu, Jakeun gochuga maepda 작은고추가 맵다 )*, clothes are likened to a pair of wings (*bộ cánh, 옷이 날개다*); a daring person is one with a big liver *(to gan, 간이 크다)*, a sly woman is a nine-tailed fox (cáo trắng chín đuôi /hồ ly tinh *- 구미호*), or a powerless person may utter *they put a nose ring on me (tôi bị xỏ mũi –바가지를 쓰다 )*.

Culturally, like many other Asian nations, Vietnam and Korea rely heavily on rice, the staple grain without which almost no meals can go, and the two languages abound in terms that describe a whole variety of products made of, from, or related to, rice. It is, therefore, natural that many of their sayings center round this life-support necessity. For instance, the Korean say *Eat, eat: rice is everything*, very much like the Vietnamese with *cơm tẻ là mẹ ruột; no cơm tẻ, thôi mọi đàng (*lit. *rice is mother of the intestines; no appetite when you’re filled with rice)*.Referring to some illusionary promise or something good but unattainable, both peoples use the same image *geurimui tteok (그림의떡), cái bánh vẽ* *(rice cake in the picture)*. Describing a gray area, or a useless product, for example, they both say *jukdo anigo bapdo anigo (죽도 아니고 밥도 아니고), cơm chẳng ra cơm, cháo chẳng ra cháo (it’s neither rice nor porridge)*. Interestingly still, *siksahaetseoyo? (식사했어요)* *Anh/Chị ăn cơm chưa? (have you eaten (rice) yet?)* rarely means an inquiry as whether you’re hungry or not, but is a common way of greetings in both languages, which can shock a Westerner if so asked by a Vietnamese or a Korean. Wishing a girl to be settled in marriage soon, both peoples make a rhetoric question, normally accompanied with a smile, *국수 언제억지? Bao giờ cho ăn cỗ đây?* (lit. *When will I have a chance to eat your noodles?*) Obviously, rice and its derivatives are integral parts of the two cultures and their languages.

Furthermore, behavioral norms, life experience, advice, and Confucian moral rules, etc. in the two cultures are also vividly reflected in their idioms and proverbs. Similarities are found not only in the images/objects used as metaphors in these idioms and proverbs, but also in the literal and figurative meanings conveyed. For example, in a wedding, the newly-wed couples receive a wish like *Until your hair turns into leek roots 머리가 파뿌리가 되도럭, Sống đến đầu bạc răng long / bách niên giai lão (until death do you part)*. A weak, poor commoner may rise to overthrow the ruler when cornered with oppression, *even an earthworm wiggles when someone steps on it (a treaded worm may turn), 지렁이도 밞으면 꿈들, Con giun xéo lắm cũng quằn.* An inexperienced youngster who dares to do things beyond his ken is referred to as *the blood has hardly dried on his head* or *He still reeks of milk 머리에 피도 안마른놈, Chưa ráo máu đầu / miệng còn hơi sữa; Chưa học bò đã lo học chạy*. A broken marriage is likened to *Pakyeong 팍영, gương vỡ (a broken mirror)*. Advising people to hold their reputation in esteem, the Korean say *호랑이는 죽으면 가죽을 남기고 사감은 죽으면 이름을 남긴다,* precisely the same as the Vietnamese *Hùm chết để lông, người chết để tiếng (When a tiger dies, it leaves its fur. When a man dies, he leaves his name*.*)*  A narrow-minded person yet believing he knows everything is *Umul an gaeguri 우물 안 개구리, ếch ngồi đáy giếng (a frog in a well)*. A useless venture is described as *Sajokeul danda 사촉을 단다, vẽ rắn thêm chân (adding legs to a snake)*; fighting with an invincible rival is merely *Dangranggeocheol당랑거헐, châu chấu đá xe (a mantis kicking a horse-cart wheel)*; a fight that benefits only a third party is *Eobujiri 어부지리, Trai cò tranh nhau, ngư ông đắc lợi*. Asking someone to stop flattering is *Bihanggi taeuji mara비행기 태우지 마라 Đừng cho tôi đi tàu bay giấy nữa (stop giving me a paper plane ride)*; a salesperson cheating customers is criticized *as Yangduguyuk 양두구욕, Treo đầu dê, bán thịt chó (Sheep/ goat’s head and dog’s meat)*; interpersonal intimacy is like that between lips and teeth, as in*입술이 없으면 이가 시리다 Môi hở răng lạnh (If you lose your lips, your teeth get cold)*; *욱시할 눔* or *욱장낼 놈, Cho voi giày ngựa xé / xé xác phanh thây or Đem bỏ vạc dầu* is a curse on a scoundrel. Unpredictable luck in life, good or bad, is just like a man who lost his horse: *Saeongjima 새옹지마 Tái ông mất ngựa*. Another good advice is “do not exercise punishment on a person at meal time, just like your dog – do not beat it while it is eating”, *Bap meokeul ttaeneun gaedo an ttaerinda 밥 먹을 때는 개도 안 때린다 Trời đánh tránh miếng ăn*. A man of forty years of age is *Bulhok불흑, Bất hoặc (tứ thập như bất hoặc)*, or fleeing a danger is the best strategy - *Samsipyukgye삼십육계, Tam thập lục kế, tẩu vi thượng sách.* There are countless examples of this sort in the two languages.

Similar to several other Asian countries, in Korea and Vietnam, Confucian moral rules for long laid contempt on women while paying respect to men. *Man is the seed*, and a woman who ventured outside her duties and status would bring ruin to the family, *If the hen cries, the household will collapse, 암탉이 울먼 잡안이 망한다, Gà mái gáy*. Women were required to conform to*삼종 지도, tam tòng tứ đức (three types of obedience and four types ethical attributes, namely obey their father, husband and son; diligence, appearance, language and dignity)*, and so, *you should break in your new daughter-in-law when she is still in a rainbow dress, Dạy con từ thuở còn thơ, dạy vợ từ thuở bơ vơ mới về*, as the Korean and Vietnamese sayings go. A daughter-in-law is truly your daughter, but a son-in-law is not, so treat him like a special guest, *Sawineun baeknyeonjigaek사위는 백년지객, dâu là con, rể là khách*. However, things have changed, women’s status has ameliorated, and now the Koreans have such a saying as  *딸 하나 얼 아들 안 부럽다 – one good daughter is worth ten sons* rather than the Vietnamese *nhất nam viết hữu, thập nữ viết vô (you are considered fertile even if you have one son, while having ten daughters means you have no children at all)*.

Another interesting finding I would like to share is what is commonly referred to as the “envelop culture”, a social evil in both nations. I have not been able to investigate the current situation in Korea, but most probably this “cultural phenomenon” still persists. Corruption is everywhere, in developed as well as in developing countries; yet bribing traffic police, government officials and teachers in the form of a small envelope with *chonji 촌지, chút quà mọn/ chút tiền trà nước* in the hope to get better treatment to oneself or their children at school is, or once was, prevalent in both cultures. Definitely, this “envelope culture” will continue to take years of efforts before it can be substantially reversed in both countries.

My final point in this section is similar attitudes of the Korean and Vietnamese towards education, which has caused high pressure to the Governments and peoples alike, especially the youths. Under Confucian influence, both nations crave for education, and parents may pay all costs to get their children a good education. A university degree is a passport to career success, and seems to be the only way to secure a good job and a good life, therefore youngsters study real hard to get a place at university, although “it is highly competitive, particularly the [Korean] national university entrance examination. Taking extra classes outside school is common… many high school students return home after such extra classes well after 11pm” (Bui, 2011:3). Similarly, Professor Nguyen Minh Thuyet, our teacher and a former National Assembly delegate, remarks, “Possibly the highest pressure that causes tension in [Vietnam] education is that general education seems to have only one outcome: a place at college or university. Since children’s first days of schooling, parents already have to worry which school is good for their kids, which special school of the upper grades they can proceed to, and then what degree courses they can take at university so as to secure a decent job, a good income and a brighter prospect”[[3]](#footnote-4). It is actually a perpetual stress to children and their parents throughout their school life, especially in more developed cities in the country. “It seems that in the city, many parents are over worried, and they may have better incomes, so they exert pressure on their children’s schooling, which is more or less justifiable, because if children cannot gain entry into colleges, chances can be rare for them to get a job”, Professor Nguyen Minh Thuyet adds[[4]](#footnote-5). This is quite similar to Koreans’ *cosmopolitan striving* earlier discussed (Park and Abelmann, 2004).

It is good that education is well respected, and everyone is entitled with the right to access to education. Yet universities are not the only place where education can be acquired, and a country needs not only doctors, professors, researchers, but also engineers, high-skilled technicians, drivers, artists, mechanics, builders, cooks, etc., all equally important and respectful.

It is said that all the 3H’s: Head, Hand and Heart are equally essential, but how to ensure proper balance among them is a difficult question, and, like corruption and bribery, it will also take both nations a long time to change their peoples’ attitudes and practices so that pressure on the Governments, the educational sector, the peoples and their children can be abated to a far less worrisome extent.

To conclude the section, I would like to reiterate that despite being some thousand miles apart, the two nations possess more similarities than differences, linguistically, culturally and mentally, as has been seen through their languages and ways of life. Cross-cultural communication between us is not only possible, but always smooth thanks to what we share.

We not only communicate in our own languages – Korean now is among the most popular foreign languages to Vietnamese students and people, partly because Korea is one of the biggest investors in Vietnam; and Vietnamese is one of the foreign languages Korean high school students can choose as a curricular subject. We can also communicate using the global language – English, or rather, Englishes, i.e. English spoken in Korea and English spoken in Vietnam. What is the status of our Englishes in the world Englishes? Following are my arguments as an answer.

## 3.2 Korean-English and Vietnamese-English in Asian Englishes

I am not going to discuss at length the issue of pronunciation, because definitely all non-native learners of English, in order to ensure intelligibility, should aim at getting their pronunciation as close as possible to a particular, established vernacular of English, such as “standardized” “the Queen’s English” in London, or Standard American English, or Australian English, to name just a few. (In learning a foreign or second language like English, mother tongue’s influence is naturally inevitable, but that should not be allowed to result in some pronunciation so far away from, or causing so much distortion to, the target language that serious misunderstanding occurs, and even communication totally fails). What I am trying to support here is the Englishes used by Asian people in Asian ways with Asian words via the medium of English.

Language is a means of human communication, we all know, and the people with whom we communicate every day, more often than not, are our fellow people, those who speak the same mother tongue as we do. Even when we speak English with speakers of other languages, we are usually not trying to express what the English natives think and do and how they do it; rather, we use English to express our own thoughts and deeds. As Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) puts it, ‘at the end of the upper secondary (high school) level, students will be able to …. better inform the world of the Vietnamese people, their history and culture, and to take pride in Vietnam, its language and culture’ (MOET, 2007, cited in Hoang, 2008:11). Thus, a tourist guide showing foreign visitors around a scenic beauty, telling them the history behind the mossy bricks of a ruin, explaining to them the rituals associated with some type of music and/or singing; a scientist presenting his/her research results at an international conference; a waitress explaining what ingredients make up the traditional dishes to foreign diners at a local restaurant - these are common scenes in any country. English then is no longer the sole unshared treasure of the natives, but has become the world’s language and is used at the disposal of the non-natives. They use it in their own ways, for instance, “The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid. Turn to her straightaway” in an announcement in a Yugoslavian hotel, “When a passenger of the foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet at him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage, then tootle him with vigor” in a warning to motorists in Tokyo (Bryson, 1990:11), or a notice in an unidentified non-English speaking country as seen in the picture below[[5]](#footnote-6):



The Vietnamese are no exception. We have used English in our ways which outsiders are obliged to accept. Take the word *socialization* as an example. In “pure” English, the meanings of the original verb *socialize* are explained as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Verb** | **1.** | **socialize** - take part in social activities; interact with others; "He never socializes with his colleagues"; "The old man hates to socialize" |
|  | **2.** | **socialize** - train for a social environment; "The children must be properly socialized" |
|  | **3.** | **socialize** - prepare for social life; "Children have to be socialized in school" |
|  | **4.** | **socialize** - make conform to socialist ideas and philosophies; "Health care should be socialized!" |

Based on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. ©2003-2011 Princeton University, Farlex Inc[[6]](#footnote-7).

It has nothing to do with the cost-sharing mechanism of projects/programs for social development between the government and the citizens, or the collection of funds from people for a community activity, or the mobilization of social forces to engage in a certain campaign, which is expressed in the Vietnamese language as *xã hội hoá*. This term well corresponds to verb formation rules in both Vietnamese and English with the addition of the word/suffix *hoá/ize*; hence *socialize* and its derivative *socialization*. “New wine in an old bottle”, as the Vietnamese saying goes – the English word has acquired a new meaning in the Vietnamese context. When the word was first used, few foreigners would understand what it meant, and it took us quite a while to get them understand its Vietnamized usage. Now, that new meaning is well-established in the lexicon of non-Vietnamese English speakers who maintain frequent contacts with the Vietnamese, though it will continue to take several more years to find ways into standard English dictionaries.

*Socialization* is just exemplary at word level. At phrase, sentential and textual levels, English use is overwhelmed with Vietnamese grammatical rules and rhetorics. Following is an English verse-like creation in conformation to the Vietnamese poetic rules supposedly credited to some *xích-lô* (cycle rickshaw, pedicab) pedalist in Hanoi who wants to invite foreign visitors to take a ride:

*One dollar, one you*

*Two dollars, two you*

*You okay, you sit*

*Not okay, thank you.*

Among my students’ writing assignments, I found “*People want to have equality in position, employment ..., especially gender equality, one of the hottest problems attracting many people’s notice”; “start seeing 3 types of family with different works of Female which are shown in the table below”; “The Arab was luxurious and extravagant life in town, had wide commercial dealings but no culture contact with Christian. There was 3 months no fightings. The society was powerful political and religion formed by Muhammad called Muslim and Muslim grew strongly among areas”.* They violate English grammatical rules, they may not be straightforward in presenting ideas as the English rhetorics dictates, but does such violation or divergence seriously block understanding and communication?

The answer is yes, but not of high frequency. Sharing the same mentality, ways of thinking, speaking and writing, it is not always difficult for us to understand one another while communicating in English this way, although it can be a chore on the part of other unaccustomed English users. They will soon learn, I believe. For successful intercultural communication using the global English today, both sides have to make efforts - the non-natives have to improve their English in the direction of the standard while the natives have to acquire better understanding of the language and culture of the non-natives, and in so doing, they may come to a point of convergence. Many native speakers of English have now arrived at the recognition that they simply cannot ‘colonize’ the world with their language (although they did *cocacolanize* the world[[7]](#footnote-8)); they cannot require all English speakers in the world to speak it like they do. That is to say different varieties of English, or Englishes, are accepted as natural, as in the case of Indian English. We have long heard of Franglais (French English), Phinglish (Philippino English), and more recently, Singlish (Singaporean English), Chinglish (Chinese English), so surely Vinglish (or Vietlish, meaning Vietnamese English) and Konglish (Korean English) have a pride-worthy place among our Asian Englishes. As a Japanese author puts it, “Students of English should realize that Japanese English is not an inferior form of English but one variety of the “various” language, or world Englishes. They should be guided so that they could be confident in becoming speakers of Japanese English that is a fine output of the English education in Japan” (Takeshita, 2000). We Vietnamese and Korean should feel the same pride.

We should feel the same pride because to both nations, English is the language of an Other, because our attitudes towards English are very much the same, as are the ways it is taught and learned in both countries, and, as anyone may expect, we share almost the same problems. The following section will describe such similarities in this regard.

## 3.3 Similarities in English Education

### 3.3.1 Similar History

There are no official documents to define with certainty when English was first introduced into Vietnam, although some historical sources indicated certain contact between the Vietnamese and English speaking people as far back as the 17th – 18th century. It can only be inferred from a few books available such as *L’anglais Vivant: Classe de sixième, L’anglais Vivant: Classe de troisième* (1942) and some bilingual English-Vietnamese dictionaries compiled by two Vietnamese scholars Le Ba Kong and Le Ba Khanh (Hoang, 2008:8) that English was actually taught in Vietnam as a truly minor foreign language during the French occupation of the country, i.e. by the end of the 19th and the early half of the 20th centuries, the time while French was the official language in the French Indochinese colonies and the use of the native language was restricted[[8]](#footnote-9), much similar to the situation in Korea during the Japanese rule. In 1954, after the Geneva Agreement, Vietnam was divided into North and South Vietnam. While Northern people started to learn Russian and continued with modern Chinese for communication with their Soviet and Chinese supporters, English learning flourished in the South with the involvement of the United States for the same reasons as in Korea (Nguyen, 2009). English was also taught in the North; however, it was restricted to some piloting efforts or to a small number of students who, upon graduation, could be used as spies or interpreters in the diplomatic front, particularly during the peace-talk process towards the Paris Accord. Another important purpose for the learning of English in the North is ‘in order to fight the enemy, we need to understand them’.

After the country’s reunification in 1975, Russian predominated the scene all over the country, while English sharply declined for a simple reason that it was the language of ‘the enemy’, ‘the imperialist’, or ‘the boat people’ (Nguyen, 2009) – those Southern losers in the war (and a lot of Northerners, too) emigrating to other countries, and that people who knew English could have access to foreign and/or ‘reactionary’ materials and such anti-communist broadcasts as the BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation) or VOA (the Voice of America) which may politically harm the country and destroy the hard-gained unity. This is a major difference between English learning in Vietnam and English learning in Korea.

Fortunately, this conservative and hostile extremist yet somewhat naïve view was short-lived. Realizing the need to improve people’s quality of life through socio-economic development, and be friend with countries around the world, regardless of social regime and political inclination, Vietnam officially opened its door in 1986 with the *doi moi* (renovation) policy. English learning re-gained its momentum, and soon overtook all other foreign languages, even Russian. I was one of the lucky students to benefit from those radical changes. When I started university as an English major in the early 1980s, both teachers and students had very few materials to work with, except some books and tapes, most of which were published in, and provided by, the Soviet Union. Books published earlier in South Vietnam or in the UK, US or Australia were either rare or used to a limited extent **not because** of political restriction, but merely due to the lack of re-printing or copying facilities.

After 1986, however, as a junior, I witnessed the huge influx of such interesting materials as the Streamline English series, English-speaking movies and other sources of valuable reference. Previously, only a few Vietnamese teachers of English were selected to be trained overseas, mostly in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries; by this time, teachers trained in Australia, the UK and the Soviet Union under various programs of international assistance returned in greater numbers, and in-country English teacher training programs were delivered, professional development workshops and conferences were organized, bringing in new waves of innovation and improvement to the teaching and learning of English. Native teachers also came in increasing numbers to help teach us English, and with more foreigners arriving in the country for a variety of purposes, we had more opportunities to practice our English both on formal and informal occasions.

Upon graduation in 1988, I became a teacher right at the University where I used to study (and have remained ever since), and given the low salary paid (not only then, but even now), life would have been much harder had I not exhausted myself teaching extra hours in mushrooming English centers around the city and private classes tailored to specific groups of learners. English learning movement was and is truly widespread all over the country, and will continue on its rise for years to come, allowing us to earn extra income, yet sadly at the expenses of other pursuits or necessities. This is also one of the problems in relation to English education in the country, similar to those in Korea, which I am going to discuss in the next section.

### 3.3.2 Similar Problems

**3.3.2.1**  **Teacher quality**

Vietnam educational system has been facing with the problem of English teacher quality for several decades not from the very beginning but only since English learning began to flourish. The first generation of English teachers in the North in the 1950s and 1960s, small in number though, were well-trained and qualified; they were knowledgeable about the language and relevant subjects. These teachers well satisfied the demands at the time when the number of students they had to teach was also small – the teacher:student ratio was merely around 1:10-15, more or less, and the prevalent method was grammar-translation with little focus on communicative competence. Thanks to them, their students could learn a lot and acquire in-depth command of English. Upon graduation, most of these students became teachers of English in different universities and colleges in the country, and a number went to work in foreign relation agencies or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the North, Hanoi College of Foreign Languages and Hanoi Foreign Language Teacher Training College were the sole providers of foreign language teachers to high schools and tertiary institutions in the North, with the addition of a small number of graduates produced by the Hanoi University’s Department of Foreign Languages established in 1978[[9]](#footnote-10). Meanwhile, English teachers in the South were supplied by Colleges of Foreign Languages in Hue, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City or Can Tho, after the Americans had gone.

In the early 1980s, especially after 1986, English learning became more and more popular, in and out of schools. It was introduced into middle schools from Grade 6, and the afore-mentioned universities/colleges could not supply enough teachers of English to the system. The responsibilities were shared with provincial teacher training colleges. With sudden rocketing demands, supplies naturally fell short. Teacher training programs overseas at graduate level supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) and then Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) between the 1970s and the early 2000s, could only award financial support to “approximately 40 Vietnamese teachers and interpreters annually” (Hoang, 2008). The Government Program of sending Vietnamese to pursue graduate studies overseas launched in 2000, including TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), commonly known as Program 322, can cover only a small part of the huge contingent of English teachers at all levels of schooling in the country. Other development assistance donors do support the educational sector in Vietnam, but TESOL teachers may not be their focus and hence cannot benefit much from such aids.

Recent years have seen increasing numbers of self-financed Vietnamese studying overseas, mostly taking hot courses like business administration, economics, but TESOL is not their choice. While some universities can sometimes retain the best of their graduates as replenishment to their faculty and thus are able to maintain and improve quality, others from elementary schools to higher education institutions suffer great shortage of competent English teachers, either because not many are available, or a teaching job is not attractive to the top graduates. They have to recruit less able teachers from various sources, many of whom have never had a chance to speak English with a foreigner, let alone visiting an English speaking country to get some first-hand experience of the language and its culture. A number of previous teachers of Chinese or Russian, despite their expertise in these two languages, experienced a time of under-employment when Chinese and Russian went ‘out of fashion’ due to the troublesome relation between Vietnam and China in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and most of them had to attend a special training program to convert to English teachers. This is very much like the situation with teachers of other European languages in Korea, as Finch (2011) points out.

Now that English has been piloted on a number of elementary 3rd graders before it goes nation-wide, the problem of teacher quality even worsens. Before my trip to Korea, I was involved in administering tests of English proficiency for teachers of English in around 10 provinces in North Vietnam, and sadly enough, not a small number of English teachers at elementary, middle and high schools, especially in rural and remote provinces, could barely say what their names were in English.

English teacher’s proficiency is only part of the problem. A more important attribute of a good teacher in general is their pedagogy. In some selected institutions or ‘most favored groups’ (normally one such group for each grade in every school), for special programs with priority investment and facilities, and the top ‘cream’ of gifted students, the able teacher can apply various modern approaches and activities in language teaching, and success rates are high. But such ‘genteel’ programs are only for a humble minority. For the majority, with large class sizes, normally 35-45 students each, rigid classroom arrangement and facilities, the teacher cannot try out much CLT (communicative language teaching) even if they know it. What they eventually have to resort to is the traditional grammar-translation, or audio (if they are lucky enough to have a cassette/CD player for use in the classroom), or “structural method with a focus on lexicogrammar, reading and translation skills” (Hoang, 2008). The conclusion in Pham’s paper (2007: 200) can further illustrate this difficulty:

… many teachers embrace CLT, not simply because CLT represents a modern and progressive way of language teaching. Neither do they embrace it simply because they want to please the educational policy makers. The teachers in this study espouse ﬁrmly the primary goal of CLT — to teach students to be able to use the language — believing that this is consonant with the students’ ultimate goal of learning English in their context. However, when it comes to the level of practice, teachers often encounter many difficulties. Their desire to implement CLT, which is manifest through efforts to promote common Western CLT practices such as pair work and group work, conﬂict with many contextual factors. These factors range from systemic constraints such as traditional examinations, large class sizes, to cultural constraints characterized by beliefs about teacher and student role, and classroom relationships, to personal constraints such as students’ low motivation and unequal ability to take part in independent active learning practices, and even to teachers’ limited expertise in creating communicative activities like group work.

Not only Vietnamese teachers of English are faced with methodology problems, but native or native-looking teachers of English in Vietnam as well. International education providers such as the British Council, Language Link, the American Apollo, the Australian Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) can most of the time ensure that their English teachers are qualified, but the number of such institutions is quite small. Attracted by a large and expanding English training market, with gigantic numbers of centers inside and outside the formal educational sector comparable to Korean *hagwons*, many foreigners have come to Vietnam, first with a tourist visa as ‘backpackers’, and then converted it to some form of long-stay permit so as to teach English, even though the pay in Vietnam is not as handsome as in Korea or other Asian countries. These foreigners may enjoy a natural advantage compared to local teachers, merely because they are not Vietnamese. A number of them are ‘round-eyed’, but recent years have seen many from countries around the region or other non-English speaking European nations, and many do not have any teaching certificates or qualifications whatsoever, the same situation as Park (2009:53) reported, “Cramming schools have to pay $3,000 monthly in order to employ a native speaker of English, and often have to hire unqualified native speakers of English in order to meet the expectations of Korean parents”. Such foreign teachers are simply out of the Government’s control, which adds severity to the problem.

As has been said, the staffs in our Faculty of English, and our University in general, are replenished by the best of our graduates, so we can be assured of teacher quality. However, like all our sister institutions in the country, we are always overloaded, since the 150 staffs in our Faculty have to deliver English training to more than 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students at the same time. It is difficult for us to organize regular professional development training for them, and they may not have enough time to devote to other required academic pursuits, such as conducting scientific research, reading more methodology books, attending workshops to learn and share experience with their peers in order to improve teaching quality, or merely continuing studies for higher degrees[[10]](#footnote-11). Also, we all have to do extra work for generating incomes to support ourselves and families in times of inflation as high as 14% by March 2012 (Vietnam General Statistics Office GSO, 2012). *Teaching* quality, not *teacher* quality, therefore has to be compromised, and this is the sacrifice referred to in the previous section.

Given these quality problems, the need for the Government’s control and for teacher training has become more imperative than ever in Vietnam, and to do so, enormous amounts of financial, institutional, time and human resources will have to be in place.

**3.3.2.2 Time allocation**

Thecurrent time allocation to English education in Vietnam is shown in Table 2.

As the table shows, after middle school, Korean and Vietnamese children have enjoyed roughly the same length of English education. When it comes to high school, differences occur: Korean high school leavers study English for substantially larger amounts of time than their Vietnamese counterparts since English is a critical part in Korean high school graduation and college entrance exams.

**Table 2. Designated English Classes in Vietnam Educational System**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level of Education** | **Instructional hours** | **Subtotal** | **Total after each level** |
| Elementary or Primary School | | | |
| Grades 3-5 | 2/week/35 weeks | 210 | **210** |
| Lower Secondary or Middle School | | | |
| Grades 6-8 | 3/week/35 weeks | 315 |  |
| Grade 9 | 2/week/35 weeks | 70 | **595** |
| Upper Secondary or High School | | | |
| Grades 10-12 | 3/week/35 weeks | 315 | **910** |
| Tertiary Education | | | |
| Undergraduate | vary across institutions and programs | minimum 210 | **1120** |
| Graduate – Master level |  | 105 | **1225** |
| Graduate – Doctoral level | self-study equivalent to 45 instructional hours | | **1270** |
| **TOTAL** | **1270** | | |

*(Source: Hoang, 2008)*

For Vietnamese students, English is also one among 6 compulsory subjects in the high school graduation exams, but it is not as rigorous as in Korea, and the passing rates are normally high. However, the college entrance exams in Vietnam, equally competitive as the Korean CSAT, are categorized into several groups. Group A, for instance, consists of exams in Math, Physics and Chemistry; Group B Math, Chemistry and Biology; Group C Literature, History and Geography; Group D Math, Literature and English; etc., therefore only those who have to take the English exam must study hard day and night, both at school, *hagwon-type* institutions and teachers’ own classes in preparation for it.

The time devoted to English as a compulsory subject in all undergraduate and graduate programs also differs from that in Korea. While SNU students have to earn 2 – 4 credits with College English 1, College English 2 or other suitable courses, depending on their TEPS score, VNU undergraduates and graduates must respectively spend 10% and 14% (14 out of 140 credits, and 7 out of 50 credits) of their university course on English. Now that CEFR is beginning to be applied widely in Vietnam educational system, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) decides that once English introduction program with 3rd graders is in full-fledge, for an average child, the outcome levels of English should be A1, A2, B1 and B2 after elementary, middle, high school and university education, i.e. after 1120 hours in 14 years of English learning. Special programs naturally apply higher requirements.

In a country with as many as 75 - 80% of the population living in rural and remote areas, a country with 54 different ethnic groups, 53 of which speak Vietnamese only as their second language, given the English proficiency of teachers reported earlier, these outcomes may only be attainable to a small percentage of urban dwellers in more developed parts of the few major cities like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, Da Nang, Hue, Nam Dinh or Can Tho. The SMART objectives intended for English education (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound) seem to lack their vital A, which is a headache to educational policy makers, teachers and learners of English in Vietnam, as much as it is to Korean counterparts.

Another aspect of this time distribution which contributes to low effectiveness of English education in Vietnam is the low frequency of exposure and practice. In an EFL context, it is difficult for learners to practice English outside the classroom, so 2 or 3 hours a week is merely sufficient for them to receive certain amount of lexicogrammatical knowledge, practice a bit of speaking in class, do some listening and reading exercises while writing is often assigned as homework. For less self-disciplined or busier learners (in fact, they are all always busy with heavy learning schedules and exercises in and out of school, like Korean children), practicing English everyday may not always be possible. “Practice makes perfect”, and without it or with too little of it, their English learning definitely falls below expectation.

Aware of such pitfalls, in the last three years, at VNU, all the students of the ISP (International Standard Program) of different majors have been gathered together for one year intensive English training at our ULIS, with at least 20 class hours a week instructed by the best of our staffs, plus extra-curricular activities and self-study resources for English practice and development at their disposal. We have strived our best to create a highly enabling environment for their English learning and practice. The result is quite promising: by the end of the year-long training, as much as 95% achieved Level C1 of CEFR, with some even higher. They then returned to their respective colleges and pursued their academic studies in the discipline of their choice, with many, if not all, courses using English as a medium of instruction. As a matter of course, there remain different pros and cons to the use of English as a medium of instruction in Vietnam and Korea; yet at least, these students know that their English will continue to be used and further developed, and if they fail in the English training program, they have to move to another program in a discipline they do not favor or may not perform as well. ISP students also can be assured of better employment and further study prospects upon graduation. These ‘bait-like’ factors have helped intensify their motivation in English learning, which turn them into some of the success factors of the English training part of the ISP program at VNU.

Such ISP model has worked at demonstration level, though. VNU in particular, and Vietnam educational system in general, are now trying to find ways to replicate this success story on a wider scale so as to improve the general level of English proficiency of their human resources, which is not easy, given the current financial, infrastructure and other major constraints.

**3.3.2.3 The learners**

So far, I have been discussing the issues of teacher quality, teaching methods, time of exposure, facilities, or supportive policies and enabling environment, the factors which are instrumental yet more or less external to the success of English learning in particular, and language learning in general. Internally, the actor and manufacturer of this success is the learners themselves.

There are several aspects of the learners which determine success: motivation, needs, learning methods, self-discipline, etc. As with the ISP students described above, high motivation and clear, immediate needs have enabled them to achieve satisfactory results in the English training program. However, generally inside schools, the need for learning English may not be clear or imperative to many learners, so their only motivation is learning English as a compulsory subject and trying to pass exams, which comprise more writing, grammar, reading and vocabulary than listening and speaking. They do not practice English actively, particularly speaking. Their passive learning style culturally conditioned and cultivated during the 12 years of general schooling continues to university, which is hard to change and hinders their learning at tertiary level, not only in English but also other subjects. The result is they may pass the test, their written test scores can be satisfactory, but they are by no means good at speaking English, i.e. their communicative competence is low. This is another weakness shared by many Korean and Vietnamese learners of English.

Now that the Credit-based Modular System (CBMS) similar to the American style has been applied more widely in Vietnam higher educational institutions, students are required to do more independent studies. Therefore, their passivity has reduced, and hopefully this reduction will help them learn English better, too.

## 3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a number of linguistic, cultural similarities and shared attitudes toward education between the Korean and the Vietnamese peoples, and discussed the status of English in Korea and English in Vietnam among our Asian Englishes, which are considered the pride of our nations.

Nevertheless, we should be aware of the same problems we are both facing with, the biggest of which include the quality of English teachers and their teaching pedagogy, the learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and their learning needs and methods. Solutions for these problems cannot come over night; they will take years to be reduced before eventually reversed. Yet for the immediate future, from the Korean experience, I believe the Vietnamese can learn a number of lessons and carry out certain solutions which will be suggested in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FOUR LESSONS LEARNT FOR VIETNAM

Based on the Korean experience, both successes and problems, having compared several aspects of the two countries, with particular regards to English education, I believe Vietnam can draw out lessons in the following areas in order to avoid similar pitfalls or repeating failures, to issue better-informed policies and to ensure the cost-effectiveness of the 5-billion-dollar-worth National Plan for “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Formal Educational System in the Period 2008-2020”, commonly referred to as *Project* or *Plan 2020* for short.

## 4.1 Early English Introduction

The question when it would be best to start learning languages other than one’s own mother tongue remains controversial, but it is undeniable that no one is unable to learn another language, whether young or old (I once had a student of 70-odd who said he needed to learn English so as to communicate with his grandchildren born and raised in an English speaking country, and he learned very well). There are obvious benefits from children’s early exposure to language, for instance, early exposure enables them to *acquire*, rather than *learn*, language more naturally and smoothly. However, early English exposure to children must be accompanied with several important measures in relation to needs, fun, time, diversity, input, facilities, to name just a few, not in any orders of importance, to fit with their psychological and personal development.

First, early English introduction must create a meaningful need for its learning among children, because without a clear need, there could be no learning by anyone. The 70-odd gentleman in parentheses above learned well because he had a clear need. The ISP students at VNU have a clear need in mind when learning English, and they are successful. Other illustrations throughout the paper also help prove this necessity of a need, in Korean, Vietnamese or other contexts. For children, they may need to understand what the characters say in their favorite cartoons like *Chip and Dale, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Tom and Jerry*, in which there are actually more actions than words. They may need to know how to play certain group games, recite some nursary rhymes, or sing some simple songs. They may have some foreign friends whom they need to talk or write to. It can be a little more difficult to create such needs among children in less advantaged regions like the countryside or remote areas, but wherever possible, efforts must be made so that children see their own need and personal purposes of learning English rather than vague justifications or mandatory reasons imposed on them.

Second, learning English or any other subjects must be fun. Psychologically, human conscious activity is most effective when they find fun and interest therein, which inspire them, attract their passion and devotion, and generate rewards to them. For children, this is even more crucial. Rote learning, copying words from the board into their notebooks, repeating words after teacher, mechanical imitation, etc., would pretty soon lull them to sleep or tire them out, and they would quickly give up. This means teachers to young children have a really challenging job of organizing interesting activities for children to maintain their attention and participation, which fosters learning. Their teaching methods must diverge from traditional ones, along with changes of their own attitudes.

Appropriate timing is the next factor to consider. It is not only the question of when to teach them, but also how long each activity should last. As is known, children cannot maintain a high level of concentration for too long, so English learning activity must change gears every 10 or 15 minutes. This is another challenge to textbook writers and lesson planners to ensure the sufficient diversity of tasks and activities for children to do, play and learn.

Language inputs are equally essential. English educational curriculum and syllabus developers, textbook writers and lesson planners all have to consider what are important and appropriate inputs to children in order to ensure effectiveness. What children need to know, what kind of communication they have to, or are likely to, engage in, what content their communication contains, which skill they need to focus on, etc., are some examples of the kind of consideration the afore-mentioned stakeholders have to make.

Furthermore, inputs should be varied, particularly with regards to accent. Many people share the view that native speakers must be employed to work with young children in this early English introduction program so as to ensure that children acquire good pronunciation. If their pronunciation does not get right from the beginning, errors may get fossilized and become incurable. In communication, grammatical mistakes among non-natives can be easily tolerated, but pronunciation errors can lead to serious consequences due to misunderstanding, as several examples in the paper have shown. It is quite a pleasant experience hearing a foreigner speaking our own language like we do, isn’t it? It is also a common belief, to which I agree, that native-like accent is a signal of your language proficiency.

However, I tend to argue that native-like accent is a direction to approach, not necessarily the compulsory yet visionary destination. If we can speak it like those in London, Washington D.C., New York, Canberra, or Toronto, that will be wonderful. If not, we can speak English the Korean or the Vietnamese way, just like the Indian and other varieties of the world Englishes, as I have argued earlier. Therefore, Ahn (2011:700) advises, “varied listening materials with different kinds of Englishes should be given. Moreover, teachers should provide more frequent opportunities for learners to expose themselves to other varieties of English, since experience with other accents and varieties of English may help them better understand English language as spoken around the world.”

In order to materialize the said factors, facilities for English learning in the classroom must be provided, primarily the basic minimum requisites, which has always been a dilema in Vietnam, since most public schools do not have sufficient budgets for everything needed. Yet *difficulty gives rise to creativity* – there are already initiatives in the country to cope with this difficulty and manage within the constraints. The 19:00 News on VTV on April 22, 2012 talks of the use of *a robot teacher* in English training in the MOET pilot program of English introduction to 3rd graders. It is a simple, cheap yet unprecedented device developed by Dr. Doan Ha Thang which can read, translate, guide pronunciation practice and test English learners in several aspects. It is accompanied with digitalized textbooks, which is by no means a substitution of the teachers, but does facilitate their teaching to a considerable extent. More importantly, it helps learners to improve their pronunciation, reduce their shyness and raise their confidence in using English. Such initiatives should be encouraged and popularized to provide better assistance to elementary school teachers of English in their job.

## 4.2 Teacher Training

It is fair to say the Government of Vietnam, especially MOET officials, are aware of the potential social impacts and public outcry the early English introduction program may entail in case incompetent English teachers are excluded from employment. They therefore maintain that the test of English proficiency only identifies what levels of English they are at so as to plan suitable re-training and supplementary programs for them; it does not mean to cancel their teaching if they are not properly qualified. Anyhow, the idea of the early English introduction program, together with its requirements imposed upon teachers of English, has caused widespread anxiety and debates among local educational authorities, schools, teachers, parents and children in the country. To subside the public, MOET Minister Pham Vu Luan re-asserts in a live public dialogue on March 7th, 2012 that early English introduction can only be performed at schools with sufficient numbers of qualified teachers and facilities, i.e. MOET would apply a phase-wise approach rather than nation-wide for the immediate future, along with the delivery of teacher re-training programs to meet the requirements[[11]](#footnote-12). No teachers would be dismissed due to their incompetency; by contrast, they would have to be trained and/or train themselves within certain deadlines to improve their English proficiency and qualifications in order to teach, with the Government’s support in one form or another.

In this case, said is done – such re-training programs have already started, and our ULIS has concluded the first one for more than 60 teachers of English from Thai Binh and Hoa Binh provinces in North Vietnam. The training content focuses more on improving their pronunciation, together with their general English compentency, and a critical part covers methodological and pedagogico-psychological issues related to teaching and working with young children. However, this program is only able to re-train approximately 0.1% of the total number of English teachers in the country, which means a thousand more of such a program will need to be delivered in the years to come. This requires careful planning and cost-effective implementation under close guidance, monitoring and evaluation from MOET and relevant Government agencies.

In fact, the logical way should have been as follows:

* Conduct a nation-wide review and assessment of school facilities, quantity and quality of English teachers, textbooks and materials available to identify *where we are* so as to be able to determine *where we can arrive* in terms of English education;
* Conduct teacher training and other necessary preparation;
* Pilot this early English introduction program in several locations, including the better-off parts of major, more developed cities, the average in rural areas, and the disadvantaged groups of the population. More valuable lessons are learnt from the difficulties such a program encounters with the least advantaged groups than their better-off fellows;
* Evaluate the pilot program, and based on the lessons learnt, the program can be revised accordingly;
* Once the revised program is in place, and other prerequisites, including teachers, are ready, policies can be issued, and the program can be launched full-fledged.

Now that policies have been issued, the pilot program has been on-going – *the rocket has been launched, it is point of no return –* there are no grounds to require the process to be reversed and started over again. Yet at least, the Government and MOET can see what needs to be done and how it will be done so that their policies can be “introduced into life” (the common jargon in the country) with wider public support and participation to ensure success.

For the part of teachers of English, they also need to be aware of their own weaknesses and invest their best efforts in training and improving themselves so as to ensure the quality of their teaching for the sake of children in the whole country, including their own. They need to change their attitudes toward English teaching while learning new techniques in the re-training programs, because “new techniques with old attitudes will certainly destroy innovation, but old techniques with new attitudes will certainly help promote innovation” (Nguyen, 2009). The re-training programs need to emphasize that the mandatory textbooks and accompanied teacher’s books with lesson plans only serve as the backbone based on which they should utilize their own creativity to devise appropriate lessons and activities to suit the particular class they are teaching, because if these are used rigidly according to a fixed syllabus, their teaching is no more than mechanical repetition year in and year out, which is extremely boring and ineffective, as has been generally observed at different levels of the educational system.

## 4.3 Teaching, Learning and Testing

Along with re-training of existing teachers of English, pre-service training must cover the same content so that teachers are better prepared to engage in this endeavor. They need to be effectively trained for teaching to help develop students’ skills and test those skills accordingly.

The learners also need training on how to learn. In most tertiary educational institutions, when new students are admitted, the orientation program normally does not provide sufficient guidance to freshmen on how to study, how to write a term paper or how to answer questions in a oral test. Having left school, most undergraduates are normally unprepared to assume independent studies, and deeply rooted in traditional ways of teaching and learning as the result of the 12 years of the general education, they tend to experience shocks upon entering college. The orientation program fails to help ease these difficulties so that they can quickly settle in a new social, personal and academic life, and perform well in their undergraduate courses. We teachers of English frequently have to cope with such a situation. Even if we are lucky enough to be allocated some time to talk to freshmen on how to learn English and the requirements of the English courses during the orientation program, it is not enough for students to change their learning habits and quickly adapt to the new style. Active learning, frequent practice and meaningful use of the language learned, the crucial factors in learning a foreign language, must be cultivated from the very beginning, i.e. as soon as children at elementary school are exposed to the language, and subsequently maintained throughout their school life.

Apart from teaching and learning, testing must be modified as well. Currently, Vietnamese learners of English are tested with papers containing mostly or entirely Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) in the form of an *Achievement Test*, not a *Proficiency Test*. If they are required to give short or long answers to a reading or writing task, they do it on paper, i.e. in written form. Listening tests are administered where technical facilities allow, but speaking is always a problem, since it takes time, and there are not enough teachers to administer the test while the number of students to be tested is huge. Consequently, speaking test is often excluded, both at school and college. While much advocacy and training on the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) is given so as to improve learners’ communicative competence, as intended by educational policy-makers and educators in both countries, there is a mismatch between teaching, learning and testing (Hoang, 2008). Such is human nature that people do not pay much attention to learning what is not going to be tested, which is worsened under the influence of the widespread test-driven approach in both countries. To encourage learners to practice speaking and improve their oral skills, tests, therefore, must include the speaking part in a manageable way. The speaking part must give more credits to learners’ ability to make themselves understood in successful communicative undertaking rather than solely count how many grammatical or lexical errors they make and deduct their points accordingly. Mistakes, to a considerable extent, among children, even when they are learning their native language, must be tolerated and gradually remedied rather than rebuked, and this is more so in the case of a foreign language like English.

Recently, in an effort to make the test scores comparable and recognizable, numerous schools and higher educational institutions in Vietnam have made use of international testing systems, such as TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS. If the official test papers are not possible due to their costs, they make the so-called ‘in-house’ TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS tests. There have been countless debates on the validity and legality of these ‘in-house’ tests, in which I am not going to get involved in this paper. What I would like to caution about is their suitability to the current situation of English learning in Vietnam.

It should be born in mind that TOEFL, TOEIC or IETLS are *proficiency tests* primarily intended to assess the language proficiency of applicants to certain undergraduate and graduate programs at college in an English speaking country like the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia. Later, some particular occupations can make use of those tests for their staff recruitment, such as Vietnam Airlines using TOEIC in recruiting their flight crew, which is understandable. If these are going to be used officially in Vietnam educational system, teaching must be modified to follow suit, i.e. teaching must shift from *achievement-focused* to *proficiency-focused.* This does not mean I am in favor of the test-driven approach. What I mean is while teaching, equal attention must be paid to the development of all the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, and above all, development of learners’ overall language competence, apart from building their capacity to continue independent learning for the rest of their life. Also, before they can be used, they need to be adapted, because not everything needed for an English-as-the-first- or -second-language environment is equally necessary or as important in an EFL context, as Dr. Le Hung Tien and Dr. Le Van Canh of our ULIS have emphasized on several occasions (personal communication).

The same requirements apply to the use of the CEFR. The Common European Framework of Reference, or CEFR for short, as its name clearly indicates, is a framework of reference to make the assessment of language proficiency comparable and easily recognizeable across European countries to allow for mobility of labor, for instance. It contains descriptors or features which are vital for an European citizen when moving from country to country in Europe, but they may not be so in the Vietnamese context. Also, it is by no means a standardized test like TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS. Therefore, now that it has been used in Vietnam educational system to determine the outcome levels English learners should achieve, it is truly high time that it was reviewed, modified and adapted to the actual situation in the country. Especially, as has been intended, Vietnamese children should reach Level A1 upon completion of elementary school. What exactly this means to make the target attainable to Vietnamese children must be clarified in the adapted version of CEFR. The research project on CEFR use in Vietnam being undertaken by a group at Hanoi University needs to see to this issue.

Another issue to be considered with the use of CEFR is that among the four language skills, naturally, a person may be good at some skills while he/she is less fluent in others. For example, he/she can be at Level B2 in terms of reading and writing, but listening can be at Level A1, and speaking at A2. What exact levels for each skill that learners in Vietnam should reach as their learning outcomes after each level of schooling is therefore worth considering, particularly with young children at elementary school.

With regards to the ‘in-house’ tests referred to above, current debates argue that the test scores are valid only institutionally, i.e. within the school where it is administered. Outsiders have not recognized them as equivalent to scores of true, copyrighted international tests officially administered by licenced agencies. Such debates will continue for years to come. I believe that in anticipation and prevention, the Government and MOET must exercise their control of quality and define what can serve as the official proof of language proficiency recognized by employers, educational service providers, or the market for short. Otherwise, the same situation with the uncontrollable quality of the A, B, C certificates several years ago will inevitably recur. ‘In-house’ tests may continue to be used institutionally, but before they can be officially recognized, careful research must be conducted to verify their validity and determine their comparability with other international standardized tests. This is exactly the research which has been done with the TEPS at SNU (Choi, 1999). As a result, its validity has been confirmed, and it is widely recognized and administered in the country and 8 others, including Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Mongolia. Even so, TEPS still needs several more years to be recognized on a wider international scale.

## 4.4 Teaching ESP vs. Teaching Subject Matter Courses in English

For several decades, the debate on whether to teach ESP (English for Specific Purposes) or to use English to teach subject matter courses (abbreviated as ESMC – English in Subject Matter Courses – my coinage), and which of them should offer students more benefits in terms of English proficiency and knowledge of the subject matter has been running on end and answers have varied from one extreme to the other.

Supporters of the former tend to argue that before students can engage in subject matter studies using English as the sole or partial medium of instruction (English-only, or English in bilingual mode, along with the native language), they need a period of transition and preparation – transition from general English for everyday communication to English for their professional, academic or vocational purposes, and getting prepared to cope with the particular vocabulary, jargons, structure, style and register of such a specific language. Within this group of supporters, some believe that the 14-credit English course for undergraduates at Vietnam tertiary institutions at present should comprise a proportionate balance of both GE (General English) and ESP, while others maintain that since students do not enter college with no English at all – in fact they either have taken a 3-year English program at high school or the 7-year English program at middle and high school – they can start with ESP in an incremental way from their first day at college. ESP must be the unique strength and trademark which characterizes university education as distinct from general courses provided earlier at school or elsewhere in various language centers or *hagwon-like* institutions in the country, they add. They believe in the benefits ESP has to offer to students, as pointed out by Munby (1978), Kennedy and Bolitho (1984), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Robinson (1991), Anthony (1997), Dudley-Evans (1998), amongst others, and illustrated in the following excerpt from Fiorito (2005):

ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures… English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. As a matter of fact, ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation. The students' abilities in their subject-matter fields, in turn, improve their ability to acquire English. Subject-matter knowledge gives them the context they need to understand the English of the classroom. In the ESP class, students are shown how the subject-matter content is expressed in English. The teacher can make the most of the students' knowledge of the subject matter, thus helping them learn English faster.

The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. Students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts[[12]](#footnote-13).

By contrast, believers in the latter approach, i.e. to use English to teach subject matter courses (ESMC) claim that the 14-credit English program is not a sufficiently long to provide any in-depth ESP training; that ESP is merely the issue of discipline-specific vocabulary and terminology, which can be accumulated by the learners themselves through professional dictionaries and materials once they have achieved a satisfactory level of GE and developed necessary competencies for independent learning. They claim that ESP teachers are primarily teachers of English with little, or insufficient knowledge of the subject matter, which prevents them from providing students with sound and accurate specialized inputs needed in students’ discipline or profession. This is true – many ESP teachers have experienced difficulties giving learners the exact jargons and Vietnamese equivalents used in the field, and ended up explaining specialized concepts and terminologies in plain GE or General Vietnamese language. In such a way, misinformation or incorrect explanation is inevitable.

The position of these proponents is, therefore, that teachers of English solely focus on improving students’ GE, leaving the job of ESP to subject matter teachers. Once embedded in an English-use environment in the field of their academic interests and professional pursuits, students’ English will certainly improve in a meaningful way while simultaneously absorbing discipline-specific knowledge and skills, these proponents argue.

This is precisely one of the justifications for ESMC in Korean and Vietnamese tertiary institutions, even in general schools in Vietnam. In both countries now, subject matter teachers can enjoy certain privileges and incentives, in cash and in kind, if they can deliver their courses in English, as Park (2009:53) reported, “Universities began giving lectures in English to help students improve English competence, and elementary school teachers were recommended to teach students English in only English, even though there were few teachers who could lead the class in English. Colleges and universities preferred to hire professors who could teach courses in English. Most surprisingly, it was reported that a university in South Korea planned to hire a professor who could teach Korean language and literature in English”. A number of teachers have already started teaching Mathematics in English to young elementary school children in Vietnam, and this is also the case at our ULIS’ Foreign Language Specializing School (a high school within the University for students with special aptitude to foreign languages).

Another justification among advocates of ESMC is there have been promising signs from ESMC, and one can feel optimistic about it instead of sonorantly voicing complaints and criticism. Elsewhere in Asia, such a model has worked, as the one witnessed in Singapore – now one of the most popular study destinations among Southeast Asian students, or the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), where the medium of instruction is English, with Arabic used in courses related to the study of Islamic sciences like theology, jurisprudence and ethics.

As one can see, both of these conflicting views do contain positive points to be considered, many of which have been proved by research. ESMC itself has already been responded with complaints, such as the strong criticism by Professor Choi Gwang-mu of KAIST quoted in the article in *The Korea Times* of April 6, 2012 earlier discussed. Others express the same concern, though less bluntly, for instance, “his [President Lee’s] presidential transition team suggested that all the English classes in high schools be taught in English. The presidential nominee’s and his presidential transition team’s obvious interest in ELE [English Language Education] have intensified citizens’ already heated interest in and worries over ELE and started to show side effects such as a strong backlash from teachers and parents” (Kim, 2012). Some are more skeptical, saying “*the basic aim is good, but I don’t think two or three years will be enough time”* to see substantive changes, or showing negative reactions to plans to teach other classes in English, *“I don’t understand why social studies and science should be taught in English instead of Korean. Wouldn’t that make English a second official language?”*, as reported by [Nathan Schwartzman](http://asiancorrespondent.com/author/nschwartzman/) (2008)[[13]](#footnote-14).

In Vietnam, through personal communication, I have also heard similar concerns from teachers and students alike – some subject matter teachers said they encountered negative reactions from students when they attempted to teach in English for the simple reason that their English was not ‘right and native-like’, and was different from the type of English the students had been accustomed to. Meanwhile, students sighed, saying the subject matter teacher’s English was unpleasant to hear, which disinterested them, and may worsen their listening skill in the long run. It is a true dilema in our country: English teachers are assumed to be incapable of providing professional and discipline-specific inputs, while the subject matter teachers’ English is unwelcomed by students.

Even if the subject teachers’ English is satisfactory, the delivery of the courses in English may not always be successful. In my own case, I am proud to say that my pronunciation is near-native, and some foreigners, after listening to my interpretation in some conferences, approached me with commendation in the form of an inquiry whether I had a program on air. Nevetheless, the course on *Introduction to Semantics* delivered to a group of 15 students, including one Korean student (two other Koreans had abandoned the undergraduate program altogether) last Spring, which was intended to be solely in English, did not turn out the way it should be. Initially, when I talked only in English, I could see they vaguely understood the various abstract semantic concepts and issues presented. I then sandwiched the English lectures with brief summaries and explanations in Vietnamese, encouraged more discussion, and besides required English coursebooks, I asked them to read similar materials in Vietnamese to get better understanding of the subject matter. Some progress was witnessed, with the Korean girl surpassing her Vietnamese peers; still, their English answers to the homework assignments, the take-home and in-class tests contained several mistakes, both in the use of English and in content. The intention *to kill two birds with one stone* fell below expectations. However, it is a relief to see the situation getting brighter with subsequent cohorts of students whose English exceeded that of the first group mentioned above.

Where do I position myself between these extremes? It could be said to be situated somewhere in the middle, or rather, a *blended* approach. In some of my previous discussions on or related to the same topic (2004, 2008, 2011), I have argued for strong collaboration between English and subject matter teachers in delivering English courses and maintaining the use of English for sustainable impacts and improvement. More specifically, in my 2011 paper, the following suggestions were proposed: if ESP is to be continued,

* comprehensive needs analysis must be performed, as ESP would cease to be ESP if not properly based upon the real needs of the learners, the industry and the employers, amongst others, not the needs that managers of the educational institutions and/or their English teaching staff subjectively think the learners should have;
* for education and training programs targeted at specific occupations, such as tour guides, flight attendants, nurses, restaurant wait people, etc., ESP should be inclined to the EVP or EPP branch (English for Vocational or Professional Purposes), as indicated in the ELT tree by Hutchinson and Waters (1987);
* for programs without such visible targets, in order to satisfy the current requirements, ESP should take the EAP approach (English for Academic Purposes).

Now that ESP is disfavored and excluded in many institutions, and ESP may not allow for convenient student assessment using the CEFR while the use of this framework is being advocated, chances for ESP to resume its noteworthy position are even more remote. English teachers are contented with GE teaching only, and the delivery of subject matter courses in English is the responsibility of the subject matter teachers with sufficient English fluency. It is therefore necessary to offer those teachers with a short training program which hopefully can help improve their English pronunciation, but more importantly, the program should equip them with proper methods in using English as the medium of instruction in their professional courses. By the time this paper is drawing to its finalization, I am happy to inform the readers that such a program has been initiated in VNU recently.

In the long run, once GE (General English) has been sufficiently provided through the 10-year English program from Grade 3 to Grade 12, once high school leavers’ English proficiency has been attested, English courses at college then only need to ‘top up’ and/or merely concentrate on English for academic or other specific purposes upon demands without having to start from ABC again, which entails enormous costs and efforts. The undergraduate curriculum would not need to reserve as high as 10% of its duration for English training, and more time could be shifted to important subject matter courses instead, and ESMC could be far more successful.

There are initial problems in ESMC, of course, since nothing is perfect right from the beginning, but the fact that SNU has successfully attracted so many international students and scholars to its undergraduate and graduate courses and various exchange programs is undeniable. This success is partly attributed to SNU’s internationalization of many of its programs by means of English as the medium of instruction delivered by both Korean and foreign scholars. Through my personal communication with undergraduate and graduate students from different countries, including my fellow Vietnamese in and around SNU, I can see their satisfaction with their courses and research conducted in English. A number of them have barely enough Korean language to survive in the host country, since they can use English for their academic undertakings, which is the highest language requirement, and have no imperative need to improve their command of Korean.

It must be admitted that pulling international students to these tertiary educational institutions is by no means the dominant aim of ESMC. In fact, the drive behind ESMC is to create an enabling environment for English proficiency development among the younger generations of the countries right “at home” so that they can use it at ease as a highly critical lever for their academic and career success. Exemplary in our country are leading scholars and experts who could not have reached such reputable positions at home and overseas without a good command of one or several foreign languages. Some of them said, “English may not be the most important foreign language, but it is true that the most important and state-of-the-art scientific knowledge, technological know-how, or business intelligence – whatever field it concerns – is available or given in English. So English is like a weapon, the sooner you seize it, the sooner you have the upper hand” (personal communication).

In a nutshell, Vietnam tertiary institutions are envisioned to do exactly what Korean universities and colleges are doing now in terms of English education. ESP, EAP, or ESMC then, can assume the status they deserve, and this is an issue to be considered by English teachers, educators, educational authorities and policy-makers in their educational curricula and long-term foreign language policies.

## 4.5 Long-term Foreign Language Policies

The last lesson I would like to present in this paper is the need for long-term foreign language policies which should be non-politically biased. The history of English education in particular, and foreign language education in general in both countries reveals similar features. Not only English, but other foreign languages have experienced their ebbs and flows over time due to various reasons, including political ones. For instance, in Korea, the study of European languages suffered substantial decline due to their exclusion from CSAT in the early 1993 (Finch, 2011). Consequently, students enrolled in such foreign language courses had to take double-major, i.e. English alongside the foreign language enrolled, and later they could take the National Teacher’s Examination to get engaged in English teaching. For existing teachers of those ‘unfortunate’ foreign languages, most had to attend a special training program to be converted to English teachers. Foreign languages in Vietnam such as Chinese and Russian and their teachers have experienced the same decline and conversion due to political circumstances and the Government’s foreign language education policy which has met with strong criticism, as ‘MOET’s “English Exclusive” goes against the Party’s foreign policies of multilateralization and diversification’ (Bui, 2009).

What are the consequences of such problems? There are several, I believe, but the most critical one I can see are the lack and the waste of human resources. In time of needs, it can be difficult to find people with good language proficiency to perform imperative tasks. For example, about 5 or 6 years ago, Vietnam badly needed people with good command of the Laotian and Cambodian languages to serve the border demarcation work, but not many could be found. Officials involved in such work had to learn either of these two languages for their job, but few teachers could be identified. For more than a decade now, the influx of Chinese tourists, apart from Chinese business people, students, doctors of traditional medicine, etc., particularly in Vietnam’s northern border provinces, has pushed up demands for Chinese-speaking graduates while supplies are short. Similarly, in the last two years, Russian tourists have come to South Central coastal and Southern provinces in greater numbers, but too few tour guides there can speak Russian. Now that Korean and Japanese investors are among the biggest in the country, and these two languages are among the most favorite foreign languages to Vietnamese students, after English of course, yet almost all conferences or similar events have to be conducted with English-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-English interpretation, since competent Korean-Vietnamese and Japanese-Vietnamese interpreters are rare. It should be noted in passing that interpretation is a special profession of its own, requiring specific aptitude, special training and practice, which means not all people fluent in a certain foreign language can successfully work as interpreters. This is the lack of human resources I am referring to.

On the other hand, a number of experts, specialists and knowledgeable teachers of those “unfortunate” foreign languages had to retire early, if they were close to retirement age. For those who were still young enough to be re-trained, conversion to English teaching was exercised, with their previous command of the foreign language they were specialized in being put aside or totally unused. Meanwhile, the small number of graduates who continue to major in these foreign languages here and there in the country may not see much bright prospect of employment in which the language(s) they learned is/are properly used. This is what I mean by the waste of human resources.

Considering these factors, given the country’s policies to be friends with all nations around the world, to modernize, industrialize the country and to actively integrate in the world’s economy, I echo the recommendations initiated by such authors as Prof. Bui Hien, Prof. Vuong Toan, Prof. Nguyen Duc Ton and Prof. Mai Ngoc Chu in the National Conference on “The Party and Government of Vietnam’s Policies on Language in the Period of Industrialization, Modernization and International Integration” in November 2009 that the Government of Vietnam develop a long-term policy for foreign language education which may sustain in spite of potential impacts of politics in order to ensure that

1. the policy is aligned with the period of industrialization, modernization and international integration;
2. the policy is aligned with the goal of paying respect to, and maintaining conservation of, cultural diversity;
3. English is considered a supplementation to some deficiency which may have appeared in the Vietnamese language in the era of globalization; and
4. English is essential, but it must not be the exclusive one; Vietnam must position herself in the inter-relationship with the region and the world, which means foreign languages other than English cannot be disregarded.

Basically, the view emphasized in these professors’ recommendations is the balance among the major foreign languages needed for the country and ensure the supply of quality human resources in this regards. This is precisely the same call for balance in foreign language education in Korea for very similar reasons (Finch, 2011).

Amidst the country’s international integration, Vietnam is looking out to the world and balanced policies on foreign language education serve such a need. This notwithstanding, Vietnam needs to look inward, too, i.e. attention must be paid to the national language of the majority Kinh (Viet) people and the languages of the other 53 ethnic minority groups. In one of my earlier papers (2010), I called for the need to improve Vietnamese language practice among Vietnamese students to serve academic purposes. For instance, train them more on the use of Vietnamese language to make a good written and oral presentation, how to write a good academic paper like a term assignment, an annual project or a thesis. So far, this has been a weakness among Vietnamese people, including even professors and politicians. Their knowledge and expertise are of course undeniably outstanding, but these may not have developed in tandem with their speaking and writing skills. Not all scholars can have effective pedagogical methods to function as a good teacher, and not all politicians or those in power are effective public speakers, which may sound strange but true. Once I had to translate an article by a reputable professor of history, and his first paragraph took up almost the whole A4-size page with numerous run-on, poorly-connected or grammatically incorrect sentences, which rendered his writing unintelligibly complicated and did put me in deep waters, and he was definitely not the only one. In my interpretation service, I frequently encounter difficulty interpreting people who may talk real long without any clear ideas at all. These are just a few examples of the weakness in the use of Vietnamese language I am referring to. Our local students are naturally proficient users of the language for communication, but using the language to serve particular academic functions is the skill they need to improve and to be assisted. This has been indirectly asserted in a remark by Bui (forthcoming), “the inclusion of too much theoretical knowledge of linguistics, Vietnamese linguistics and literature in the curriculum for Philology Teacher Education while little attention is paid to methods for teaching reading, writing, listening and speaking in current Vietnam educational system is the opposite extreme, which must be addressed soon.” I have observed the existence of a writing center to help students in this regard in a number of universities and colleges in the United States, and in Korea, university curricula also require Korean students to take courses on Korean writing and speaking, such as those at Hanyang University, or courses on Writing in Humanities, Writing in Social Sciences, Speech Communication, Advanced Korean, etc. in SNU. Vietnam needs to do likewise with regards to the use of the national language.

In parallel, the languages of the 53 other siblings of the Viet ethnic group must be preserved and developed, since some of them are already on the verge of extinction. More importantly, local authority officials, educators, teachers, etc., those involved in working with minority groups need to have a certain command of the indigenous languages for better communication and more effective functioning. The political unrest among several groups in the Central Highland in the early years of this century was strong demonstration of the necessity for ethnic language training I am calling for. In other words, the balance among various foreign languages to be taught, and the balance between foreign and domestic languages, including both Vietnamese and minority languages, must be secured in Vietnam’s long-term language policies.

The media, therefore, has a critical role to play here. Educational policies and problems have in recent decades been hot topics of daily conversations among the general public, of frequent coverage in the press, and of high profile in the agenda of the National Assembly sessions, since these policies have immediate impacts on all walks of life, on every single family and individual citizen. The Early English Introduction Program to 3rd Graders (EEIP) is still in its infancy, yet widespread anxiety has already been experienced by couples with young children. MOET’s foreign language policies in general, and this particular EEIP must clarify what is required of, and attainable to, children in each grade and by the time they complete elementary, middle and high school. In spite of some positive push, parental beliefs, over-anxiety and misconceptions have exerted several negative impacts and unnecessary pressure on children, as the Korean experience has strongly proved. The role of the media, therefore, is not only to reflect (and sometimes accidentally ignite) public opinions, debates and unhealthy objections to policies (unhealthy to the national interests, not the interests of some officials in power). Rather, the media has to be a constant companion of policies, a true interpreter of policies (with all the principles and Codes of Conduct of the profession of interpreter fully complied) and a ‘comforter’ to the public in case their worries can be excessive or groundless. Nevertheless, in order for the media to fullfil these functions satisfactorily, it is required that policies be sound, thoroughly considered, fully informed and serving the ultimate interests of the nation and her citizens in the first place.

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

This is the last chapter of my research, in which five areas have been identified as containing good lessons for Vietnam from the comparative study of English education in both countries. As Kim (2012) points out, it is difficult for the Korean government to introduce ELE (English Language Education) policies that satisfy the majority of the citizens while having long-lasting positive effects, and such a gallant attempt will require thorough preparations, including in-depth analyses of the successes or the failures of similar measures taken in the past whether in Korea or in other countries. Vietnam needs to do the same so as to multiply the successes rather than repeating proven failures or falling into the same tunnel.

# CONCLUSION

1. **Recapitulation**

As Chapter One described, English has been introduced into Korea for more than a century. During all those years, English teaching methods have undergone several changes in accordance with worldwide trends in language learning/teaching and the particular needs of the country. The situation of English learning in Korea and the Korean Government’s policies on English education clearly demonstrate their attitudes to the importance of English in which certain successes have been achieved.

Nevertheless, the Koreans have suffered from, and are still experiencing several problems in this regard, such as difficulties caused by the different languages and cultures, competitive university education, or teacher quality. Despite supportive policies and active efforts of the Korean Government, there remain several concerns to be addressed, as Chapter Two presented. These coincide with what the Vietnamese are facing with, the biggest of which include the quality of English teachers and their pedagogical methodologies, the learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and their learning needs and methods, which were discussed in Chapter Three. On this comparative basis, the last chapter proposed five areas of good lessons for Vietnam in order to improve and secure the highest success in foreign language education in general, and English education in particular.

1. **Limitations and Orientations for Further Research**

This paper is by no means a comprehensive analysis of the complexities of English education in Korea due to a number of limitations.

First, my work at VNU did not allow me to spend the whole year on this research as initially intended, so the duration had to be reduced to a mere span of six months, during which each passing day was effectively exploited to the maximal extent possible.

Second, it was impossible for me to conduct official interviews and workshops with on-the-field stakeholders as originally planned. I was lucky to have occasional, informal conversations with Korean partners on the issues from which certain valuable inputs for the study were generated, but it must be admitted that their views may not be highly representative as they should be.

Finally, policies on exclusive rights to access to curriculum content exercised by the majority of Korean tertiary institutions prevented me from retrieving essential information regarding English programs offerred there, which resulted in some inevitable gap in my description and analysis.

As an orientation for further research, I would very much like to make an in-depth investigation into the success factors in English learning among several mountainous ethnic groups in North Vietnam. This idea is originated from various dialogues I have had with Korean as well as Vietnamese academia and government officials, many of whom complain *“Well, our people are so bad English speakers. They can’t learn English. They are worse than our neighbors like the Fillipinos or the Singaporeans”*, so on and so forth. When I went to Sa Pa, a small mountain town yet a popular tourist attraction in Northwest Vietnam, I was surprised to find that many children of the ethnic minorities there such as H’mong and Yao groups, who are normally stereotyped as disadvantaged and less educated groups, could fluently communicate with foreign tourists in very good English. Dr. Le Van Canh, one of my senior professors at ULIS, expressed the same astonishment and interest in finding out why those children could succeed and whether it is true that there are nations or ethnic groups who are better language learners than others, like the popular afore-cited complaint. Personally, I do not think that any particular group may be endowed with better innate language learning aptitude or capacity than others – some Americans even joke that the Americans are the worst foreign language learners in the world for the simple reason that English is spoken globally, so there is no need for them to learn another language. However, these are plainly words of mouth, or groundless presuppositions, while conclusions must be made through research evidence. If possible, Dr. Le Van Canh and I, together with like-minded people, would like to engage in this undertaking, which is envisioned to take substantial time, effort and funding. Such research would definitely add to the body of knowledge in language learning, especially English learning, and help clarify some of the pessimistic myths above.

1. **Final Remarks**

Learning a language other than one’s own mother tongue always meets with some problem or another, no matter how enabling the teacher, the institution, the environment and the materials and facilities are. They may differ in their types, degrees of severity or frequency of occurrence from person to person, from one ethnic group to another, or from country to country, as the Korean and Vietnamese cases have demonstrated. Language learning is far more successful when the learners see their own needs and find interests, benefits and rewards in learning, under certain levels of external pressure. Again the question of how much pressure is sufficient is difficult to answer, but as the paper has discussed, such high pressure from the Governments, the educational authorities, the parents and the society at large that causes excessive obsession, unintended anxiety and potential counter-effects as those experienced by the Korean and Vietnamese children need not be the case. Mitigating those problems for our own children requires appropriate learner-centered policies and proper management and delivery of education in general and English education in particular.

Amid the current globalization process, driven by the needs to supply quality human resources in service of the development of the countries and improvement of people’s life, both the Korean and Vietnamese Governments have enacted policies which mandate English proficiency apart from some other major foreign languages, together with considerable supporting investments and mechanisms to facilitate citizens’ English learning. Yet learning is a long process, with immediate results hardly visible, while learners naturally progress at different paces. There is no short cut, and any attempts to do so are likely to reap failure. One ten-year English education plan may not be enough for the average level of English proficiency among Korean or Vietnamese people to soar sharply, which means we need not feel too pessimistic about the current situation and continue to make life harder for our children in forcing them to spend more time on learning than on other pursuits which benefit both their mental and physical development to become a healthy, productive and well-rounded human. Policies on both national and foreign languages, therefore, should take into careful consideration both long-term directions and goals as well as well specific short-term objectives and immediate measures suitable to the needs and aspirations of the target groups of such policies, i.e. the Korean and Vietnamese people as a whole.

For their part, the Korean and Vietnamese people are advised to understand the Governments’ motivations and purposes behind those policies and act accordingly. Merely complaining about these problems without doing anything to help would not enable us to escape. Rather, the citizens need to see what is expected of them, share the responsibilities, and invest their own efforts in learning English now that it is a must. Among teachers of English, we generally agree that around 70% of success in English learning come from the learners themselves, whereas the teacher, the school, the materials or any other externalities may take credit for 30% maximum. That is what we mean by *act accordingly* on the part of the Korean and Vietnamese people, particularly school children and students. All parties working together for the common goals would serve as the solidarity needed for our success in English learning, be it in Korea or Vietnam.

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# INDEX

approaches, 5, 11, 12, 34

communicate, 7, 11, 19, 27, 28, 39

communication, 3, 11, 18, 20, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 40, 45, 47

communicative, 8, 55, 56

competence, 11, 14, 15, 19, 21, 32, 38, 43, 44, 46

culture, 18, 19, 26, 28, 30, 33

curricula, 3, 5, 11, 12

curricular, 8, 11, 27, 37

curriculum, 7, 8, 11, 21, 22, 40

efficiency, 4, 17

elective, 7, 8, 9

elementary, 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, 21, 33, 34, 36, 41, 43, 44, 46, 50, 54

entrance, 8, 11, 15, 23, 26, 36

English education, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 49, 51

ESP, 2, 5, 45, 46, 48, 55, 56

foreign language, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 22, 31, 32, 43, 49, 50

government, 7, 8, 11, 20, 21, 26, 29, 51, 55

graduation, 8, 10, 15, 32, 36, 37

learning, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46

mandatory, 7, 8, 39, 42

medium of instruction, 11, 31, 37, 45, 48

methodologies, 4, 5, 17

motivation, 15, 34, 37, 38, 46, 54

native speakers, 11, 17, 18, 21, 30, 35, 40

need, 5, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49

parents, 16, 18, 19, 22, 26, 35, 41, 47

policies, 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 38, 39, 42, 49, 50, 51, 54

primary, 8, 19, 20, 34, 55

private, 9, 10, 16, 19, 20, 22, 32

problems, 1, 4, 5, 12, 16, 20, 22, 23, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 38, 39, 49, 50

proficiency, 3, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 34, 37, 40, 41, 44, 45, 49

qualifications, 3, 8, 17, 35, 41

quality, 1, 3, 17, 18, 21, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 41, 42, 44, 50

scores, 10, 12, 17, 20, 38, 43, 44

secondary, 4, 7, 19, 20, 28

similarities, 5, 24, 27, 30, 38

skills, 3, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 21, 34, 42, 43, 44, 46

subject matter, 5, 45, 46, 47, 48

teacher training, 5, 17, 32, 33, 35, 42

teachers of English, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41, 42, 43, 46

teaching, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 32, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 54

tertiary, 3, 4, 10, 32, 38, 42, 45, 46

testing, 2, 5, 42, 43

third graders, 8, 16, 20

Vietnam educational system, 32, 36, 37, 44

**CHỈ DẪN**

**(tương ứng với bảng tiếng Anh – in correspondence with the English index)**

cách tiếp cận, 5, 11, 12, 34

giao tiếp (động từ), 7, 11, 19, 27, 28, 39

giao tiếp (danh từ), 3, 11, 18, 20, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 40, 45, 47

giao tiếp (tính từ), 8, 55, 56

năng lực, 11, 14, 15, 19, 21, 32, 38, 43, 44, 46

văn hóa, 18, 19, 26, 28, 30, 33

chương trình khung (số nhiều), 3, 5, 11, 12

trong chương trình, 8, 11, 27, 37

chương trình khung (số ít), 7, 8, 11, 21, 22, 40

hiệu quả, 4, 17

tự chọn, 7, 8, 9

tiểu học, 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, 21, 33, 34, 36, 41, 43, 44, 46, 50, 54

vào (đại học, cao đẳng), 8, 11, 15, 23, 26, 36

giáo dục tiếng Anh, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 49, 51

ESP (tiếng Anh chuyên ngành), 2, 5, 45, 46, 48, 55, 56

ngoại ngữ, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 22, 31, 32, 43, 49, 50

chính phủ, 7, 8, 11, 20, 21, 26, 29, 51, 55

tốt nghiệp, 8, 10, 15, 32, 36, 37

học, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46

bắt buộc, 7, 8, 39, 42

ngôn ngữ giảng dạy, học tập, 11, 31, 37, 45, 48

phương pháp, 4, 5, 17

động cơ, 15, 34, 37, 38, 46, 54

người bản ngữ, 11, 17, 18, 21, 30, 35, 40

nhu cầu, 5, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49

phụ huynh, 16, 18, 19, 22, 26, 35, 41, 47

chính sách, 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 38, 39, 42, 49, 50, 51, 54

tiểu học, 8, 19, 20, 34, 55

tư nhân, 9, 10, 16, 19, 20, 22, 32

vấn đề, 1, 4, 5, 12, 16, 20, 22, 23, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 38, 39, 49, 50

trình độ thông thạo, 3, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 34, 37, 40, 41, 44, 45, 49

trình độ, văn bằng, 3, 8, 17, 35, 41

chất lượng, 1, 3, 17, 18, 21, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 41, 42, 44, 50

điểm, 10, 12, 17, 20, 38, 43, 44

trung học, 4, 7, 19, 20, 28

tương đồng, 5, 24, 27, 30, 38

kỹ năng, 3, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 21, 34, 42, 43, 44, 46

chuyên môn, 5, 45, 46, 47, 48

đào tạo giáo viên, 5, 17, 32, 33, 35, 42

giáo viên tiếng Anh, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41, 42, 43, 46

giảng dạy, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 32, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 54

bậc đại học, 3, 4, 10, 32, 38, 42, 45, 46

kiểm tra, thi, 2, 5, 42, 43

học sinh lớp ba, 8, 16, 20

hệ thống giáo dục Việt Nam, 32, 36, 37, 44

1. The 2nd NEC: 1963-1972, the 3rd NEC: 1973–1981, the 4th NEC: 1982–1988, the 5th NEC: 1989–1994, the 6th NEC: 1995–1999, and the 7th NEC: 2000 to the present. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Wikipedia, retrieved May 10, 2012. I arrived in the US for my Master program in 1993 amid this media heat. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Reported by Vinh Ha and Ngoc Ha, tuoitreonline, <http://tuoitre.vn/Giao-duc/486194/Day-them-hoc-them-khong-xau.html>, April 9th, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Reported by Vinh Ha and Ngoc Ha, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <http://www.thomasthetankshop.com/thomas-the-tank-shop-232-143-metal_sign_teapots_and_hot_bottoms-replica_metal_signs.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/socialize>, 05 March 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. This pun was used by an American professor from the University of Indianapolis at a workshop on American Popular Culture at our VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities in 1997. *Coke* and *Pepsi* have become two of the most popular beverages to billions of people, especially children virtually everywhere in the world, hence *colanization*, or *cocacolanization*, which sounds much the same as *colonialization*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Vietnam modern educational system established by the French in these colonies of course used French as the medium of instruction, while Vietnamese scholars continued to use spoken Vietnamese and Chinese or Nom (demotic) characters to impart Confucian learning before *quoc ngu (국어)* – the Romanized writing system initiated by the French Jesuit missionary Alexander Rhodes and other Vietnamese missionaries in the early 17th century started to be learned more widely. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Hanoi College of Foreign Languages (HCFL) has recently been expanded into a multidisciplinary tertiary institution under the new name of Hanoi University, while Hanoi Foreign Language Teacher Training College officially established in 1967 as a development of its smaller predecessor is now a VNU constituent bearing the name University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS). Hanoi University, to which this Department of Foreign Languages belonged, was merged with some other institutions in 1993 to become our Vietnam National University, Hanoi. This Department ceased to produce English graduates and focused solely on English training for students of other majors. In 2009, it was relocated to ULIS and merged with some other groups of ULIS English teachers to become the Faculty of English, of which I am the Dean. Currently, our Faculty with about 150 permanent staffs is responsible for English training for all VNU undergraduate and graduate students of majors other than English Teacher Education. Precisely because of this move I had to cancel my KFAS-awarded research program as one of the ISEF 2009-2010 laureates.

   Also note in passing that there may be other translations of the names of these institutions, which certainly causes confusion, e.g. Hanoi University or University of Hanoi, with its predecessor HCFL or Hanoi University of Foreign Studies, while ULIS was formerly known as VNU College of Foreign Languages. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. VNU faculty is required to earn doctoral degrees to achieve VNU target of 65% doctoral degree holders among its staff by 2020 (80% with regards to science, technology and economics), which is truly ambitious (*VNU Development Strategy until 2020*, [http://www.vnu.edu.vn/ home/?C1918](http://www.vnu.edu.vn/%20home/?C1918), retrieved 24 April 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Reported by Vinh Ha and Ngoc Ha, tuoitreonline, <http://tuoitre.vn/Giao-duc/481134/Se-quan-tam-hon-den-van-de-con-nguoi.html>, March 08, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. <http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/teaching-english-for-specific-purposes-esp.html>, May 3, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *Native Speakers Speak on English Education in Korea*, Feb 06, 2008, <http://asiancorrespondent.com/22295/> native-speakers-speak-on-english-education-in-korea [↑](#footnote-ref-14)