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**English Evolution:
Development and Change of Conversational Language Education Policy
in South Korea**

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Dedication

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Abstract

English Evolution: Development and Change of Conversational Language Education Policy in South Korea

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Conversational language instructors as defined by the Korean Immigration Service's E-2 visa category have become a hallmark of foreign language instruction in South Korea, particularly for English. Intended to supplement deficiencies in the language skills and curriculum of local Korean instructors, these instructors are a key source of exposure to the English-speaking cultures of countries such as the United States and Canada. Over the twenty-four year history of the formal categorization of conversation teachers, employment numbers have ranged into the tens of thousands, but have also fluctuated significantly. While factors like the global economic climate and changes of the ruling party in Seoul have impacted demand for teachers, relatively little formal scholarship has evaluated the process of education policy making in this area. This paper identifies the split between public and private education, socio-economic divisions, urban/rural dichotomies, devolution of political authority, and Korea's modernization experience as key factors in the development of conversational education policy. This is

combined with analysis of Korean Immigration Service annual reports on registered foreigners to indicate overall trends in visa issuance to evaluate trends over the course of the program and to discuss the relationship between foreign language education and policy in recent years. As the newly inaugurated Moon Jae-in administration begins to implement its new policy priorities in education, these key factors will continue to influence the success or failure of new policies and will illustrate the continued importance of language education policy in South Korean society.

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Introduction

South Korea distinguished itself internationally due to its rapid rise in economic status during the second half of the 20th century. While this modernization project can trace its origins to the last few years of the Joseon Dynasty and the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula, most of South Korea's development into a modern Asian Tiger occurred after 1960 and saw massive changes in industry, infrastructure, education, and society (Woo 1991). What had been primarily a poorly-educated agricultural country has come to consistently rank in the world's top tiers for education, infrastructure, and GDP per capita, even becoming one of the first past recipients of foreign aid to transition to donor status (Kim 2011). Within this context, the development of the Korean education system into a key facet of modern life is of particular interest. South Korean households rank near the top globally on education expenses. It has some of the highest high school and university graduation rates (despite high school attendance being noncompulsory) and it consistently ranks highly in education performance (Kim & Lee 2010). The social and economic importance of education has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary Korean society (Martin et al 2014).

With roots in Korea's Confucian experiences prior to modernization, education is seen as a means of parents investing in their own future as well as that of their children (Sorensen 1994). Educational attainment is one of the surest paths to advancing, or at least maintaining, socioeconomic status in Korean society, as particularly coveted jobs in South Korean multinational corporations are effectively restricted to graduates of Korea's top universities, and entrance into these universities is contingent upon having the absolute best entrance exam scores and resumes (Lee & Brinton 1996). This results in massive expenditures by parents keen on setting their children up with the best

opportunities for employment and the subsequent ability for these children to house and care for their parents as they grow older and grapple with South Korea's often inadequate social service systems for the elderly (Shin 2016). The costs associated with parental investment in supplementary and private education can become excessive, particularly for those in the middle class (Song 2013). It has been alleged that excessive expenditures on education costs in particular are a major driving factor in South Korea's declining birth rates, as parents feel they would be unable to afford to place two or more children into competitive education programs (Anderson & Kohler 2013).

Korea's obsession with education spans the education spectrum from pre-kindergarten through graduate school, although the nature of the education system and the priorities of students, parents, and educators changes from stage to stage and subject to subject (Kim, Lee & Lee 2005). Early education varies significantly depending on a household's residence and socioeconomic status, with residence in urban areas offering significantly more options for early private education to supplement public kindergarten and early elementary offerings (Kwon 2004). Middle and high school are dominated by preparation for competitive entrance exams for high schools and universities (Lee & Larson 2000). Subject matter overwhelmingly emphasizes subjects covered in these entrance exams, particularly math, science, and languages. University education is significantly different, as from this point students are mostly relieved of the pressures to prepare for another round of entry exams, and due to mandatory military service, major changes, and part-time employment, completion of undergraduate coursework commonly takes over six years (Kim 2005).

One area that sets South Korea apart from the comparable entrance exam systems of neighbors like Japan and China is the relative importance of learning English language. English is a major component of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT),

and its understanding is also of major importance for students interested in studying abroad. English test scores are often included on resumes (Hyams 2015), and English is frequently tested by employers as part of a competitive hiring process at major firms. While other foreign languages such as Chinese or Japanese are offered in schools and are commonly taken by students as a third or fourth language, these are not tested as rigorously during various admissions processes and are more of a resume booster than a core competency.

The importance of English in Korea as a major language of business and industry has its roots in the Korean War, where English language was seen as important for postwar development by both the Korean and American governments in order to ensure that Korean troops were able to cooperatively deploy with their American allies (Shaffer 2017). The ongoing presence of American troops and development aid on the peninsula also provided an economically significant incentive for others such as shop keepers and bartenders to gain at least a basic understanding. Of the major Asian languages, Korean has significantly fewer speakers than Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, or even Japanese, and has very few non-native speakers (Ostler 2005). This puts it at a significant disadvantage when regional business interests are concerned. In order to compensate and simultaneously maintain linguistic peer status with these larger regional languages, contemporary Korean businesses seems to prefer English as a business tongue rather than adopting the language of one of their regional rivals.

Because of the importance of English in the college preparation market, in recent decades the Korean government has prioritized English language in public school classrooms, although the exact degree of support has varied over time. English education begins in elementary school, and most students study it continuously throughout their primary and secondary education. Supplemental private classes are available beginning

from as early as age 3 and are often several times weekly for hours at a time, and English education makes up a major portion of Korea's \$18 billion private education market (Kwaak 2014).

When public and private English education are combined, it represents a market which employs tens of thousands of teachers, both Korean and foreign, and amounts to tens of billions of dollars in education fees and textbook sales. As virtually every Korean public school student studies English in elementary and secondary education, this facet of education affects the development of virtually every Korean student. The use of native speaking English teachers in middle and high schools as well as private academies also almost guarantees each student's exposure to several foreign English teachers over the course of their careers (Jeon & Lee 2006). This represents the first and often only face to face contact that Korean students have with non-Koreans during their childhood years, giving students crucial insight into the world at large, and helping to form their understanding of other peoples and cultures.

In the classroom, in addition to teaching fundamentals like grammar and spelling, these foreign English teachers are expected to act as cultural ambassadors representing their home countries (Barratt & Kontra 2000). As English courses commonly contain lessons on culture, these teachers represent a major factor in the formation of the public perception of English-speaking countries, particularly the United States, which is often the largest single country of origin for native speaking English teachers in South Korea¹. In higher level classes, critical writing and debate exercises often deal with controversial social topics relating to politics, religion, or morality. These are intended to encourage students' critical thinking abilities in their second language, but at the same time teachers

¹ For more detail on market share by top four English native speaking countries, see Figure 3: E-2 Visa Share on page 36.

are free to frame the conceptual discussions in ways that may radically differ from the dominant treatment of these topics within Korean society (DeWaelsche 2015).

Given the size of the industry, it is unsurprising that the Korean government has been an instrumental force in trying to shape or control growth of English education, both inside and outside of the government-run public school system. Some high profile efforts, such as attempts by the government to prohibit or heavily regulate the private education market, have been well analyzed (Kim, G. J. 2002; Kim 2008), but unfortunately the majority of Korean education policy has drawn little attention from those outside the industry itself in Korea. Part of this is a product of the language barrier, as English news media in Korea does not necessarily give a lot of coverage to education issues. Most of the Western academic attention paid to South Korean education has focused more on education theory, or incorporating the Korean experiences into a discussion of Global English. This leaves the education scholar with surprisingly little insight into the mechanics of South Korean English education policy formation, implementation, and history.

A better understanding of Korean education policy is imperative given the fact that both national and regional politics are becoming more important in the development and implementation of contemporary Korean education policy. The direction of Korean national education policy has traditionally been closely contingent upon the educational priorities of the president, allowing them to emphasize or deemphasize programs such as the English Program in Korea (EPIK) which place native speaking English teachers in Korean classrooms (Jeon 2010). In the recent past, the Korean presidency held significant influence in the national implementation of education policy, even on the regional and local levels. This has changed in the 2000's as regional and municipal education superintendents changed from being appointed positions tapped by the president to

regionally or locally elected positions (Cha 2016). This is part of a larger trend in South Korean politics toward devolution of different policy areas from central governmental control to regional or local authorities. A contemporary understanding of this shift in political power from Seoul to the provinces has not been well reflected in academic literature on Korean education, with many works deemed definitive dating to before this policy shift.

As this industry accounts for billions of dollars in education expenditure, affects thousands of teachers in a global market, and has impacted the development of an entire generation of Koreans, adequate treatment of Korean education policy by the academic establishment has a wide range of possible benefits. In particular, better understanding policy implementation and constraints should allow better understanding of past growth and declines of the industry, and can hopefully add clarity to the future of what has been a rapidly changing market.

Assessment of the contemporary state of English education policy and its constraints must begin with a look at the historical development of the Korean education system, the introduction of English language to the peninsula, and the development of the contemporary English education industry. This context helps to clearly identify the key factors which continue to influence Korean education policy today: globalization, socioeconomic division, the urban-rural divide, decentralization, and the private education market. These key factors will then be used to provide interpretive insight to current trends in English teaching educational statistics, largely drawn from immigration data gleaned from the Korean Immigration Service's annual statistical yearbooks. Finally, the evaluation of current research and Korean media coverage of education policy in the context of these trends will be used to identify ongoing challenges to South Korean

English education policy as well as areas of concern for the newly inaugurated Moon Jae-in administration.

History

Understanding the constraints of and influences on contemporary Korean education policy requires some reflection on the historical setting of education on the Korean peninsula. The development of modern education systems from their Joseon era roots incorporated aspects of competing cultures and traditions, drawing from Japanese, Chinese, and Western traditions, and was often shocked by periods of war and violent transition. Given the turbulent first half of the 20th century, the majority of Korean education policy and infrastructure was developed following the conclusion of the Korean War, but the historical legacies of earlier times still impact the view of education today.

Relatedly, while English education today is closely linked with public education and national education policy, the origins and early developments of English education were often independent and privately organized. As these origins and outside influences on English policy have changed over the years, they continue to marshal significant resources into a private education system parallel to and outside the direct control of the Ministry of Education. It is thus useful to look at the historical development of English education independently from that of public education policy in general.

DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Korea's experiences with education during the Joseon era are often seen as the origins of today's modern country-wide education system (Choi 2006b). Drawing upon Confucian Chinese influences, Joseon education was almost exclusively male and was geared towards a meritocratic system of government bureaucracy mediated by a complex examination process. As the imperial civil service examination system primarily

concerned reading, writing, and knowledge of the Confucian classics, these subjects were the main focus of most education in Korea before the modern era (Lim 2007). While foreign languages were not a major focus of education during this time, students would study the Chinese writing system, *hanja*, which was still widely used in government and religion. Education was not compulsory, and was effectively restricted by class or socioeconomic status, resulting in high rates of illiteracy among the poor.

This period was marked by an interesting public/private education system, which is reflective of the current markets for private education (Choi 2006a). A public education system known as *hyanggyo* was developed to teach the male children of the *yangban* class, and teachers were paid and placed by the king throughout the country. However, most teachers were very low level bureaucrats and were paid poorly. This, combined with the rural placement and frequently poor condition of the schools themselves, made this an undesirable position, and the quality of the education provided was not high enough to produce competent candidates for the civil service exam on par with those from particularly wealthy urban students.

This led to the creation of a parallel system of private academies or *seowon*, to which wealthier members of the *yangban* sought to send their sons. The quality of instruction was considered significantly higher, and students were often boarded at the site of the school allowing for them to spend more time dedicated to their studies than students at *seowon*. Additionally, there were typically fewer students studying under a given teacher at these private academies than at the *hyanggyo*. This education system was the dominant form of education in Korea for several hundred years, only changing late in the Joseon era when the Japan-inspired First Gabo Reform ended the civil service examination system in 1894 (Dittrich 2014). These reforms also encouraged the creation of Korea's first forms of Western-style education in Seoul which replaced the traditional

Confucian subjects. The Kwangmu Reforms continued the development of Western-style education institutions, including a number of foreign language academies, some of which were intended to teach government officials English language (Kim-Rivera 2001).

The Japanese colonial period of 1910-1945 marks the beginning of South Korea's implementation of large-scale modern education system, as colonial administrators integrated existing public institutions into a growing public school systems in cities that mimicked the Meiji era schools developed in Japan during the late 19th century (Kim-Rivera 2002). While education was still not compulsory, the form of these public schools looked very similar to today's curriculum, emphasizing math, reading, writing, and history. These education initiatives formed a crucial part of a Japanese assimilation agenda intended to cement obedient control over the newly acquired Korean peninsula by replacing significant swaths of Korean language, culture, and society with their Japanese counterparts. Drawing from Japan's own domestic Meiji-era experiences of social reorganization, this agenda consisted of a "three-stage acculturation process that began in the home, continued in the schools, and was reinforced in society" (Caprio 2011). As such, education at public schools in the colonial era took place in Japanese, and most print media during the period was also published in Japanese. English language education, which had begun with the previous Western-style education reforms in the late 1800's lapsed, and English as a whole was eventually discouraged because of its association with Japan's WWII enemies. It was not until after Korean independence was regained that a country-wide system of modern education taught in Korean and incorporating both urban and rural areas was created.

After halting efforts during the gap between WWII and the Korean War, significant expansion of the Korean education system began during the reconstruction period following the 1953 armistice, as the country strove to develop the resources

necessary to succeed in the hostile environment of the ongoing armistice while surrounded by larger powers such as China, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States (Seth 2002). This eventually saw the development of a comprehensive public education system which is compulsory through middle school, although high school enrollment and graduation rates have surpassed those of many developed countries in which even high school attendance is compulsory. Initially there were no entrance examinations for middle or high schools, and students were assigned by lottery to one of the schools closest to them (Sorensen 1994). The lottery system was designed to encourage equal distribution of resources across school systems, and to ensure equality in education provided across schools, but these prohibitions on entrance examinations were eventually dropped as the high school system diversified to allow different types and tracks such as technical, scientific, or foreign language high schools.

Another formative event in the development of the Korean education system occurred several decades later with the attempted banning by President Chun Do-Hwan of tutoring and private supplemental education like *hagwon* in 1980 (Park 2017). These private academies, intended to supplement students' regular education in special interest areas such as foreign languages, arts, or sports, or to prepare students for particular entrance or technical exams, often operate in the after-school hours or on weekends. Also included in the private education ban was the use of private tutors, either in group sessions or individually in the home. The intention of the ban was to preserve the equality of the public education system, as well as to ensure the investment of scarce resources into fields that drove the domestic consumption economy. This attempt at banning private education ended up being a complete failure as demand was still very high, especially for in-home private tutors, and enforcement proved particularly challenging for the government. The provisions were eventually declared unconstitutional, although there is

still a prohibition on classes for primary or secondary students after 10:00 p.m. (Ripley 2011).

GROWTH OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

When focusing specifically on English, Korea's first experiences with English language and its study occurred with the first visits of American missionaries during the late 19th century (Choi 2006b). Japan, and Korea as well, had been largely closed to outside influence by Europeans and North Americans until the forced opening of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1853. The subsequent Meiji Restoration in Japan spurred the introduction of significant numbers of Americans into the region, as well as a growing interest in Western technology and ideas. Korea continued to remain largely closed to outside influence until Japan applied the Western concept of gunboat diplomacy to Korea during the Ganghwa Island incident of 1875 (Le Mièrè 2011). The subsequent unequal treaty between Korea and Japan exposed Korea to Meiji Japan and its associated Western influences, and was the first step in the eventual colonization of the Korean peninsula by Japan. This opening of Korea to foreigners led to the arrival of the first protestant Christian missionaries in Korea in 1884.

Prior to the Korean War, most Protestant missionaries to Korea were located in what became North Korea, but many of these relocated to the south before or during the war. Protestant missionaries quickly established themselves in the field of education, often combining teaching of more traditional subjects with their proselytizing and church establishment, and English language education quickly became one of their more popular offerings. The missionary legacy still has a significant effect on the Korean education system, as the country had some 293 Christian primary and secondary schools and 40 Christian universities at the beginning of the 21st century (Grayson 2002). A number of

these Christian education institutions are still major players in the English language education market today, emphasizing classroom instruction in English across all subject areas.

Following the Korean War, another major expansion of English language teaching and usage in Korea occurred along with the permanent stationing of US military and American investment in the Korean government's development and modernization initiatives (Collins 2005). With thousands of US troops stationed in bases across Korea committed to defending the southern state against possible attacks from the North, it became apparent to both governments that the interoperability of the two militaries should be prioritized. This created additional security implications for the learning of English by Korean youth, particularly young men headed into their two-year compulsory military service. Additionally, there was the issue of providing for the thousands of American soldiers. This encouraged the learning of English in towns and cities near American bases. The Korean government even began to provide basic English courses for shopkeepers and prostitutes working in close conjunction with the American military.

The need for development and coordination on security matters led to various programs of government assistance by the United States in order to advance Korean education and development. One of the first American initiatives that led specifically to an increase in English language learning and usage was through the Peace Corps (Lee 2016). Over a fifteen year mission stretching from 1966-1981, over 2,000 American Peace Corps volunteers served in South Korea working in education and healthcare. Primarily serving in rural areas, these volunteers worked in schools and clinics to help distribute vaccines and to teach courses on language, agriculture, and other development related topics. At this point in time, most of the Korean population was still rural and relatively undeveloped, and engagement with American Peace Corps volunteers in

villages and schools represented the first, or at least first civilian, American that most Koreans had encountered.

The language and conversation skills that these volunteers provided was the inspiration for a generation of young Koreans who would become the teachers, executives, and leaders for the realization of Korea's push into education modernity (Lee 2014). A number of these young learners were so impressed by their encounters with early Peace Corps volunteers that they dedicated their lives to education, particularly linguistics and English language education in Korea. Many of these students went on to study in American universities, particularly in graduate programs, and now are the heads of English and linguistics departments in a number of top Korean Universities.

While the Peace Corps mission ended in the early 1980's as Korea was beginning to come into its own developmentally, the need for English language instructors was only beginning. Some Peace Corps volunteers stayed on after their assignments and continued teaching in Korea. At the same time, other American educators were traveling to Korea to take positions in the growing network of Korean colleges and universities. During this time, Japan was known more widely as an opportunity for teachers to go and work in high school or university education. This began to change in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Seoul's hosting of the 1988 Olympic Games functioned as a major international success for the Korean government, which used the international attention to portray itself as a newly risen modern state (Park 2009). This, combined with the bursting of the Japanese real estate bubble in the early 1990's, led to increased interest in employment of English teachers in South Korea.

While these factors began to create outside interest in the South Korean education market, simultaneous experimentations with government programs encouraging English teaching began to create today's Korean English teaching market. The early 1990's saw

English education move from being a fringe market predominately controlled by private tutors and *hagwon* into a major factor of public education (Nam 2005), particularly through the creation of two institutions which still largely define the Korean English teaching market today: the E-2 conversational teacher visa and the English Program in Korea (EPIK). These marked the first attempts by the Korean government to prioritize the learning of English throughout the national school system.

The first was the creation by the South Korean government of the E-2 (외국인) visa category in 1993 (Jeon 2012). Known as the conversational foreign language teacher visa, this is a renewable, employer-sponsored one year visa for foreign language teachers that specialize in conversation classes. These are assumed to be native speakers of the language in question, although sometimes the line between native and second speakers is blurred in the case of teachers originating from polyglot countries such as South Africa or the Philippines. This visa is distinct from other teaching such as a professorship, and applicants are required to possess a bachelor's degree (although not necessarily in education or any field related to teaching), and must be able to pass a government background check.

There are no restrictions on the language or country of origin of the applicant, although previous restrictions were written into the law stipulating which countries' inhabitants would be considered native speakers. For English, these were the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and English positions are rarely filled by applicants from outside these countries still today. In order to apply for the E-2 visa, the applicant must already possess a job offer from a Korean school or academy. E-2 visa holders are employed at all levels of the Korean education system, from kindergartens to universities.

It should be noted that E-2 visa holders represent the majority but not all of the native speaking teachers in the market. Some hold varying F-class visas granting permanent residency and unrestricted work privileges, such as for the spouses of Koreans or the extended families of Korean citizens. A few hold temporary D-10 visas for employment in transition between other visa categories, some are Korean citizens who were educated abroad from at least 7th grade through college, and others work illegally after overstaying tourist or other short term visas. While the exact numbers of those employed in these other categories is difficult to know exactly, the E-2 category represents the majority of conversational English teachers.

The second key piece of Korean government involvement in the development of the Korean English teaching market was the creation of the EPIK (Jeon 2010). Begun in 1995, this government initiative within the Ministry of Education's National Institute for International Education (NIIED) is tasked with recruiting, hiring, and placing native speaking English teachers within the public school system. Originally a small program intended to hire teachers for high schools, the program expanded rapidly in the 2000's, including placements in both middle and elementary schools. EPIK program requirements were originally minimal beyond those needed to obtain an E-2 visa, although it still maintains the original restriction specifying the seven acceptable native English speaking countries (Lee, Y. S. 2015). Only citizens of these countries who have studied in their home education system from 7th grade through university are eligible, but only teachers from South Africa are required to prove that their middle and high school education occurred primarily in English (EPIK 2015).

Initially EPIK was intended to place teachers in rural schools that would have difficulty otherwise finding native speaking English teachers, and assisting these schools with the costs of recruitment. At its peak, the program intended to place native speaking

teachers in as many schools as possible throughout the country, including in urban areas such as self-governing cities. While the influence of EPIK has changed with different presidential administration education priorities, its overall influence has waned as some provinces have elected to create their own provincial recruitment and placement programs such as Gyeonggi-do's Gyeonggi English Program in Korea (GEPIK) (Song 2012). This has resulted in EPIK placing a higher priority on the qualifications of its teachers, who must now have a degree in education or certain types of teaching certifications. Nonetheless, EPIK still represents the single largest sponsor of E-2 visa holders and the largest single recruiter of conversational teachers in Korea.

Factors Impacting Korean English Education Policy

While Korean education policy with regard to English language learning has changed over time, there are a number of factors that currently impact the development and implementation of language education policy at all levels of the Korean education system: nationally, provincially, and locally. These factors have been instrumental in both the development of the Korean education system at large and the native speaking English teacher system as employed. While none of these factors is inherently unique to South Korea, the various influences of these factors have jointly created the unique situation confronting English education in South Korea today. Major factors include the globalization and modernization project of Korea, Korea's struggle with socioeconomic divisions in its society, the contrast between its urban and rural areas, trends in provincial devolution of political authority from Seoul, and tensions between public and private education.

SOUTH KOREAN MODERNIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

For much of its history, South Korea has had the misfortune of existing as a small state surrounded by multiple competing great powers (Kelly 2015). Historically more under the influence of China, Korea has been subject to repeated encroachment from Japanese, and to a lesser extent Soviet, intervention during the last century. Despite its dominant historical status as tributary or colony, Korea has long held a proud view of its own culture and society, with aspirations to greatness seen in brief examples such as the short-lived Korean Empire. The end of World War II and Korea's liberation from the Japanese colonial government found a divided peninsula that had made small strides towards industrialization, but was still primarily a poor and undeveloped area. The interwar years saw both sides attempting to leverage support from their great power

benefactors as the rapidly increasing tensions of the new Cold War increased the importance of the peninsula. While the United States was initially more interested in rebuilding Japan than defending South Korea, the introduction of the US as an external Great Power into the region finally provided South Korea with an ally that did not have territorially expansionist plans for the Korean homeland.

Syngman Rhee was the first Korean leader to aggressively court American engagement supporting South Korea, and following the outbreak of the Korean War relied heavily on American military engagement for defense (Millett 2001). When the Korean War ended in an armistice instead of a formal peace treaty, South Korea unexpectedly found itself with thousands of English speaking residents, many of them soldiers, and a major reliance on American aid for reconstruction and development. In the postwar years, the Korean government succeeded in leveraging these security guarantees and aid promises into the growth of export-led heavy industry, combining Japanese restitution payments with non-competitive contracts to supply the US military in its other Asian engagements such as the Vietnam War (Woo 1991). The reinvestment of profits into these heavy industrial companies helped the growth of the *chaebol*, which still control a significant swath of the Korean economy today.

The combination of the South Korean government and business efforts to build heavy industry and exports with development efforts by the United States contributed to inevitable communication issues. Korean may be one of the fifteen most commonly spoken languages, but the vast majority of those speakers reside in either North or South Korea and it is poorly represented within American and European business circles. In this situation English became a natural fit for a business language, and not simply because of the role of American engagement in the region. English, whose initial distribution across the globe was a product of British colonialism, was experiencing a new boom in

international influence and popularity as European colonial structures collapsed and America emerged as the superpower champion of the Western capitalist world (Ostler 2005).

The adoption of English as a major business language by South Korean companies was an attempt to resist the strong influences of other regionally dominant trade languages, and due to the growth of the unique association of English with global finance and business, has generally been a success (Choi 2008). This adoption by businesses led to the beginnings of the commercial, private-sector teaching of English language, and led to particularly lucrative tutoring opportunities for early teachers in Korea. Government prioritization of English learning, such as through the EPIK program and the emphasis of English on entrance exams, is rooted in this key role of English as a language of mediation for international business, and the success of the export core of the Korean economy. In short, the path dependent relationship between the South Korean economy and the United States, as described by Moon and Rhyu (2010), can be expanded to include the continued reliance on English language by South Korean business and academia.

SOCIOECONOMIC STRATIFICATION

Socioeconomic stratification has been a defining aspect of Korean society for most of its existence. Although the forms and rigidity of such strata have changed over time, gaps in income and socioeconomic status continue to impact education access and policy (Byun & Kim 2010). At the origins of the modern Korean education system, education was largely restricted to the *yangban* class, as education was key in attaining government offices, and hereditary lineages largely controlled the distribution of land and authority from generation to generation. While the *yangban* officially lost their standing

in government reforms at the end of the 19th century, some families have maintained significant economic and social status for decades. During the colonial period, the dominant position previously occupied by the *yangban* was taken over by the Japanese colonial government officials and by local collaborators (some of whom came from the *yangban*, as the Korean nobility was incorporated into the Japanese Imperial aristocracy) who controlled significant power and influence within the colonial government.

While all forms of hereditary rank and aristocracy were abolished after the liberation of Korea at the end of World War II, and the subsequent Korean War led to radical reorganizations of landownership, capital, and human resources, Korean society retained a strong affinity for association based on heredity and common origin. Following the Korean War, several businessmen, entrepreneurs, and former nobility were able to find success in developing heavy industries and manufacturing. As these businesses grew and diversified, they came to control significant political influence the South Korean government, as their successes in manufacturing and export were seen as inherently linked to the performance of the Korean economy and the overall success of the Korean development project. Through nepotism, political influence often bordering on corruption, and inheritance, the owners of these *chaebol* have managed to form a relatively static ruling class in contemporary Korea (Kim, H. R. 2002).

While this ruling class and the lowest classes of wage laborers tend to be quite static, there is at least some flexibility within the middle class and those just above and below it, and a major driver of this flexibility is mediated by education attainment (Choi 2006b). While members of the elite class have a close hold on the executive positions in the *chaebol* and their subsequent profits, these large multi-national conglomerates employ thousands of in the mid-level and senior ranks. These corporate positions come with expectations of a lifetime of service and loyalty to the company, but have also

traditionally provided excellent salaries and benefits, effectively guaranteeing the holder's place in the upper middle class ranks or even lower tiers of the elite.

These positions are technically attainable by merit, regardless of an applicant's ancestry or hometown, but the extreme competition for these positions has created an unofficial set of qualifications, the most important two being a degree from one of the country's top three SKY Universities (Seoul National, Korea University, and Yonsei University) or an international, Ivy-league equivalent, and the ability to speak business English (Kim, R. 2013). Because Korea's educational entrance examination system begins in middle school, poor performance at the level of seventh or eighth grade may potentially preclude a student from the ability to attain employment at these highest levels. Thus, many middle-class parents expend large amounts of money on private, supplemental education for their children, through the hopes of giving them a competitive advantage on the sequence of entrance exams that provides the key to maintaining or advancing the family's social status in the next generation (Kim & Lee 2010). Ironically, the entrance examinations that are themselves intended to create an unbiased, merit-based application process have created a system where the wealthier members of the middle and upper classes are able, through tutoring and supplemental education, to use specific expenditures to better the odds of their children's future success.

Because of the implied links between education expenditures and academic performance, and between academic record and socioeconomic standing, the Korean government often cites these relationships as impetus for education policy changes (Kim, C. 2013; Kim 2014). For example, the desire to expand access to English classes and native speaking instructors, particularly for those in poorer or rural areas, was a key justification for the expansion of the EPIK program, and decreasing the necessity of English vocabulary and grammar in supplemental private education as justification for

decreasing the size and weight of the English component of the CSAT. As different presidential regimes have different priorities for reducing socioeconomic inequality, this factor can have significantly different impacts on education policy from administration to administration.

URBAN-RURAL DICHOTOMIES

Near the end of the Joseon Dynasty, the Korean peninsula was primarily rural, with most of the population dispersed throughout many small villages. The first half of the 20th century, which saw Japanese colonization, World War II, and eventually the Korean War, significantly disrupted the traditional lineages and population centers, and set the stage for the industrialization that would drive the urbanization movement in the second half of the century (Rii & Ahn 2002). Although South Korea was still mostly rural at the outbreak of the Korean War, this changed rapidly and continuously over the next half century, until the vast majority of the population resided in major cities. For example, the population within Seoul's official city limits ballooned from 8.4% of the country's population to peak at 24.4%². While South Korea today has become a significantly urban nation, some 17.5%³ of its citizens still live in rural areas which tend to be poor and agricultural.

While the urban/rural dichotomy is associated with the socioeconomic stratification described above, issues of rural education tend to be discussed separately from those of wealth inequality. It is certainly true that rural students are more likely to be poor, and that rural schools are more likely to suffer budget issues than those in urban

² Numbers from Rii & Ahn 2002. Although Seoul's percentage of the total population has fallen a few points since then, it is more from people moving out of Seoul to other major cities within the surrounding area than from citizens returning to rural areas.

³ Numbers from World Bank, but retrieved from Trading Economics: <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-korea/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>

centers. Those residing in rural areas are also less likely to have private alternatives to education such as private elementary or middle schools, or to have many (if any) options available for supplemental *hagwon* lessons, and their residents less likely to be able to afford those services if available. In addition to school budgets, rural schools have been affected by both the population's declining birth rates and continued urbanization, putting significant pressure on rural schools through a shrinking student population (Chandler 2010).

One of the major English education issues affected by urban vs rural residence besides school budgets is that of exposure. Students in Korea's larger cities, which hold the majority of the country's population, are significantly more likely to be exposed to English language through media, culture, and actual contact with English speakers (Ahn 2011). The vast majority of tourists to South Korea only visit major urban areas such as Seoul and Busan, and the majority of English speaking immigrants (short term or permanent residents) also live and work in major cities. This provides urban students with more natural exposure to English conversational usage, as well as a greater incentive for students to study English. This disparity in exposure was a significant factor in the Korean government's desire to expand the EPIK program to all provinces, and also a justification for urban schools experiencing budget pressure to cut paid native speaking teacher positions.

This difference in location continues to be used as justification for supplemental funding to be given towards rural schools in both national and regional educational systems. EPIK cuts have tended to be in urban areas with rural placements continuing. Funding for rural education systems may be more palatable to populist candidates, although the populist political framework seems to be more in favor of reducing the overall importance of English education on a national scale rather than correcting an

urban/rural funding imbalance. This is problematic in that even if English were eliminated from national college entrance examinations, the use of English education to build an educational or career resume is still highly valuable and disadvantages rural students.

DEVOLUTION AND DECENTRALIZATION OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

When Korea returned to democratic governance, decades of authoritarian rule had left a legacy of strong central control within the government (Cotton 1989). Most regional and municipal officials were appointed by the executive branch, allowing the party in power to shape much of the national policy. Furthermore, the vast majority of the government bureaucracy was geographically centralized in Seoul. This gave very little independence to provincial and municipal governments outside Seoul, even when their populations may have had significant differences of political opinion with the government in power in the capital. This was true of education policy as well as other areas. The Ministry of Education in Seoul was able to set specific standards for the country-wide education system, and the president was in charge of appointing regional education superintendents who would control the provincial and municipal education systems operations and policy implementation.

Two trends have consistently progressed in Korean government since the re-establishment of democracy: decentralization and devolution. Both are fundamentally rooted in the problem of Seoul's preeminence in Korean society and government. Through the majority of Korea's modern history, Seoul functioned as the social and political center of the country, drawing a significant number of Korean citizens to relocate from the provinces to the capital city because of its educational and economic opportunities. Like other services and infrastructure, education has also become strongly

centralized within the capital, with education opportunities outshining those of the remainder of the country in both quality and density (Kim & Lee 2006). This has created significant stresses in the capital area as the population density increased, taxing infrastructure and housing systems to the point of occasionally spectacular breakdown, such as the Han River bridge collapse (Lee & Sohn 1995). At the same time the drain of people, particularly the wealthy and educated, from the provincial areas was creating problems for the poorer rural regions which were less able to provide a comparable standard of living.

The policies of decentralization and devolution have thus been implemented to try and reestablish a healthy balance between Seoul, Korea's smaller metropolitan areas, and the provinces. Much discussion has been made about the relocation of major government ministries outside of the Seoul area, with the building and development of new semi-rural government complexes intended to both drive economic development of rural areas and encourage (or in some cases mandate) the relocation of Seoul bureaucrats outward to the provinces (Park 2008). Relocation plans have included, or at least discussed, the movement of national ministries, government organizations such as the Korea Foundation, and major universities. These plans have not been without public resistance to the idea, as many Seoul inhabitants have little desire to move to the provinces, and the infrastructure and services surrounding these new government complexes is sometimes lacking.

A similar policy of devolution of political authority has been implemented, returning autonomy to many municipal and provincial offices (Lee 2009). A large number of previously appointed positions were changed to be directly elected by their appropriate constituencies, such as city mayors and various regional administrators. One of these positions is that of regional or municipal education superintendent. These heads

of the local education systems are now under direct election, allowing greater local control over the curriculum and implementation of local education policy. However, this increases tensions between the national Ministry of Education and local systems as policy priorities are not necessarily in line. Educators have also expressed reservations as superintendents now bring politics into implementation and those elected are sometimes perceived as less qualified than prior bureaucratic appointees⁴.

PARALLEL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

A final factor impacting education policy in Korea is the existence of a well-developed private education system in parallel with public, state-provided education (Byun 2014). This encompasses both private schools which operate semi-independently from the state Ministry of Education and supplemental private education such as *hagwon*. The existence of a private education system dates back to the Joseon era, when *seowon* were developed as a private alternative to government run *hyanggyo*, or Confucian academies intended to prepare students for the national civil service examination (Choi 2006a). As the teachers sent by the government to rural *hyanggyo* were often poorly trained or uninterested in their work, the private *seowon* system originated as a way for wealthier country nobles to prepare their children for government service.

Private elementary, middle, and high schools in South Korea fall into three general categories: religious schools such as Sam Yook run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, international schools which have to meet a specific government requirements for certification and often (but not exclusively) cater to foreigners residing in Korea, and technical schools such as the popular foreign language high schools that emphasize a particular curricular aspect. While private schools are under the oversight of

⁴ This sentiment was expressed to me in person by multiple university professors in Korea, referencing different scandals involving elected education administrators.

the Ministry of Education, they have significantly more leeway in developing curricula and in many cases teach all classes in English. They can be particularly expensive and, in the case of foreign language high schools, often have rigorous entry examination requirements. Criticism has been levied against foreign language schools in particular as elitist institutions, as a disproportionate number of successful applicants to the prestigious SKY universities come from these, rather than public institutions (Yoon 2014).

Private *hagwon*, after school academies and cram schools, are much more prevalent than full-scale day schools and are almost ubiquitously found across the country (Dawson 2010). The cost of attendance can range widely per class, depending on the brand, location, and class hours. The association of these academies with a disproportionate advantage for students from wealthier families has led to different government attempts to regulate the industry. For a time, all private supplemental education, even including tutoring, was banned in the name of equal education opportunity. However, public outcry and the difficulties of enforcing such regulations when tutoring often took place in private residences resulted in the legalization of private education, although it remains regulated in certain ways by the national government. These include restrictions on the number of students allowed per class and the times which private lessons are allowed to be offered. These regulations are still occasionally ignored, particularly in the case of after-hours lessons, but represent attempts by the government to maintain equal access and to protect students from particularly excessive workloads.

The difficulty in lower income families in affording these private supplemental programs has encouraged some schools and school systems to offer supplemental programming through the public school system (Lee 2011). These programs may include after-hours supplemental lessons offered either free or at low cost, competitively priced

kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs, or intensive lessons during school break periods. The goal is for parents to have alternatives to private education that are high quality and affordably priced, but these programs still often require supplementary fees and tend to have significantly higher student to teacher ratios than in private academies.

Current Trends in English Education Statistics

While it can be particularly difficult to assess trends in demand for English education within the Korean populace, one possible proxy for demand can be the number of English teachers working in the country. The number of South Korean nationals teaching English in public schools is more difficult to evaluate, as teachers can be assigned to more than one subject at a school. However, foreign native speaking English teachers are only employed to teach English and can function as an indicator for the number of classes, and by association the demand for English education. The vast majority of these teachers are employed on a particular visa category: the E-2 visa. This is specifically referred to as the conversational language teacher category.

Conveniently, the Ministry of Justice provides yearly reports on visa issuance statistics including a detailed breakdown of E-2 issuance by country of origin⁵. As conversational teachers are required to be native speakers of the language they teach, and by Korean law native speaking is determined by country of origin (Jeon & Lee 2006), these educational statistics allow us to determine how many E-2 visa holders are employed to teach conversational English lessons in South Korea. While the Ministry of Justice numbers do not distinguish between public and private employees, the Ministry of Education publishes figures showing the annual employment of native speakers in the EPIK program which, as the largest employer of public school conversation teachers, can help us to understand the relative proportions of public school teachers within the greater body of E-2 conversational teachers.

⁵ The Korea Immigration service has published annual immigration yearbooks (통계연보) from 1960-present as well as a variety of monthly reports (통계월보) from 2007-present. Unless noted otherwise, the following tables and charts contain information from these yearbooks which can be found here: http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs_003/BoardList.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strFilePath=imm/&strRtnURL=IMM_6070&strNbodCdGbn=&strType=&strAllOrgYn=N

Analysis of these trends can illustrate how demand for teachers has changed over time, and can potentially show associations between other trends in Korean education policy or the impacts of external factors such as presidential administration or economic growth. While these relationships are not necessarily causal or strong enough to predict future demand accurately, the relationships help us to evaluate the impact that future changes or events might have on continued demand for conversational English teachers and for English education in Korea as a whole.

OVERALL E-2 VISA ISSUANCE

Tracking overall visa issuance numbers in Figure 1⁶ from the creation of the E-2 conversational instructor visas from the beginning of the category in 1993 shows that the overall number of visas increased steadily over the first eighteen years of the program, despite numbers falling in 1998 and remaining relatively steady from 2002-2004. The number of conversational teachers peaked in 2010 at 22,800 (21,685 English speakers), and has fallen steadily since then. E-2 visas issued to native speakers from non-English speaking countries usually accounts for between 5-10% of the total, with numbers regularly around, or just above, 1,000. Change in overall numbers from year to year is common, but changing the direction of the trend is much more uncommon. In only five out of the twenty-three year over year changes did the direction of the trend switch from either positive to negative or negative to positive.

The first dip in the E-2 trend occurring around 1998 is likely a product of the Asian Financial Crisis which occurred from 1997-1999. At this point EPIK and government placement of English teachers was still in its early stages, so it did not

⁶ Data for this figure has been compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 1993-2016.

account for a large percentage of conversational teachers. In the private education market, the pressure on household finances would have made spending on private supplemental education difficult, resulting in steep cuts to the population of *hagwon* teachers. While these numbers recovered relatively quickly in the wake of the crisis, hiring was flat during the 2002-2004 interval as the latter years of the Kim Dae-jung administration experimented with “open education” reforms that disrupted the traditional role of standardized testing and stressed a somewhat underfunded national education system (Kim 2004).

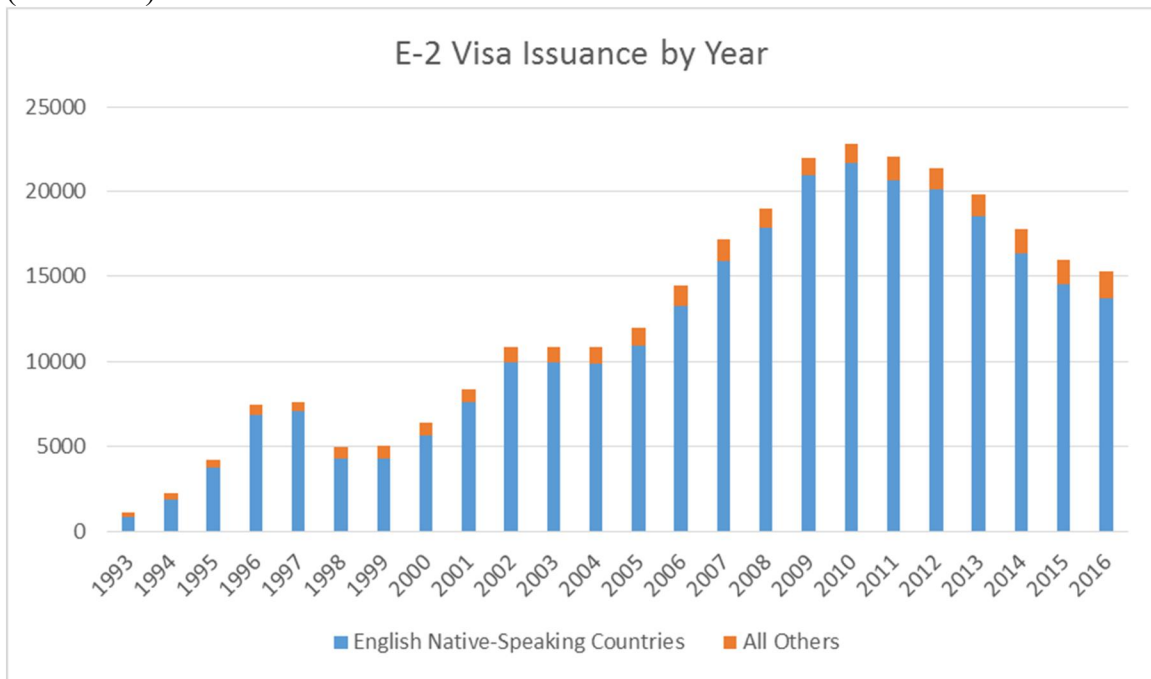


Figure 1: E-2 Visa Issuance by Year

Interestingly, the global financial crisis which occurred around 2007-2008 did not immediately appear to have much of an impact on the hiring rates of conversational teachers, as the increases between 2007 and 2009 are some of the largest in absolute

numbers, as seen in Table 1⁷. The market did not begin to contract until 2011, although the decline has continued through the most recent statistics year available, 2016.

While the E-2 program has now spanned six presidential administrations with the recent election of Moon Jae-in, when evaluating changes in E-2 numbers from administration to administration there are few readily apparent trends. President Kim Young-sam’s administration saw the implementation of the new visa framework and was the only administration to see consecutive job growth all five years. However, the hiring numbers for 1997 already reflect the instability of the coming financial crisis, the effects of which make identifying any particular governmental influences during the Kim Dae-jung administration difficult. Roh Moo-hyun intentionally encouraged additional government emphasis on English education and associated spending, ramping up the EPIK program, with the intention of discouraging spending on English education in the *hagwon* market, but saw little impact of his policies on private spending (Schwartzman 2008).

Changes in E-2 Visas by Year and Presidential Administration																								
Year	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Annual Change	1136	1105	1989	3243	134	-2680	82	1405	1974	2476	-42	40	1139	2437	2759	1780	3041	782	-686	739	1532	2046	1809	696
% Change	n/a	97.3	88.8	76.7	1.79	-35.2	1.7	28.1	30.8	29.5	-0.4	0.4	10.5	20.3	19.1	10.4	16.0	3.6	-3.0	3.3	7.2	10.3	10.2	4.4
President	Kim Young-sam					Kim Dae-jung					Roh Moo-hyun					Lee Myung-bak				Park Geun-hye				
Average Annual	1521 (+66.1%)					651 (+11.0%)					1266 (+10.0%)					836 (+4.7%)				-1521 (-8.0%)				
Term Total	7607 (n/a)					3257 (+42.8)					6333 (+58.3%)					4178 (+24.3%)				-6083 (-28.5%)				

Table 1: Changes in E-2 Visas by Year and Presidential Administration

⁷ Data for this table has been compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 1993-2016. The president for each year was assigned based on the administration that occupied the presidency for the majority of that year.

Despite continued emphasis of English on the CSAT and in the classroom, the South Korean economy has been relatively stagnant since the beginning of the current decade, and persistent budget shortages and subsequent cuts have put pressure on the number of public school teaching jobs in particular (Kalka 2014). The Park administration continued policies intended to pressure the *hagwon* market and focus consumer spending on more economically generative pursuits, resulting in some pressure to that market as well. The most recent Immigration Service reports indicate that the decline in conversational teachers began to level off in 2016, but it remains to be seen if this indicates that the years of a shrinking job market are almost over or if the trend will pick up pace again in 2017.

VARIATION IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

As there are seven countries considered to be home to English native speakers, some variation in visas issued by country of origin is natural from year to year. As noted before, the E-2 category also includes conversation teachers for other languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, and German. As seen in Figure 2⁸, only Chinese and Japanese represent non-English populations within the visa category greater than 100 teachers, with the remaining languages combined only representing about 1.5% of the total and including only a handful of teachers for a given language. The fraction composed of non-English countries of origin, as seen in Figure 1 above, has remained relatively steady with a composition similar to that observed in the 2016 data, with the vast majority being comprised of Chinese teachers, a sizeable minority of Japanese, and a small assortment of others.

⁸ Data for this figure has been compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) section of the 2016 annual yearbook.

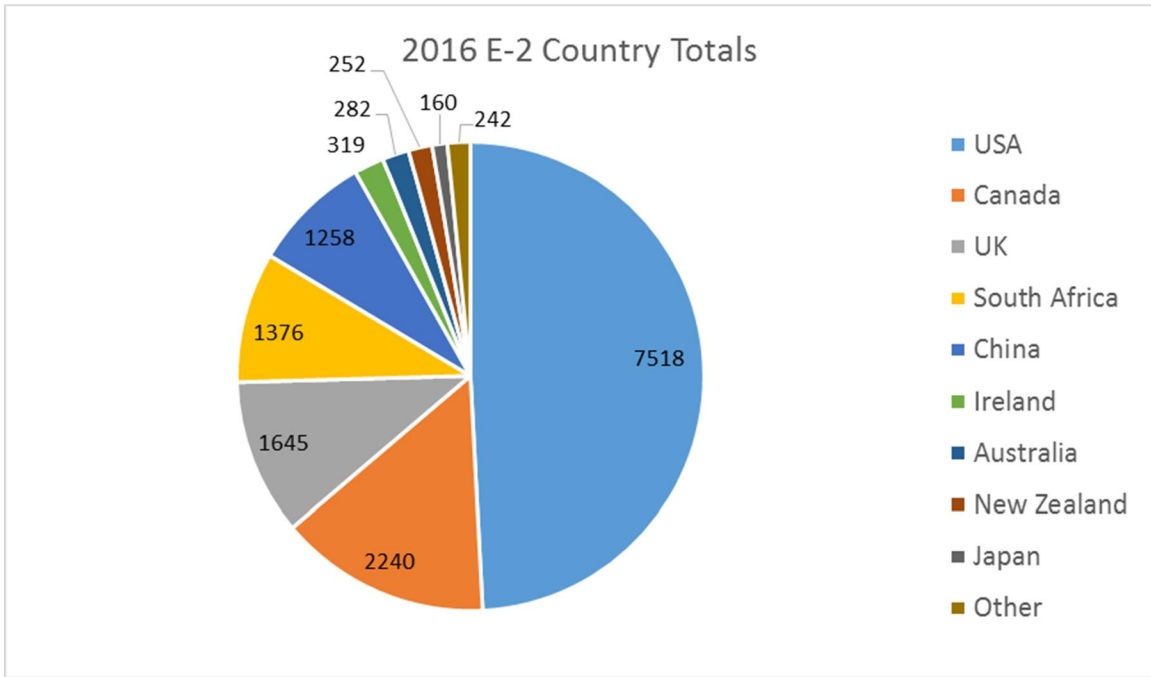


Figure 2: 2016 E-2 Country Totals

However, if it is assumed that teachers are recruited under the premise that skills and qualifications are the determining factor in hiring then variation among these countries of origin should be relatively random or related to the interest that country's citizens have in teaching or working abroad. While it would take much more time and breadth of material than this study can afford to look at each individual country and determine what factors may or may not influence the desirability of teaching in South Korea to its citizens, it is worth noting that there are likely other factors that impact the hiring preferences of employers, and that these may be impacted directly or indirectly by South Korean policy.

No information could readily be determined as to whether the Korean Immigration Service has ever considered, or tried to implement, a quota system for country of origin in regard to the E-2 visas, and information on the evaluation criteria for

applicants to government employment in programs such as EPIK and GEPIK is not readily available to the public. Therefore it is impossible to speculate on the existence of specific country of origin preference or manipulation within those aspects of hiring, although it is entirely possible that country quotas do exist. On the private education side, the visa application process is not begun until after a school has made an offer of employment to a prospective teacher⁹. Assuming that the visa candidate is able to meet all the paperwork obligation by providing diplomas, background checks, and such, as well as pass the requisite health check and drug screening, it is uncommon for applicants to be denied visas. The absence of explicitly selective or discriminatory policies, however, does not mean that there are no policy impacts influencing the selection of teachers from a particular country of origin.

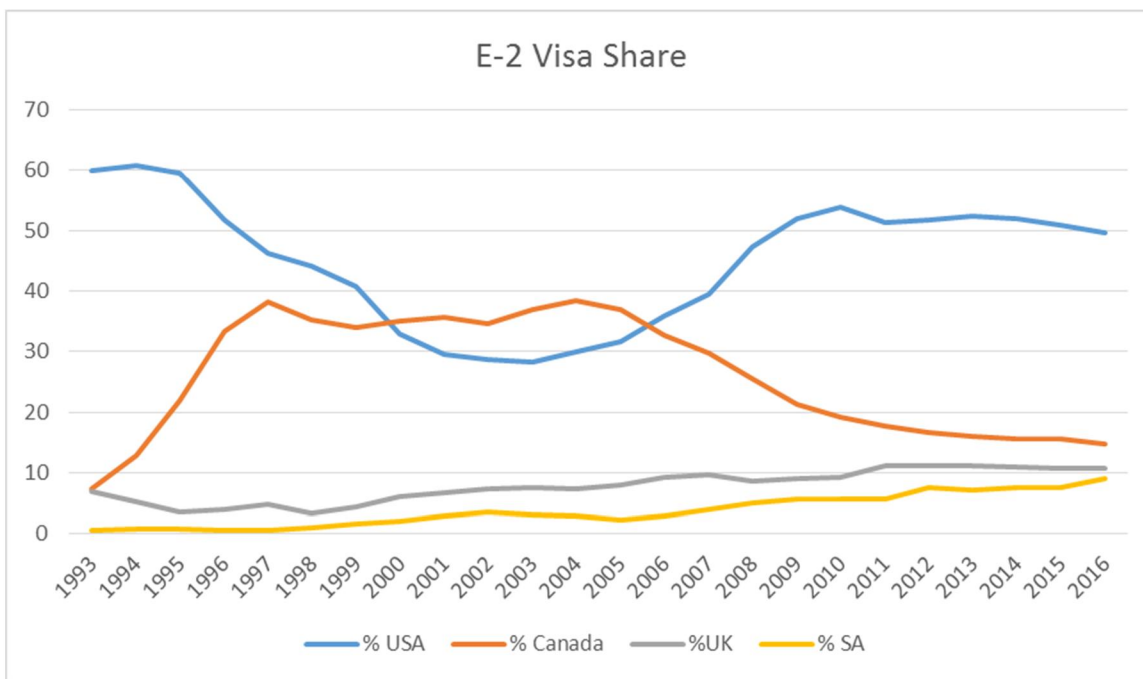


Figure 3: E-2 Visa Shares of Four Large Countries

⁹ Knowledge of the visa application process for *hagwon* teachers is based on two years of work experience at such a school in Gwangju, South Korea.

When looking at relative fluctuations within the countries of origin for English speakers, sizable changes become apparent in a way that is not seen in the fractions of non-English countries, as seen in the four largest sending countries of E-2 teachers in Figure 3¹⁰. Teachers from the US and Canada consistently represent the largest share of the E-2 visas, but significant variations in their relative percentages are apparent, and seem to move in opposite directions. The United Kingdom and South Africa, which also often represent the third and fourth largest countries of origin for E-2 visa holders, while also illustrating some year to year variation, have never fluctuated over more than a few percentage points, and trend along relatively consistent slopes. If only the United States and Canada are isolated, and their paired percentages are graphed in a scatter plot as in Figure 4¹¹, an inverse relationship between the two emerges, although year to year variation keeps the R-squared value from being too high. It seems likely that in the E-2 hiring market, on some level, the choice between an American and a Canadian teacher is viewed as a trade-off.

¹⁰ Data for this figure has been compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 1993-2016. Percentages are of the total number of E-2 visas issued that year.

¹¹ Data for this figure has been compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 1993-2016. Percentages are of the total number of E-2 visas issued that year.

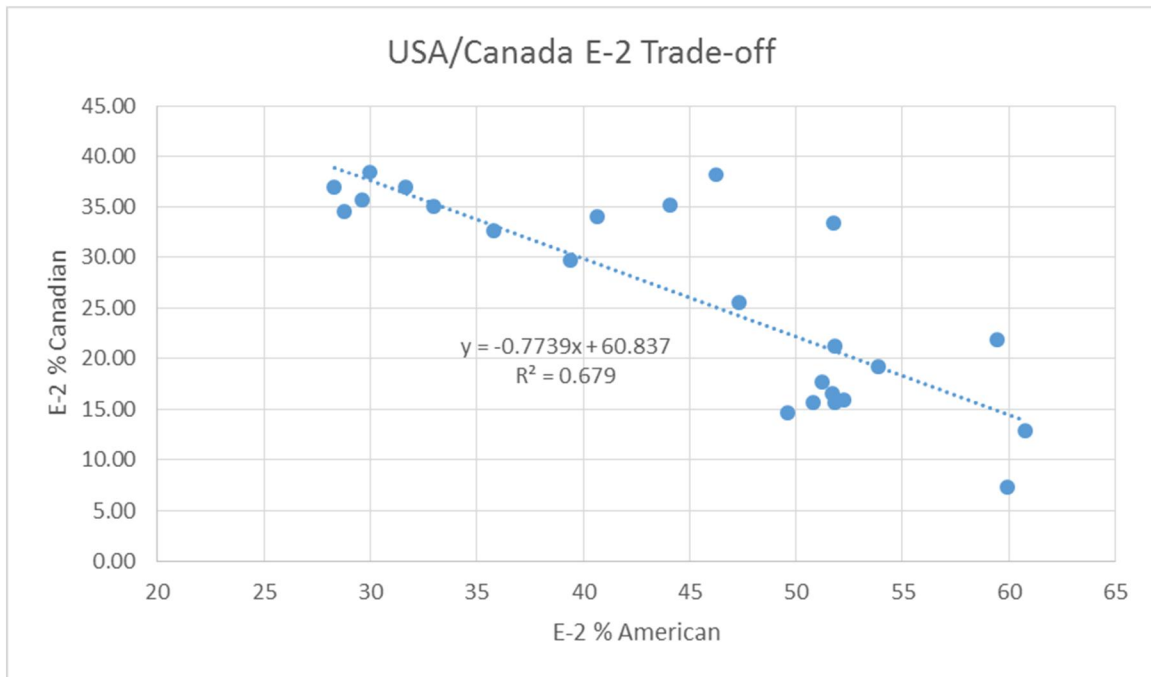


Figure 4: Linear Relationship between US and Canadian E-2 Visa Shares

The bottoming out of the American percentage of E-2 visas in 2003 gives us a possible explanation for this trade-off. The period of that coincides with this minimum was a time of particular Anti-Americanism in South Korea (Bong 2004). The George W. Bush administration and that of President Kim Dae-jung diverged significantly on issues of relating to North Korea, increasing tensions on the peninsula and stressing US-South Korean relations. The accidental killing of two Korean schoolgirls in 2002 sparked severe backlash against the United States, and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 continued to drag on American favorability in South Korea. It was not until both countries transitioned to new presidential administrations that relations began to improve significantly (LaFranchi 2011). In short, there are significant parallels in the trend

between US favorability as measured by Pew polling and the American share of the conversational teaching market, as seen in Figure 5¹².

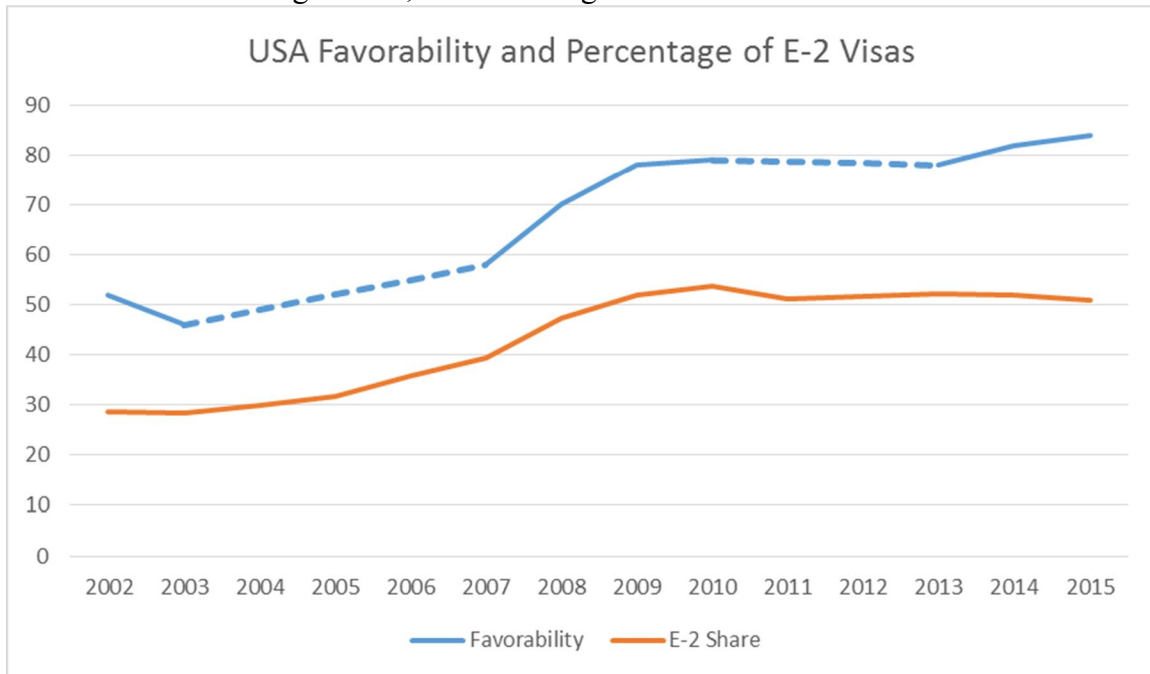


Figure 5: Favorability of USA and American E-2 Visa Share over Time

The particularly strong association between American favorability and American E-2 share, as seen in Figure 6¹³, indicates that an increase or decrease in American favorability is likely to be associated with a parallel increase or decrease in the number of Americans offered jobs in the conversational teaching market. This effect appears to be independent of the overall demand for E-2 jobs, as the association is seen during both

¹² E-2 visa share number for the United States were compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 2002-2015. Percentages are of the total number of E-2 visas issued that year. US favorability rating represents the percentage of Korean citizens polled who held a favorable opinion of the United States. Data comes from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/116/>

¹³ E-2 visa share number for the United States were compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Nationality/Region and Sojourn Status” (국적·지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of annual immigration yearbooks from 2002-2015. Percentages are of the total number of E-2 visas issued that year. US favorability rating represents the percentage of Korean citizens polled who held a favorable opinion of the United States. Data comes from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/116/>

periods of the market's overall expansion or contraction. When combined with the American market share's association with Canada, it also appears that this increase or decrease comes at the cost or benefit of Canada's share in the market rather than others.

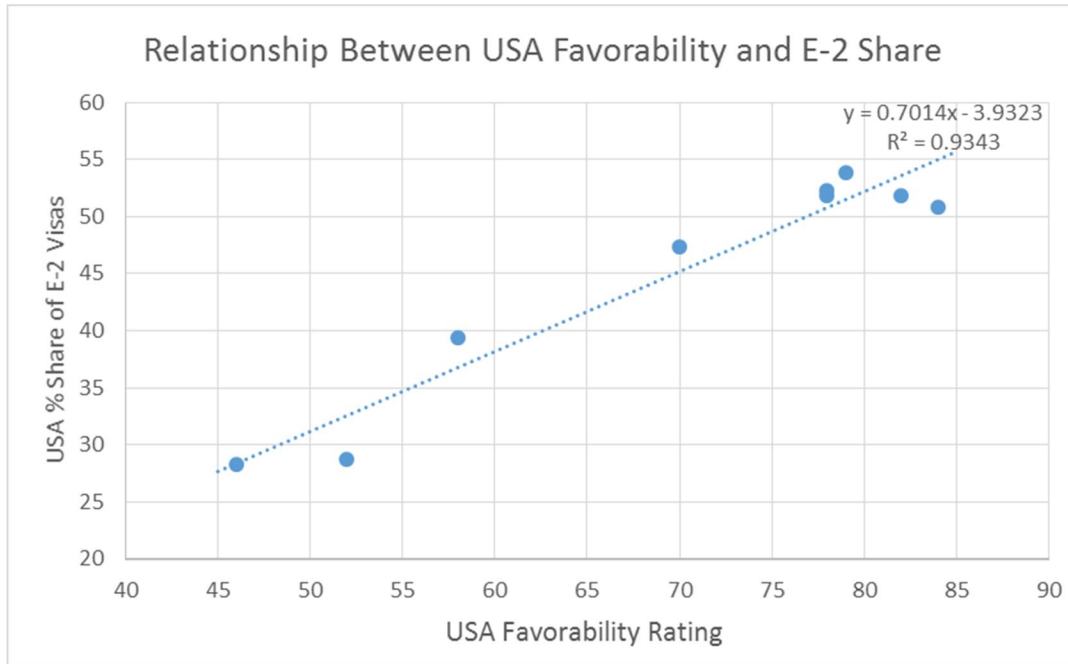


Figure 6: Linear Relationship between USA Favorability and E-2 Share

One possible explanation would be related to the relative desirability of American English in South Korea (Shin 2007). If it becomes politically or socially problematic to hire American teachers due to increased anti-Americanism and international disagreements, the Canadian accent is the most similar and represents the best alternative rather than the less popular British or South African accents. However, when relations improve, American applicants are again favored for these jobs. The dominance of one-year teaching contracts and the relatively high year to year turnover rates of E-2 teaching positions allow for the market to rapidly correct for changes in market demand due to the relative favorability of the United States.

While these results are not necessarily a direct product of intervention by the Ministry of Education, changes in American favorability are directly tied to the diplomatic relationship between the two countries, and any changes in the way that they conduct their foreign policies, especially relative to one another, appears to have an impact on the market for E-2 teachers. Additionally, the design of the E-2 visa teaching market as a temporary, one year contract-based and employer-sponsored format and the associated vulnerabilities and relative lack of legal protections afforded to resident aliens in Korea situate the market in such a way that both government schools and private *hagwon* are able to shift their hiring preferences according to public opinion with little risk or downside. These observations also seem to cast doubt on the notion that schools hire completely based on skills or abilities, as national origin definitely appears to be a factor in the hiring process.

METROPOLITAN AND PROVINCIAL DISTRIBUTION

As one of the major dichotomies in both Korean society in general and education in specific is the divide between urban and rural areas, evaluating the difference in distribution of English teachers across different parts of the country can help to determine which areas of the country are either under or overserved, and to attempt to assess the effectiveness of government policies intending to compensate for rural areas' under-access to language resources and language exposure. Unfortunately, the Korean Immigration Service did not publish statistics covering regional and municipal distribution of foreign residents by visa type until 2008, so there are not as many yearly observations for this comparison as in prior comparisons.

Immigration statistics broken down by foreigner's place of residence do not include details for country of origin (and therefore the language taught) by the E-2 visa

holders, so in evaluating this data we are forced to assume that the distribution of English teachers is relatively uniform. If anything it is likely that most of the non-English and non-Chinese teachers are clustered in the major metropolitan areas like Seoul and Busan, as smaller cities and rural areas are much less likely to have enough demand for foreign language academies teaching these languages leading to a slight inflation of metropolitan numbers.

E-2 Visa Under/Over-Representation in Metropolitan and Provincial Areas										
Metropolitan Area	Gwangju	Daegu	Daejeon		Busan	Seoul	Sejong	Ulsan	Incheon	Metropolitan Subtotal
2015 Population %	3.0	4.8	3.0		6.8	19.5	0.4	2.3	5.7	45.4
2015 E-2 %	3.3	4.5	4.0		7.2	24.8	0.5	2.7	3.6	50.5
Difference	0.3	-0.4	1.0		0.5	5.3	0.1	0.4	-2.0	5.1
2008 Population %	3.0	5.1	3.1		7.2	20.6	n/a	2.2	5.5	46.6
2008 E-2 %	2.3	4.9	3.3		6.9	26.8	n/a	2.5	4.3	50.9
Difference	-0.7	-0.2	0.3		-0.3	6.2	n/a	0.3	-1.2	4.4
Province	Gangwon	Gyeonggi	Gyeongsang-nam	Gyeongsang-buk	Jeolla-nam	Jeolla-buk	Jeju	Chungcheong-nam	Chungcheong-buk	Provincial Subtotal
2015 Population %	3.0	24.4	6.5	5.2	3.5	3.6	1.2	4.1	3.1	54.6
2015 E-2 %	3.2	20.2	5.5	4.5	3.9	3.3	2.0	4.4	2.4	49.5
Difference	0.2	-4.2	-1.0	-0.7	0.4	-0.3	0.8	0.3	-0.7	-5.1
2008 Population %	3.0	23.0	6.5	5.4	3.7	3.6	1.1	4.1	3.1	53.4
2008 E-2 %	3.3	25.1	4.8	3.1	2.6	2.7	1.7	3.6	2.1	49.0
Difference	0.3	2.1	-1.6	-2.3	-1.0	-0.9	0.6	-0.6	-0.9	-4.4

Table 2: E-2 Visa Under/Over-Representation in Metropolitan and Provincial Areas

When the percentages of E-2 visa holders found in each major metropolitan area and province are compared, as in Table 2¹⁴, it appears that the distribution of E-2 visa holders is quite similar to the distribution of Korea’s overall population. This suggests that demand for English education is relatively consistent across the country, with the only major exception being the Seoul area. The apparent over-representation within Seoul

¹⁴ E-2 visa holder distribution by metropolitan area and province was compiled from the “Status of Registered Foreigners by Place of Residence and Sojourn Status” (지역 및 체류자격별 등록외국인 현황) sections of the 2015 and 2008 annual immigration yearbooks. Population figures were calculated from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) database titled “Projected Population by Age(Province) (Population projection)” which can be found here: <http://kosis.kr/eng/statisticsList/kosis.kr/eng>

may be inaccurate, however, as there are a number of people living in the surrounding Gyeonggi province that commute into Seoul for work or education (Richardson & Bae 2014), although boarding schools in the Seoul area also attract students from across the country.

The natural division of Korea's territorial administration between largely rural provinces and its self-governing cities provides a simple proxy for the urban-rural divide (Jee 1997). While KIS statistics break each province down into its constituent parts, it does not provide enough information for an easy separation between which ones of these include the province's larger cities and might be considered "urban." For the purposes of discussion here, the provinces in general will be described as "rural" in comparison to the much larger metropolitan cities, even though the provinces do include a variety of small cities. In the above chart, Sejong City is also noteworthy in that it is the most recently established of the official metropolitan cities and as a planned city does not necessarily match the same statistical trends as other cities. It had not been officially incorporated when KIS regional statistics began to be collected, and its population and number of E-2 residents have both grown steadily over time as more government offices relocated to the area.

Despite frequent media discussions of rural under-representation and one of the stated goals of programs such as EPIK being to expand access to language education in rural areas (Card 2008, Bae 2010), there do not appear to be particularly large shifts in the over or under representation of E-2 visa holders in different provincial or municipal areas, nor have there been any particularly large shifts in the distribution across the country during the years in which more detailed data on provincial and municipal distribution exists. The provinces in general are more likely to have some degree of under-representation, but that may also be from similar phenomena to the

Seoul/Gyeonggi relationship above, but in other localities such as the periphery of Gwangju/Jeolla-nam and Busan/Gyeongsang-nam. However, it would be difficult to determine the extent of students enrolled in academies or even full time public schools outside of their province or municipality of residence. A potentially more illuminative view of urban/rural teaching distribution would have to look at a more detailed provincial context illustrating the distribution of teachers and resources throughout the entire provincial education systems, to see whether provincial areas in close proximity to urban areas were better represented.

Discussion

With the history and critical components of South Korean English education policy now laid out, the question becomes how these different constraints and historical context are likely to continue to evolve and how this will affect the future. The immediate English environment is confronted with an ambiguous power hierarchy between schools, school systems, and the Ministry of Education, where policymaking is no longer strictly the priority of the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, economic challenges have limited the current budgets of schools and changing demographics are likely to further compound the basic factors influencing past education policy such as urban/rural and socioeconomic divisions. As teachers, schools, and public officials plot the future of the Korean education system teachers, students, and parents all look to better understand how the future of Korean English education will develop, and whether past trends are likely to continue into the future.

EDUCATION POLITICS AND CENTRALIZED DECENTRALIZATION

Trends in decentralization of government authority in the last two decades have had significant impacts on education policy in Korea. The Ministry of Education has moved significant quantities of personnel and policymaking out of Seoul and into the country's various provinces, and the conversion of certain high level administrator positions from appointment to election has restored some level influence on education to the people (Park 2008). However, rather than the result of specific changes in education policy and administration, these changes were the product of a larger scheme to redistribute government offices and authority across the country, as well as to deepen the country's adoption of and commitment to democratic government. While these changes were applauded by education reformers and decentralization activists, it is important to

remember that they were neither the result of a particular populist campaign, nor do they represent a larger interest in education decentralization.

Control of education systems on the metropolitan or provincial level is still relatively highly centralized, leading to the characterization of Korea's contemporary education system as a "centralized model of decentralization" (Ho 2006). Ho describes the system as one where teachers and individual schools have wide leeway to design their own lessons and influence student affairs, but issues such as staffing and salaries are strictly controlled by the regional central authorities. This is definitely the case in native speaking English teachers employed through EPIK, who often design their own lessons and have relative freedom to plan classroom activities while their salaries are set by regional offices, the school or schools they work in is decided by the regional office, and the overall number of native speaking teachers in the system is determined by the regional office. The only role that the Ministry of Education plays in this process is the acceptance and vetting of applications to the EPIK program and the provision of a certain amount of funding to subsidize the hiring of native speaking teachers. Regional offices make the final determinations on who and how many to hire, and have the ability to do so outside the EPIK framework as well. Generally speaking, individual schools only have the ability to request teachers and cannot independently hire them.

This does mean that, in conjunction with the election of regional administrators, some insight on hiring trends or the prioritization of English education in a region can be gained from evaluating the priorities and backgrounds of particular candidates for elected office. Regional administrators have been known to prioritize, sometimes parochially, resources and emphasis toward areas where they have a personal interest or have worked in the past. Campaigns to impact English education are therefore more appropriately addressed to regional administrations rather than individual schools or the Ministry of

Education itself. Relatedly, the relative prioritization of English education can vary significantly from that of the President or Education Minister, depending on the regional political climate, curbing the ability of these national officials to significantly direct policy implementation.

FUNDING AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE COMPETITION

One of the most unstable aspects when evaluating the future of conversational English instruction is the role of funding for English education programs. English is unlikely to lose its position as the king of foreign languages in Korea due to its importance in college entrance admissions and international commerce. However, funding and budget instability will make hiring and personnel decision making particularly difficult, especially for the public school market. At present, the Ministry of Education provides financial assistance for the salaries of EPIK teachers placed throughout the country, but regional school systems are expected to pick up some of the total cost. Certain provinces and metropolitan areas such as Seoul and Gyeonggi have at times exited the EPIK program entirely, however, in order to have greater control over the hiring process and application standards (Song 2012). These independent programs appear to be funded entirely out of the regional education office's budget. While these regional offices do receive funding from the national government, there are no funds from the Ministry of Education that are specifically marked for conversational English teachers as through the EPIK program.

Korea's long-term growth prospects look unattractive, with annual GDP growth projected to steadily decline to around 1.5% over the next couple decades¹⁵. Without significant growth of the economy or tax base, it is unlikely funding for English

¹⁵ Based on OECD long-term forecast data, accessed from Knoema at: <https://knoema.com/eqbmq/south-korea-gdp-growth-forecast-2015-2020-and-up-to-2060-data-and-charts>

education programs will significantly increase, and in the presence of economic duress or budget shortfalls, English education by foreign teachers represents an easy place to cut. This has already been seen during budget crises in areas such as Jeollanam-do where teachers have not been paid on time and schools threatened to eliminate positions entirely (Lee, T. H. 2015). Schools and teachers are more vulnerable in areas that have a larger number of public teachers hired independently of national programs like EPIK. The continued existence of budget shortfalls and potential financial duress incentivize both public and private schools to prioritize the hiring of Korean nationals. This is particularly true for junior positions as their wages and benefits are often lower than those of conversational teachers when common benefits such as free housing, visa processing fees, and flight compensation are added to salaries.

Experiments by different national or regional offices that have particular policy objectives can also significantly destabilize the market for conversational English teachers. When regional education offices such as Seoul have tried to create government subsidized or entirely free public programs to compete with expensive private education schemes like kindergartens (Lee, C. 2015), some private employers were forced to significantly modify their hiring needs and budgets in order to continue to compete. These initiatives, like other longer-standing programs like EPIK, always intend to reduce household spending on education, but most programs do not appear to have had much impact on aggregate private education spending.

The criticism that these programs cost the government money without affecting private spending has affected most government programs funding conversation teaching. When combined with the greater politicization of regional education administrations and local elections, it increases uncertainty in the long-term funding of local and regional programs. Overall, the private market is much more stable because of widespread

demand, but these jobs tend to be viewed as inferior by well qualified applicants as the compensation packages and expected workload of private sector employment tend to be less desirable and more variable than for public school jobs. While jobs at an individual *hagwon* may be particularly unstable given the very local economic environment in which they operate, as an industry hiring is somewhat less likely to fluctuate wildly due to economic issues, as demand for English education is seen as highly important and is thus relatively inelastic. Consumers are more likely to change from a more expensive school to a cheaper one than to give up lessons in their entirety.

FUTURE AND PROSPECTIVE MARKET TRENDS

While exact future demand for conversational English teachers is impossible to forecast, the influences of certain contributing factors can be predicted as to how they would likely impact the market itself. For example, the connection between economic performance and the household budgets of Korean consumers of education is important due to its impact on the private *hagwon* market. While English education itself has relatively inelastic demand due to its perceived importance across societal levels, consumers' decision to purchase lessons from a particular franchise or location can be heavily impacted by household budget. Korean consumers, especially in the middle and upper classes, are known to be brand conscious (Kim & Jang 2017), and private English education is seen as a particular form of conspicuous spending. For example, premium academies use the buses and vans that transport children to and from their lessons as a form of advertising: newer and nicer transportation is plastered with expensive advertisements, often composed of large color photos of the teachers at the school allowing friends and neighbors to see exactly where these students are being educated.

From the prospective teacher's perspective, the market is likely to continue to become more competitive, particularly for the more coveted public school positions. While overall interest has fallen in some sending countries such as the United States, where falling unemployment rates have decreased the surplus population of job seekers willing to consider overseas employment, the number of jobs available through flagship programs such as EPIK has fallen significantly from their peak, increasing the applicant to job ratio¹⁶. Instead, interest in teaching jobs from sending countries with lower job rates and incomes at home has grown significantly, resulting in an increasing application volume from countries like South Africa.

Hagwon jobs are still readily available, especially those sought through the services of private recruiters, but salaries for these positions have been virtually unchanged for almost two decades. Private academies have also begun to cut benefits in recent years, removing options such as the return flight ticket or transferring teachers from the more expensive national health insurance to cheaper private plans. It seems unlikely that these compensation packages will grow at any point in the near future.

Criticisms of conversational teaching programs, particularly during the boom years of the late 2000's, often focused on the perceived under-qualification of teachers (Jeon 2010). As conversational teaching does not traditionally involve much grammar, teachers were valued most for their native language abilities to promote natural and smooth conversation. Teachers could be easily hired without any kind of background in English language education or even education in general, as the only basic qualification was to have a bachelor's degree from an institution in an English native speaking

¹⁶ While EPIK does not release official figures on job to applicant ratio, industry blogger Waegukin regularly discusses this topic and lists the most recent estimates as 1 in 6 to 1 in 7 successful applicants, down from 1 in 3 to 1 in 4 just a few years ago. Here is the most recent post on the subject: <http://waegukin.com/whats-going-on-with-epik-these-days-changes-cuts-and-korvia.html>

country. While jobs with no advanced qualifications are still available in private academies, many public school hiring systems have instituted reforms requiring an education degree and/or a foreign language teaching certification. Less qualified applicants will likely continue to have a harder time finding employment if the number of jobs available continues to decrease.

Another issue likely to impact market demand and education policy is the worsening demographic situation in South Korea, where birth rates have fallen significantly below the rate of replacement (Moon 2015). While not immediately evident from Korea's overall population, which continues to see very slight growth due mostly to increases in life expectancy, new births have plummeted over the last two decades. With the population of school-aged children falling every year, the country is rapidly approaching a situation where there are significantly more schools than are needed to educate the population. Fewer students translate to fewer classes and inevitable school consolidation. This more significantly affects rural areas as smaller schools from different towns are combined, increasing the cost and time commitments required to get students to and from school. As fewer English classes are taught, there will naturally be less demand for conversation teachers.

However, this demographic trend impacts English education in another more surprising way: cost of education. The rising costs of both public and private education have been argued as a major impact in the declining birth rates (Anderson & Kohler 2013). With quality education seen as the primary way to maintain or advance a family's socioeconomic status, expenditure on education is seen as an investment in the future of the family. Education costs become a significant portion of the total cost of raising a child, and because of the social importance of education, parents are often unwilling to compromise or curtail their funding of a child's education. Thus, when household

budgets are unable to accommodate the full schooling costs of more than one or two children, these households will carefully avoid having any additional children so as to be able to provide the best possible opportunities for the one or two children that they have.

Past government policies aimed at bringing down the overall costs of education have largely been aimed at the private *hagwon* market, as these lessons can be particularly expensive. Public funding for conversational English programs in schools, as well as additional opportunities such as after school lessons, special vacation camps, or pre-kindergarten classes, have often been justified as intending to decrease the necessity of private expenditures, particularly for poorer families. However, these programs have largely failed to impact the market for private education. This may be because public school programs continue to be seen as inferior because of large class sizes and questionable English language skills of Korean teachers, but also might be compromised by the social benefits of conspicuous consumption of name-brand or high-priced private academies.

If the government is to actually tackle the continued growth of education expenditures it will require significantly more drastic measures. These could take the form of larger increases in public funding, but with projected economic growth rates less than 2% per year and the current financial difficulties of many school systems the prospect of greater funding for conversational teaching or English in general seems poor. Instead, the government may decide to regulate the private education market more aggressively with the intent of driving down demand. While the exact nature of these policies could vary widely and is open to speculation, such a move would have a chilling effect on the native speaking teacher market.

Conclusion

On May 9, 2017, Moon Jae-in was elected president of South Korea, replacing the disgraced Park Geun-hye (Phippen 2017). This transition in government returned the presidency to the center-left Democratic Party¹⁷ for the first time since the back-to-back presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun between 1998 and 2008. As the election came about a year ahead of the regular five year election schedule, it involved a shorter amount of campaigning and lead-up before the election. While President Moon's election was widely spun as a repudiation of former President Park and the conservative Liberty Korea Party¹⁸, the circumstances surrounding the removal of President Park from office would have made it unlikely for the Liberty party to retain the presidency regardless of policies. It should be noted that President Moon won the election with only a plurality of 41.08%¹⁹, and his Democratic party similarly controls only 120 of the 300²⁰ seats in the National Assembly (41.13%), leaving his election and current political position lacking a broad mandate for policy reform.

Despite not having a majority in the National Assembly, the new Moon administration will undoubtedly have a significant impact on education policy through direction to the Ministry of Education and his ability to introduce legislation in the National Assembly itself. While it is too early in the administration to know exactly what kind impact this will be, Moon has already made several aspects of his position on

¹⁷ Korean: 민주당. Korean political parties are much more fluid than those in the United States, and the Democratic party has gone through several different iterations in the last decade. It is not exactly the same Democratic party as when Presidents Kim and Roh headed the presidential tickets, but is the direct successor.

¹⁸ Korean: 자유한국. Formerly Saenuri/새누리 or Hannara/한나라 and still occasionally known by those names.

¹⁹ Official results from the Republic of Korea National Election Commission available here: http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/05_resourcecenter/07_01.jsp

²⁰ Official results from the Republic of Korea National Election Commission available here: http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/05_resourcecenter/07_01.jsp

education clear. Shortly after the election in a statement concerning the reversal of Park's decision to ban private publishing of history textbooks, a Ministry of Education spokesman stated that Moon "remains strongly against Park's education policies," and that the new administration intended to reform a number of different past policies (Bak 2017a).

On the campaign trail, Moon was clear in his support for expansion of free public education, as well as increasing the flexibility of learning programs by reducing the number of core courses and allowing more student input in developing a learning program ("What Moon Jae-in Pledged" 2017). While there have been no specific statements as to which courses could be demoted from core to elective status, it is certainly possible that foreign language instruction could be on the list, a move that would likely be accompanied by a decrease in classes offered as students transition away from what is a somewhat unpopular subject. Additionally, the Moon administration has quickly come out against private high schools, particularly foreign language high schools, pledging to abolish the elite schools which have recently been the source of a disproportionately large share of entrants to the nation's top universities ("Abolishing elite high schools" 2017). While no action has been taken yet on the national level, regional education administrators have already begun to take steps to close autonomous and foreign language schools citing the presidential policy, either closing the special schools or transforming them into standard high schools.

One policy begun during the last days of the Park administration that has continued under President Moon is an ongoing crackdown on schools that employ teachers on E-2 visas illegally to teach subjects other than English conversation (Bak 2017b). Because the E-2 visa is a streamlined process intended to hire teachers for conversational foreign language classes, designed to compensate Korean teacher's

general lack of such abilities or experience, holders are only authorized to teach conversational classes. Those hired to teach other subjects besides English are required to get an E-7 “designated activities” (특정활동) visa. This category is significantly more difficult to obtain, as the visa sponsor has to justify why the position cannot be filled by a Korean citizen and the applicant is required to document how they have specialized skills or training that qualifies them for the position. This has become a problem because a growing number of private schools and *hagwon* offer classes in subjects like science or math that are taught in English language, the idea being that they are offering double value to students by practicing two subject areas at the same time. Neither the Ministry of Education nor the Ministry of Justice has been clear about the scope of the ongoing investigation which has mostly affected teachers and schools in the Seoul area, but an unknown number of deportations of E-2 visa holders has been ordered.

These policies indicate more uncertainty in the English market for all parties, including students, parents, and teachers. However, even with the possibility of new challenges for English education, it seems unlikely that there will be a wholesale collapse of the education market, particularly for private teachers and academies. The long association between English education and high academic achievement encouraged voluntary consumption of English lessons for a large percentage of society, and even in the unlikely event that English is removed from the CSAT, the need for English proficiency in order to study in the United States, as well as for business purposes will continue to drive household money into the private market.

In order to better understand the evolution of education policy, particularly that of English education, much more English language scholarship covering the development and implementation of current policies is necessary, as this will allow both scholars and commentators to assess whether policy is accurately meeting the stated objectives. South

Korean English language media outlets such as the *Korea Times* and *Korea Herald* allow for significant access to news reports in their online archives, but these generally only contain stories that were originally published online. Content before the beginning of digital distribution began in the 2000's is much harder to access, but dedicated archival work could produce a much better synopsis of the legislative origins of what today are now major visa and education policies.

Future scholarship on the topic will need to better incorporate the views and needs of the teachers themselves when evaluating both the policy creation and implementation processes and assessing whether current policies are meeting either their stated goals or the needs of the education system. While past decentralization policies have expanded engagement in education policy, these policies are still largely controlled by regional authorities and from there authority is rarely delegated past individual school administrators. In order for the education system to meet the needs of particularly isolated or disadvantaged communities, it will need to better engage the teachers and schools that serve these populations directly. It is too easy for national and regional administrators to focus simply on the major urban areas and the larger portions of the national electorate. Scholarship that incorporates the views, opinions, and experiences of these individual teachers could be influential in increasing the exposure of their needs, and will provide a more balanced representation of the state of the education system.

Finally, a comparative analysis of education-related visa policies across East Asia would help to provide useful information for scholars and policymakers. South Korea is certainly not the only East Asian country hosting thousands of English teachers, as Japan, China, Taiwan, and others have independent markets that hire English educators. A direct comparison of current policies and past experiences would go particularly far in helping policymakers to avoid trying failed experiments again, and would help researchers to

develop a border perspective on the state of the market and expected impacts of a particular policy. Even though these countries have significantly different governments and education systems, there are inevitably similarities in the way that they approach the immigration aspects of teaching and school regulation that would be beneficial to evaluate in a comparative context. These factors would include the visa sponsorship and application process, what qualifications are demanded, the terms for visa holders, renewal or re-application protocols, and others.

These types of future research, as well as a closer critique on the legal and bureaucratic processes surrounding both education and immigration, are necessary to drive policymaking towards accountability and an evidence base. Unfortunately, too many issues related to the intersection of education and immigration are instead used as an opportunity for political grandstanding or discrimination, such as continued discriminatory policies involving the required HIV and drug testing of E-2 conversation teachers (Keralis 2016). Without a sound statistical and conceptual basis for language education policy, future reforms run the risk of being compromised by unintended consequences, mismanagement, or misapplication, and can continue to waste taxpayer money while providing poor quality education to Korean families and leaving native speaking teachers vulnerable to exploitation.

Given the magnitude of exposure to English language and culture, as well as interactions with non-Korean teachers, programs involving native speaking conversation classes can strongly impact the experiences and consciousness of Korean students who are growing up in an increasingly globalized world. The language skills and real interpersonal interactions provided through conversational lessons are keys to building competent, globally-minded professionals that Korea needs to continue the successes in business, science, and education which have conferred upon it high esteem abroad. This

type of engagement across cultures should be viewed as standard going into the future, as embodied by the common catchphrase of recent US Ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert, “Let’s go together! 같이 갑시다!” (Rangel 2015)

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