

Cultural Policy of English Language Education in South Korea

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Abstract

We aimed to understand how English textbooks in Korea reflect English education policies for improving the English language learners' cultural ability. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, we used the method of analyzing English textbooks because English textbooks are an important tool that most specifically reflects the English policy of a country. This study analyzed middle school English textbooks currently used in Korea. We analyzed nouns/pronouns related to cultures presented in the reading section included in each unit, and compared cultural diversity and cultural identity included in English textbooks in Korea. As a result, it was found that Korea tried to introduce the diverse cultures from the world and promote Korean traditional cultures into the world. So the cultural policy of English education in Korea can be evaluated to be appropriate for cultivating Korea young learners with the cultural capabilities which are essential to be successful leaders in the globalized world.

Keywords: *Language Policy, Globalization, Textbook Analysis, Cultural Contents, Cultural Identity*

1. Introduction

Globalization has become a symbol of modern societies that interact with each other internationally and locally in various areas of social life [1]. The globalization process has been facilitated by the worldwide spread of English [2]. The internationalization of English is characterized not only by the international relations of economic dependence, but also by the structural imbalances between English and other languages linked to various cultural forms [3]. The method of English education and cultural guidance is also an essential issue in the educational contexts, and it is reflected by the establishment of English policy and curriculum content, and by the cultural content of English textbooks.

An important educational agenda for many countries, including South Korea, the question is how to respond to the challenges posed by globalization. One of the many challenges facing Korea is how to teach students the skills which can make them globally capable people: foreign language skills, mathematical logic, scientific thinking, and computer skills [4].

Globalization is characterized by technical skills and English ability. These two are defined by the literacy skills of the global era [5]. Korea is committed to improving its two capabilities to overcome the challenges of the global age. English textbooks have been revised in accordance with the globalization policy set by the government. Textbooks are the starting point for studying the influence of globalization on national identity because important elements of a globalization policy are clearly reflected in the contents of English textbooks. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the textbooks adopted as a reform of each education policy respond to each nation's strategy of globalization: Korea's participation in globalization and their processes of promoting national identity and pride [6, 7, 8].

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Spread of the global era and English language

With the expansion of multinational companies and the development of communication technology, the spread of English has inevitably arrived, and with the influence of internationalization, the expansion of immigration, urban concentration, and the spread of middle and high school education has resulted. As the number of jobs requiring higher education levels has increased, the social structure has changed and the blood-related systems have changed dramatically. Amid these social changes, global companies have come to demand English and technical skills, with each individual doing their best to improve their English skills in order to gain economic benefits, and also the development of their skills has rapidly expanded their access to English.

In other words, "globalization" means the process of interacting with each other in all aspects of society, which has been facilitated and strengthened by the worldwide spread of English. There is no further disagreement that English has become the language of international communication and understanding, causing at the same time the integration of knowledge and economy. English education is also being used as a non-political tool for international and economic development of non-English-speaking countries. The global process is a complex process in which events or decisions in one global village exert enormous influence on events or people elsewhere. Participation in various forms of intellectual interaction that have soared through this process has various consequences for individuals and groups, whose types of influence are inconsistent. Global fever has been a symbol of modern society that interacts with each other internationally and regionally in various areas of social life. English is also a means to strengthen national political power, and the methods and cultural education of English education are educational issues, so it is reflected in the contents of English policy and curriculum contents, and reflected in the cultural contents of English textbooks.

2.2 English textbooks and language policy

The role of English textbooks is to enhance national pride and ethnic identity, to coordinate interests of various ethnic groups and to improve the people's view of globalization. The following theories distinguished between English education and the period of development of English textbooks [3].

2.2.1 Grammar-translation education period: until the early 20th century

The textbooks reflect the educational purpose of educating learners to communicate with people from other countries on a national level and passing on information about their values, culture, literature and institutions. Because it is an era of grammar-translation teaching methods, textbooks set the goal of improving one's native language ability through translation and through comparison of foreign culture and native culture as well as other countries' languages. Textbooks have added a "cultural" approach to language education through introductions to other cultures.

2.2.2 The communicative period after the 1970s

The English textbooks in this period emphasize the ability of individual speakers to communicate with native English speakers. The development of English textbooks reflects the political and economic changes of foreign language learning. Textbooks shift the focus of education from translation to verbal communication or the extensive reading in expanded textbooks for dialogue, with emphasis on practical dialogue and language functions. The national culture is not lost, but it begins to take the form of social dialogue, dialogue style, eating habits and leisure activities.

2.2.3 During the global period after the 1990s

The English textbooks in this period emphasize the national culture, and personal communication skills still exist, but they are expressed in new forms. The 1990s and early 21st century have seen language and culture as the main economic terms. The focus is not only on communicative skills, but also on the issues of the transaction or the consumer's point of view, so one can deliver messages and get the goods one wants.

In order to provide language education suitable for the global era, the research on language policy and culture was actively conducted in the field of education after the 2000s. The Korean government's education policy tried to achieve the goal of nurturing human resources suitable for the global era. The English textbooks

for middle school students, which were written on the basis of the revised curriculum in 1995 and have been used in every school since 2001, were analyzed for the subject composition and cultural content of each textbook. The analysis proved that Korea has developed a language policy that can embrace both national purpose and an international sense of responsibility, thus establishing Korea as a stronger, more advanced and influential nation in the world for the purpose of its globalization strategy. In addition, the English textbooks compiled to achieve these educational goals are considered to play a very positive role in achieving the educational goal of improving national pride by introducing various world cultures to Korea while improving English skills and at the same time introducing Korean values and traditions to the world [9].

English textbooks make an emphasis on highlighting the cultural content of each country. In the case of Chile, English textbooks introduce their own culture resisting American / British culture dominance process [10], Japanese textbooks emphasize Japan's unique culture [11], and Korean English textbooks emphasize Korea's interests and cultural values [9]. Japan's loss of stability in the nation and the family and loss of confidence in the nation's leadership and the future, caused by the economic downturn it suffered during the last decade of economic bubble collapse in the 21st century, has affected English education. According to this study, Japan implemented an English education policy to emphasize its new identity in order to recover its lost decade. The Japanese government's English education policy tried to improve the ability of Japanese learners to understand language and culture through various experiences [11].

The global era is characterized by the development of technical skills and English proficiency, and the two abilities are assessed to be important enough to be evaluated by the literacy skills of the global era, and there was an emphasis on the importance of how Asian countries respond to the challenges of the global age [5].

The analytic results on the English policy reflected in Chinese elementary school English textbooks represent how various Chinese cultures are expressed, how these cultural representations are implemented between China and the global world, and how ideology shown in textbooks affects the recognition of the learners' own culture and foreign cultures. The study pointed out that current English textbooks of China are organized so that students will have a favorable perception of their own culture with too biased a view of foreign cultures [13].

3. Research Methodology

In order to search the cultural policy of English language education in S. Korea, this study focuses on the following research questions like these:

- 1) How is cultural diversity reflected in textbooks and used in classrooms of Korea?
- 2) What is included in the English textbooks of Korea to enhance national pride and national identity while improving a global sense?

For the purpose of this study, middle school English textbooks currently used in Korea were analyzed. The analysis method was carried out through the following analysis steps:

- 1) In the text of each unit, all nouns or pronouns representing the contents of culture were recorded.
- 2) Nouns and pronouns related to culture were classified into five categories. ① person, ② country, city, nationality, language, ③ things (food, clothing, local products, regional specialties, etc.), ④ events (Festival, national holidays, sports, games, etc.) and ⑤ places (location, mountain, sea, etc.).
- 3) Nouns/ pronouns associated with a particular country, region, or continent are recorded. The following are national names mentioned at least once: Korea, Japan, America /Britain (two national names are analyzed as one), Australia, France, China/Taiwan (two national names are analyzed as one), India, the Philippines, Italy and Spain. The following continental names are mentioned at least once: Asia, North America (including Britain), Oceania, South America, Europe (except Britain).

This study analyzed the following English textbooks being currently used in middle schools of South Korea. Middle school English textbooks 1, 2, 3 published by Nengreul publishing company, Dong-A publishing company, and Chunjai publishing company in South Korea.

4. Results

Textbooks analyzed in this study consist of similar formats. One unit contains one reading section. This study analyzed English textbooks of Korea and Japan focusing on the following criteria: 1) Countries referred to by nouns and pronouns in English textbooks of Korea, 2) Continents referred by nouns and pronouns based on the 5 categories in English textbooks of Korea, 3) Ratio of references to Korea and America/Britain in English textbooks of Korea.

Figure 1 shows that the English textbooks of Korea contain various cultural content from many countries in

the world. The total number of the countries whose cultural content is introduced in the English textbooks of Korea is 13.

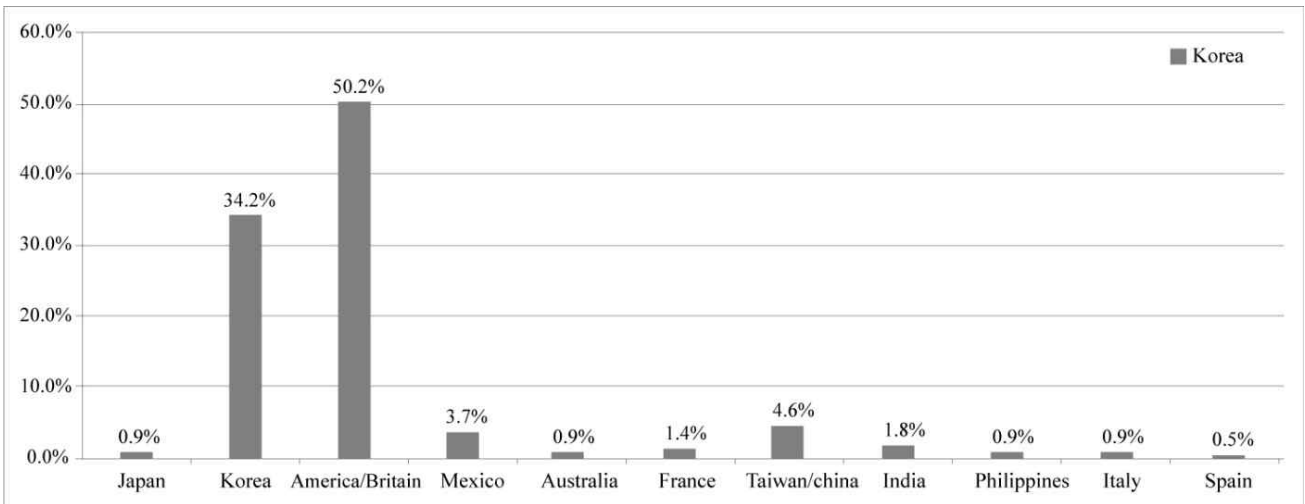


Figure 1. Countries referred by nouns and pronouns in English textbooks of Korea

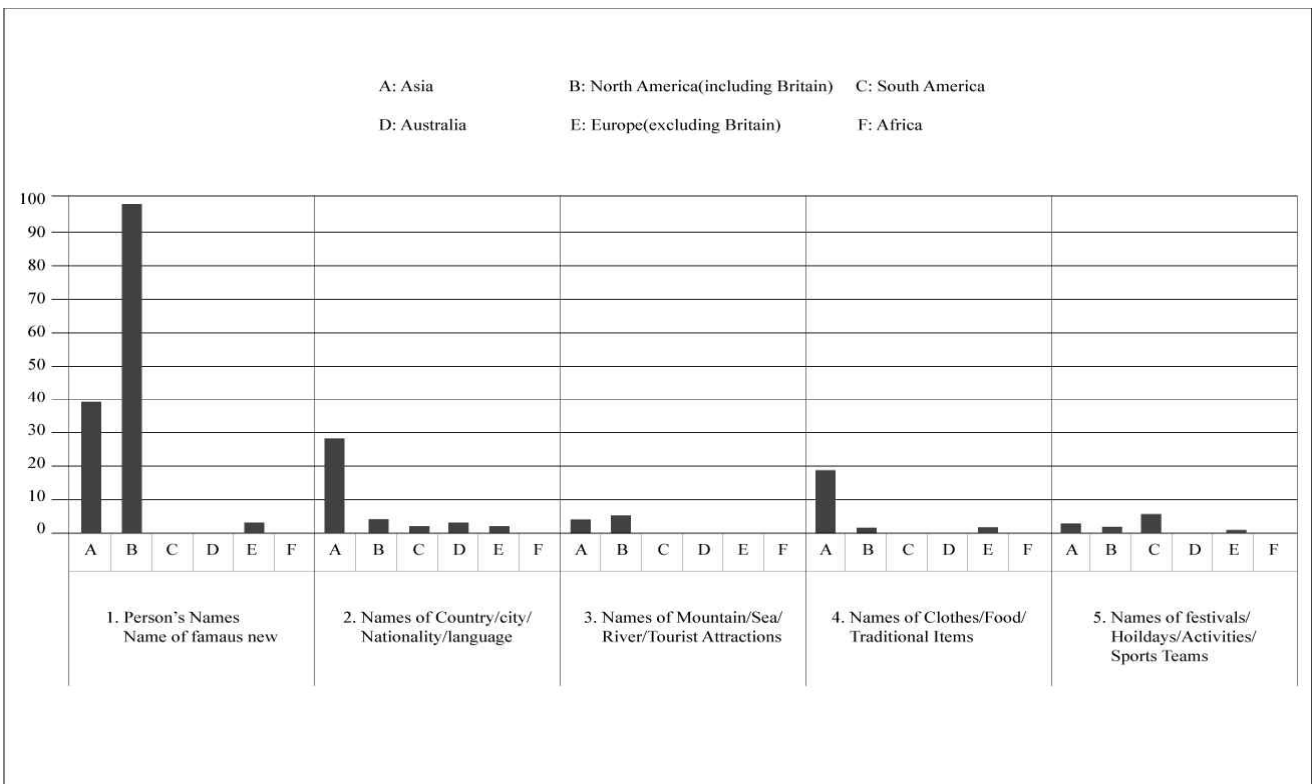


Figure 2. Continents referred by nouns and pronouns based on the 5 categories in English textbooks of Korea

Figure 2 represents the ratio of 6 continents (Asia, North America, South America, Australia, Europe, and Africa) referred by nouns and pronouns based on the 5 categories (① person, ② country, city, nationality, language, ③ things (food, clothing, local products, regional specialties, etc.), ④ events (Festival, national holidays, sports, games, etc.) and ⑤ places (location, mountain, sea, etc.)). Figure 2 shows that the nouns and

pronouns are concentrated on the first category (person), and the ratios of Asia and North America (including Britain) are high. Among the other 4 categories, the nouns and pronouns tend to be focused on Asia, which implies that the cultural contents of English textbooks of Korea need to be diversified enough to include the cultures from not only Asia and North America, but also the other continents.

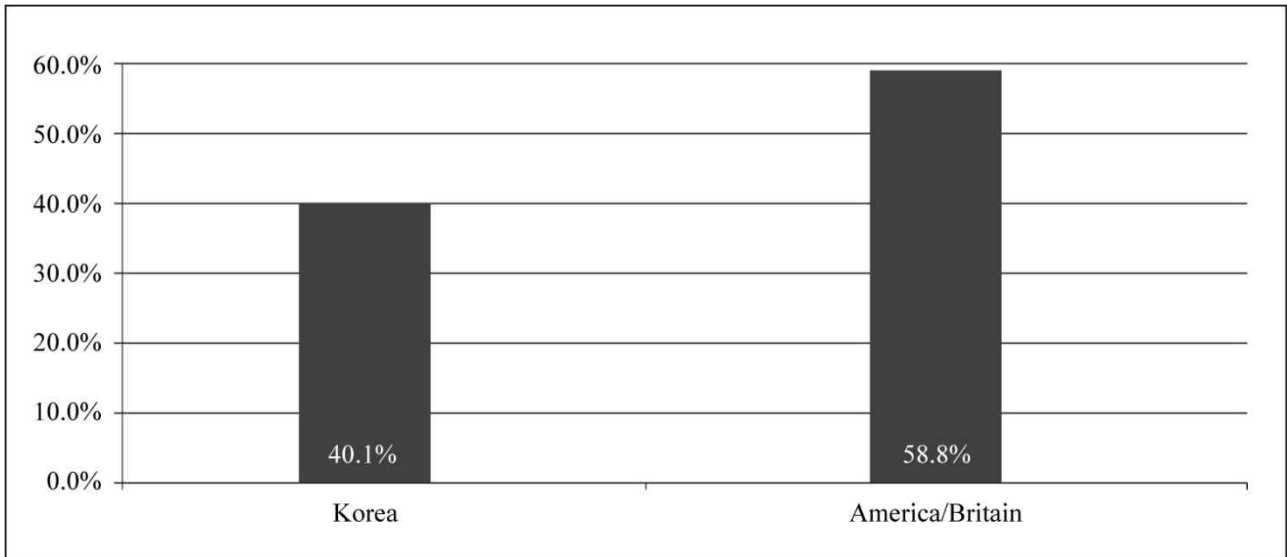


Figure 3. Ratio of references to Korea and America/Britain in Korean English textbooks

Figure 3 shows the ratio of Korea to America/Britain among the "cultural" nouns/ pronouns presented in Korean English textbooks. The remaining 1.1 percent represents the proportion of other countries. As Figure 3 suggests, the words related to "cultural" related to America/Britain are 20 percent higher than those related to Korea. From the results of Figure 3, it can be concluded that South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc. In particular, the cultural content of Korean English textbooks tends to be limited to the white middle class in countries that use English as their first language.

This study shows that the contents of English textbooks emphasize to raise the national pride through introducing Korean traditional and distinguishable cultures focusing on people, food, language, and tourist attractions, etc.

There are some examples for introducing the most respectable people of Korea into the world:

"My Love, the City of Ahn Jung-Geun (N-level 1, Lesson 8)",

"We are so proud of you! John Lee who was a Korean doctor in South Sudan (N-level 1, Lesson 5)",

"Gansong, the man who loved Korean art (C-level 3, lesson 7)",

"Nam Jun Paik, the most famous video artist in the world (C-level 1, lesson 7)",

Also the results of the textbook analysis show the good example for introducing Korean traditional food into the world:

"A: What Korean snack do people from other countries like?"

B: Theokbokki, I think. (N-level 1, Lesson 4)".

Another examples for promoting Korean traditional food are like these:

"TASTE of Korea: Special food for special days (D-level 2, lesson 8)".

"A shopping trip for a Bowl of Salad (N-level 2, lesson 4)". And this lesson introduces the relation between the specific city and its special products; *Chungju-apple trees, Andong-chicken and egg, Jeju-do-fish, Jangheung-berries and greens, Pyeongchang-cow, etc.* It can be found that English textbooks contains the introductions for special constructions of Jeongnang in Jeju-do in order to propagate the superiority of the creative ideas in Korean traditional constructions.

"How was a Jeongnang used? When all the bars are down, it means that the owner is home. When one bar is up and two bars are down, it means "I'll be back soon". When two bars are up and one bar is down, it means, "I'll be back around dinner time". When all the bars are up, it means "I won't be home for a lone time" (C-level 3, lesson 6).

The analytic results of English textbooks contents on Korean traditional cultures represent that English textbooks include the cultural contents for propagating the superiority of Korean spiritual and material traditions, so that the young learner of Korea can cultivate the national pride on Korea and Korean cultures including people, food, achievements, constructions, and holidays, etc.

5. Discussions

What's interesting is that the number of countries in English textbooks of Korea is very diverse. English textbooks in Korea present names or cultural content from 13 countries around the world, including Korea, Japan, America and Britain. However, most countries have very poor presentation rates, so this study will discuss the cultural issues around countries with relatively high presentation rates, such as Korea, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom. In response to the demands of the global era, Korea's openness to the rest of the world has led Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially the culture of the English-American regions. In particular, the cultural contents of Korean English textbooks tend to be limited to the white middle class in countries that use Western English as their first language. So in the future, the cultural contents of English textbooks need to be more diversified so that English textbooks of Korea introduce the foreign cultures from the other countries except America/ Britain. Korea's English education policy was written in such a way as to improve the cultural understanding of young Korean students in order for them to grow up as main players in the globalized society in the 21st century. English textbooks of Korea can be assessed to implement a culture policy suitable for the era of globalization in the 21st century by not only containing various cultural material from various countries, but also by promoting Korea's superior culture in various fields of Korean society, as well as by aiming to foster the pride of Koreans in the world [14, 15, 16].

6. Conclusions

Research Question 1) How is cultural diversity reflected in textbooks and used in classrooms of Korea?

The analytic results of this study show that the English textbooks of Korea contain various cultural content from many countries in the world. From the results of this study, we can conclude that South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc.

Research Question 2) What is included in the English textbooks of Korea to enhance national pride and national identity while improving a global sense?

As part of the Korean government's global strategy, English textbooks tried to propagate Korean excellent cultures including famous people, food, achievements, constructions and spiritual/material values into the world in order to raise the national identity and self-esteem of Koreans. As a result of the study, we can conclude that the cultural policy of English language education in Korea is suitable for achieving the educational goal for cultivating the global capabilities of Korean young learners by introducing various foreign cultures to Korea and at the same time propagating Korean values and traditions to the world [17, 18].

7. Acknowledgement

Funding for this paper was provided by Namseoul University in 2019.

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