

The English Fever in South Korea: Focusing on the Problem of Early English Education

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Abstract

The English language craze in Korea has made people obsessed with English under globalization. From preschoolers to college students, all are busy studying English. Parents also make a great effort to improve their children's English, as early as possible. Ultimately, the problem of English education is that of "constructed reality" into which the success psychology of each Korean is condensed; therefore, it must be viewed from the historical, structural, institutional, hierarchical, and cultural perspectives of Korean society. This paper presents a critical review of the English language craze in Korea from multi-perspectives. It consists of three major sections. The first section briefly discusses English fever in Korea in relation to the early English education. The second section examines some of the major driving forces behind the expansion of English education or English as a cultural capital. The final section analyses the problem of early English education and plans for its solution.

Keywords: English, early education, education fever, cultural capital, globalization

1. Introduction

The English language craze in South Korea has made people obsessed with English according to the logic of globalization. But the significant differences between Korean and English, particularly in sentence structure and morphology (word structure), make it hard for most Koreans to learn English. Nevertheless, Korean society has driven all to learn English, on the simple and naive assumption that anybody can master English, if they study long and hard. From preschoolers to college students, all students are busy studying English. Parents also make a great effort to improve their children's English, as early as possible. Language training abroad is a must, and studying abroad at an early age is an option. This English frenzy saw the coining of the term "goose father," referring to a father who lives alone in Korea having sent his spouse and children to a foreign country to study English or some other form of advanced study. The goose fathers are estimated to be about 200,000 goose daddies nationwide.¹ Even office workers tend to take the equation: English is equal to their social promotion or success. Some upper class people are building an "English-class society" by forming their own exclusive circles with English as a status symbol.

As the whole nation is stick to learning English, the opportunity costs with that don't come cheap. By taking advantage of this overheating phenomenon called "English craze" in Korean peninsula, English-related business people only are growing richer. Publishing companies and private English language institutes are busy advertising extensively their own key to success in English education. The pseudo-English education is prevailed. According to a report by the Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI), Koreans spend about 15 trillion won (\$15.8 billion) on English learning per year.² Thus, many top Korean universities are absorbed in giving a lecture in English by emphasizing globalization, but the level of satisfaction between professors and students are not so high. Studying English hard does not mean you will be good at English. Furthermore, there is no necessity for everybody to speak English well like a native speaker.

¹Kim Sue-young, "English Frenzy Grips Koreans," Korea Times, February 5, 2008.

²This figure is equivalent to English-related home investment costs, except public education; JeonHyo-chan&Choi Ho-sang [in Korean], "The Economics of English," Samsung Economic Research Institute(SERI), no. 578, November 15, 2006, p. 2.

As President Park said, “not every student has to learn English beyond the basic level, except for those who want to make careers requiring professional English proficiency,” forcing many to ask how much of English education is too much, or too little.³In fact, the frenzy of English education in Korean hyper-competitive society is not simply derived from the area of education system itself. So, it is necessary to consider it from all angles: historical relation between US and Korea, English as a cultural capital, Korean educational culture, conflicts of Korean public and private education, class mobility, and US hegemony and globalization, etc. Ultimately, the problem of English education is that of “constructed reality” into which the success psychology of each Korean is condensed; therefore, it must be viewed from the historical, structural, institutional, hierarchical, and cultural perspectives of Korean society. This paper presents a critical review of the English language craze in South Korea from multi-perspectives. It consists of three major sections. The first section briefly discusses English fever in Korea in relation to the early English education. The second section examines some of the major driving forces behind the expansion of English education or English as a cultural capital. The final section analyses the problem of early English education and plans for its solution.

2. English Fever in Korea in Relation to the Early and/or Elementary English Education

A heady atmosphere of English craze is partly due to the excessive expectation of early education. Thus, the government has introduced early English education system since 1997, from third grade in elementary schools. This brings about various synergy effects combining with the zeal for children's education in Korea. However, the term “early” in English education is highly controversial: early English or elementary English? Those confining the target of early education to preschoolers do not consider elementary English education as “early,” on the grounds that the mother tongue cannot only be almost mastered at the age of six, but also the brain approximately reaches 90% of adult volume by age six. According to a TV commercial on selling English teaching materials, it's never too early for two year old babies to learn English! However, we could not hastily conclude that English education after age six is not early-childhood education, in accordance with maternal tongue acquisition and/or brain development theories. People tend to talk, as if the effectiveness of early English education has been scientifically proved, but no study has ever demonstrated any academic benefit to doing early education.

In fact, the eulogy on early education is based on many cases where people learn English as a second language (ESL), but it cannot be directly applied to Korean cases where people learn English as a foreign language (EFL). For example, ESL is the case where those immigrating to or staying in US or UK learn English in English-speaking environment. In India, Philippine and African countries people learn English as a second language from elementary school. Even some among them prefer English over their own mother tongues. In those cases, three elements of LAD,⁴ language input and language demand achieve a perfect balance. They are not only idealistic for second-language acquisition, but also for English education in children. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to directly apply the results for ELS to EFL environment. Despite this fact, profit-seeking overseas producers of teaching books seem to ignore the difference between ESL and EFL. Then, Korean business people uncritically accept the “myth of early education,” and spread it all over the country. On the other hand, ESL program for early childhood education itself is somewhat theoretically problematic. Its theoretic basis can be divided into two aspects: psycholinguistics and educational statistics. However, neither psycholinguistics nor educational statistics reach a clear conclusion, as stated above. To make matters worse, the elementary English education went into effect in unprepared condition in Korea; therefore, it aggravated the burden of private education expenses by spreading the vogue of early English education into kindergartens or nursery schools. To tackle this problem synthetically, we need to use the term early education from kindergartens into elementary schools (especially, first and second-graders). For reference, the debate for and against the early or elementary English education in Korea is as in the following.

³Editor, “English Learning Fervor,” Korea Times, February 14, 2014.

⁴ The Language Acquisition Device, or LAD, is part of Chomsky's acquisition hypothesis. The LAD is a system of principles that children are born with that helps them learn language, and accounts for the order in which children learn structures, and the mistakes they make as they learn. Second language learning theory proposes that acquisition is possible in second and subsequent languages, and that learning programs have to create the conditions for it.

The supporters emphasize (1) national social needs of English for economic growth in the global period, (2) individual needs of English as cultural capital for success or the attainment of excellence, (3) governmental needs to meet public sentiment catching up with the global trends, (4) needs to minimize massive wastes of money which occur at individual and national level, under the existing inefficient English education system (For example, many experts point out that Koreans can hardly speak at all, in spite of studying English for ten years!), (5) needs to narrow the academic achievement gap between city and rural communities, (6) needs to maximize the efficiency of English education, (7) needs to catch up with the global trend of early English education. On the other hand, the opponents advise against the extension of early English education for eight reasons: (1) anomic and identity crisis due to cultural colonialism and toadyism, (2) weakening of Korean language education, (3) negligence of other educational subjects, (4) increase in learning burden, (5) problems arising from the whole educational investment conditions on elementary and secondary schools, (6) educational gap between urban and rural areas, between public and private schools, (7) overheating growth in private English tutoring and early language training abroad, (8) educational and economic inefficiency of English education under EFL environment. In regard to the negative factors of early English education, let's discuss on major driving forces behind the expansion of English education or the empowerment of English as cultural capital in South Korea.

2.1 Major Driving Forces behind the Expansion of English Education or English as a Cultural Capital

There is nothing new about the fever of private English tutoring in Korea. However, with the advent of globalization, it turns into the kind of "crisis" that requires us to change Korean education system itself. Especially, English fever in private sector has emerged as a social issue of wild goose father phenomenon since 2000.⁵ Studying abroad at a young age or language study abroad has become an epidemic. For the first time, the exit of minors climbed to 100, 000 in 2006, so the newspapers splashed the whole story all over their front pages. In fact Korea media has intermittently reported on early English education-related problems like the alarming figures of young students studying abroad and goose fathers and its economic loss, the overgrowth of private English learning market, and the disharmony between classes (the haves and the have-nots), etc. The craze of English education in Korean society is neither a simple matter of education, nor a social-pathological phenomenon, because it is due to complex and multidimensional results from historical relation between US and Korea, English as a cultural capital, Korean education culture, conflicts between public and private education, class mobility, and finally globalization under the US hegemony. Thus, we need to examine it from our historic, structural, institutional, hierarchical, and cultural perspectives. It was since the start of US army military government in Korea (1945-1948)- after Korea's liberation from Japan under US hegemony - that English has enjoyed a special status in Korean society.

In the 21st century, US-led multidimensional globalization is currently under way. Thus, the prestige of English and overly positive attitude towards learning English in Korea must be viewed at multi-levels of analysis. According to Korean professor Lee Hee-un, the high positioning of English as a cultural capital in Korean society can be classified into five major types: essential skill necessary for survival, symbol of class differences, basic qualification of global citizen, tool for national competitiveness, and fetishized product.⁶ For each Korean, English is not only a necessary condition for survival, but also a basic condition for wealth and power. At this point, English is not a symbol of class, but a cultural capital bringing real class difference. Nobody is free from English in our contemporary Korean society. According to Yun Ji-kwan, what we've been going through due to the over-empowerment of English is to be a kind of self-schizophrenia where "oppression & worship" and/or "inferiority & superiority complexes" about English are structurally twisted and complicated. As a source of suppression(?), English forms "colonialism" in our mind.⁷

⁵The term is inspired by the fact that geese are a species that migrate, just as the goose father must travel a great distance to see his family; Norimitsu Onishi, "For English Studies, Koreans Say Goodbye to Dad," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2008.

⁶The verb "fetishize" means to be excessively or irrationally devoted to an object, activity, etc.; Lee Hee-eun [in Korean], "English Village and Relocating Reality," *Korean Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies*, v.51, no.4, 2007, pp. 90-91.

⁷Yoon Ji-kwan [in Korean], "English, Colonialism in My Mind," *Social Criticism*, vol. 28, Paju: Nanam Publishing House, 2001, pp. 123-124.

After all, English is a “transcendental significance” which controls social (un-) consciousness of Koreans suffering from compulsion and anxiety by defining themselves as “absence and dearth (of English).”⁸ Moving from subject of recommendation into coercion, English becomes a mechanism for suppression on institutional dimension, beyond individualistic psychological behaviorism. For Koreans clinging to TOEFL and TOEIC scores, English is no longer a reality, but an ideology as a mechanism of power. It is not so difficult to find a historical root of power in English in Korea’s turbulent modern history. Since the early years of Korean modernization, English has been recognized as a means for being “new power elite” by adoption of advanced Western culture and technology. The empowerment of “pro-American” ruling class also contributed to making (American) English as the language of power in Korean peninsula. Under the US-led globalization, English pronunciation in other English-speaking countries is relatively neglected or ruled out. Even though Korea has collectively experienced “English power,” common people having nothing to do with power were keeping some distance from English in their daily life. It was in the late 1990s that the global English started to wield overwhelmingly dominant power over all Koreans’ daily life and life course. It was in line with the enforcement of IMF management system where South Korea has been systematically incorporated into neoliberal globalization with the increasing polarization between rich and poor. After joining the OECD, South Korea has not only been forced to open financial market or to soften labor market, but also to be measured by global standards. As practical English for business needs became more important than anything else, the social function and role of English started to change. Before the 1990s, English was relatively important for literate public, so it could play the intermediary role to assure “proper distance” between Western things and ours, and to enable “intercultural dialogue” between them and us. However, after 1990s, English as practical communication tool loses its former reflective functioning by removing distance between the subject and the other. English is now positioning as a “market language” with the expansion of market mechanism.

Interestingly, Korea’s incorporation to US-led neo-liberalism is justified by Korean nationalism. Korean government has sweetened its emphasis on globalization with the logic of Korean nation’s growth and prosperity; therefore, the directly opposed logics (globalization and nationalism) are equally applied to English learning. In 1998 when Korean public opinion was heating up over the official English movement, two claims were in direct opposition to each other: the former insists the officialization of English contributes to equality of opportunity and national competitiveness-enhancing, while the latter opposes it for the reason of “enslaving a whole nation to English.” However, it’s not the confrontation globalism vs. nationalism, but practical nationalism vs. fundamental nationalism.⁹ Vis-à-vis English language imperialism, it’s not a matter of choosing either acceptance or refusal of English, but complementary means-end relations. The debate on two practical/fundamental nationalisms is not reserved only for some intellectual class, but for many ordinary citizens who are also grounded on one of the two nationalistic logics when they put forth their argument on the appropriateness of English.

In our daily life, we can ask whether English is really a matter of “inevitable survival” or not, without regard to our logic and belief? Nevertheless, it’s nothing other than an empty rhetoric, because the survival we talk about is not in the literal sense of the word, but a synonym for success and prosperity. For example, Korean workers in primary sector do not need to get in touch with English-speaking foreigners, so they are not forced to live on English. What percentage of people do you think need to meet foreigners, to travel abroad, and to have a good command of English on behalf of their companies or institutions in Korean society? There is no necessary for all Koreans to learn English, simply to show the road to foreign tourists in English. Nobody thinks it’s for survival. Here, the means of survival signifies a ladder of success to climb into higher position for which English is needed. After all, it means that the social status and economic success of upper-middle class are generalized or transformed into survival criteria for the entire nation. This (excessive) phenomenon where ordinary people consider English as a question of survival can be explained by the notion of cultural capital of Bourdieu in 1979/1984. The school in Bourdieu’s concept is recognized as a place for gaining democratic opportunities which enable people to have equal access to cultural capitals (knowledge, language and taste, and so on). Speaking English and other foreign language in only Korean-speaking society is the most difficult type of cultural capital to acquire in long term.

⁸ Lee, Kyung-won [in Korean], “Achebe and Ngugi: Two Modes of Postcolonial Resistance,” *In/Outside, English Studies in Korea*, vol 12, p. 67.

⁹ Lee Seung-ryul [in Korean], “English Empire and Politicization of English Education,” *Comparative Literature*, Seoul: Korean Literary Society of Comparative Literature, vol. 33, 2004, p. 329.

Language is a cultural ability to communicate; thus, acquiring English as a cultural capital costs a huge amount of money. The more students are exposed to an English-speaking environment, the easier it is for them to learn English. Thus, both early English education and overseas English training are considered a kind of strategy of parents of the upper middle class for maximum education benefits through short-term investment on economic costs and time cost reduction. Korea's labor market is highly segmented along educational backgrounds. In the way that English is a core competency to gain admission to selected educational institutions like foreign language high schools,¹⁰In this sense, Bourdieu's explanation on school as conservative force is correct. English is not only an embodied capital closely linked to socioeconomic abilities of parents, but a cultural capital institutionalized by social recognition, and all sorts of standardized tests. Under the pressure of globalization all companies take English as a selection standard; therefore, English is a very efficient cultural capital which is most quickly convertible into economic capital. English is also a symbolic capital upon which the authority is bestowed by all. The problem is that everyone takes it as given that English more than anything else can be most easily converted into economic and symbolic capitals. Thus, to have or not to have a good command of English is considered a synonym for class difference. Such an erroneous collective mentality is shared by almost all in Korean society. As South Korea ranked the world's 11th largest economy, Korean economic power could produce those who have enough money to invest in the education of children. The redistribution of economic wealth makes people feel so irrational or anxious about future, as seen from Korean-styled investment fever in stocks & securities and real-estate speculation. A feeling of insecurity each Korean felt after IMF crisis¹¹has largely contributed to making an equation "general survival of all classes = success strategy (derived from dominant classes and elites).¹²Ultimately, the craze for English education in Korean society can be best understood by Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital.

2.2 Problem of Early English Education and Plans for its Solution

With the enforcement of English education in elementary schools in 1997, the whole country seems to be in the grip of early English fever. Most of the daily newspapers have not only covered the early English education frenzy over years, but textbooks on childhood English education have also ranked fairly high in book sales. The fact that many parents distrust English teaching in public schools is also a big problem. They send their children to private English academies or tutors, or if they are uncertain of their children's English skill, they think to send children to US or Canada for language training or youth studying abroad. However, overseas study in early ages can lead to serious results. How to cope with the nation's obsession with the English language which has only seemed to worsen?

2.2.1 Deconstructing The Myth of Early-Childhood English Education

Recently, government statistics show that parents spend more than 20 trillion won (\$18.24 billion) each year on private tutoring for their children at kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.¹³The age of children receiving English education has been getting younger as more and more parents subscribe to a "the younger, the better" mentality. As mentioned previously, the argument for foreign language education in early childhood is based on the theories of maternal language acquisition, but according to linguists, there is an important distinction between "language acquisition" and "language learning." As you may well have noticed, children acquire their mother tongue in 3 or 4 years. At 5 years of age, they can express ideas clearly and almost perfectly from the point of view of language and grammar. As experts suggest, there is an innate capacity in every human being to acquire language. However, the language(s) we often come in contact with after childhood cannot be the maternal tongue. Furthermore, theories of maternal tongue acquisition are not empirically proven, but they are just hypothesis still under debate between linguists and psychologists.

¹⁰They are private preparatory high schools centering on the specialized education of various European and Asian languages

¹¹IMF crisis means the financial crisis experienced by Korean people in the late 1990s, which was caused by the severe foreign exchange shortage on the brink of default of South Korea in December 1997, and bailed out by the IMF Standby Credit Facility and other international financial supports. Surely it was not the crisis caused by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but rescued by IMF.

¹² Kim Soo-jung [in Korean], "Television Discourse on English Education Fever - Narrative Analyses of Twelve Current-Affairs Documentaries," Korean Journal of Broadcasting and Telecommunication Studies, Serial number 22- no. 5, September 2008, pp. 7-36.

¹³ Private English education expenses have increased by 5 trillion won (Korean monetary unit) for nine years; Kim Da-ye, "How far Can English Education Go?" The Korean Times, October 7, 2012.

Nothing has been proven yet as to whether maternal language acquisition and foreign language learning are identical in character and/or in the psychological process or not. Thus, it is a jump in the logic to justify the early foreign language education on the basis of the hypothesis of maternal language acquisition. Neither “early birds” always succeed, nor “latecomers” necessarily fail in learning foreign language. There are many cases of advanced late learners who can speak English like a native speaker. It is an eternal truth that there is no royal road to learning. Factors affecting foreign language learning are enough time and energy for studying persistently. How much time does it take to learn a foreign language at a minimum? By the standard of FSI (Foreign Service Institute),¹⁴ the smallest amount of time for an American staff to learn Chinese or Japanese at the level for fulfilling his/her duties is 4, 500 hours. This time is equal to studying a minimum of six hours per day for two years continuously. By contrast, a Korean graduated from the Department of English averagely receives 2, 500 hours of English classes for ten years from middle/high schools (3/3 years) into university (4 years). This shows almost half level for developing English communication skills. English craze can't be disregarded or avoided as wrong or unhealthy social trends. English question is too important to be ignored. More than 85% of information in the world is in English. So, if you don't know English at all, you will be a loser as an illiterate in the 21st century information-oriented society. Since English was currently considered to be the international language, countries where children begin learning English in elementary school have continued to increase. And Korea is also one of them. Thus, it is necessary to seek a solution to English-related problems.

2.2.2 Setting New Goals of English Education of Elementary and Secondary Schools

What's the object of English education in Korea? It's to teach “practical English.” Practical English means here an English communicative ability. Elementary school students take one-hour English class per week, while middle and high school students take 4-hour or 5-hour classes per week. However, it's almost impossible to develop English communicative ability in such a time-limited educational environment. Furthermore, middle and high school teachers usually teach a method to get high marks at College Scholastic Ability Test, instead of developing practical English communication skills. For this reason, the trend toward distrust on education at school is deepening among parents. In spite of that, English education cannot be a full-scale concentration in Korea. For example, it is needed for the right intensive course to continue doing 6-hour English classes every day for years! No matter how important English education is, we shouldn't learn only English at the expense of all other subjects. Korea is among the world's most ethnically homogeneous nations. So to speak, we Koreans have low-frequency of using English, relatively with the small percent of foreigners (only 2% of the total population) who have been increasing though, along with the waves of globalization. We have Korean language, and its status as a maternal tongue is highly appreciated on a national scale. Therefore, it's very difficult to imagine Koreans who speak English or other foreign languages among themselves, instead of Korean.

The goal of English education in elementary school is to stimulate students' interest and curiosity by familiarizing them with supportive English environment through children's songs, music, games, and easy listening test. It is ready for studying English conversation skills for some years ahead. But in fact studying English at middle school is not mainly with practical English. It's rather close to a preparatory course for high school English. What's more serious is that English curricular for high school students are really so far from practical conversation skills, because they are composed entirely of intensive courses for the College Scholastic Ability Test. Thus, our English education goal for practical English in school is not to learn conversational English, but to raise test scores to pass college entrance exams, as much as possible. This great distance between goal and reality must have lowered the efficiency of English education system in Korea. So I think it's wrong to set the goal of English education in elementary and middle schools on developing English communication skills. Elementary and middle educations are compulsory for the whole nation, so it's natural to teach Korean to 50 million people to eradicate illiteracy. However, is it possible to teach all of them to speak English fluently like native speakers? It's unrealistic to teach English communication skills to the whole nation.¹⁵ It's a giant unimaginable education goal!

¹⁴ The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) is the United States Government's primary training institution for officers and support personnel of the U.S. foreign affairs community.

¹⁵ Budget to teach 2 million people to develop their English communication skills will be the astronomical costs any government really cannot afford to pay. The reality is that, for instance, the English department in Korea does not dare to run programs for developing communication ability for 30 students, due to budgeting issues. What will happen, if it is targeting for more than one million people?

Instead of giving up such an impractical idea of investing the whole nation with English communication ability, we should fundamentally modify our goals of English education. Thus, English education in elementary and secondary schools must be targeted toward developing English “decoding” ability. Decoding skill is evidently different from communication skill. The former lays the foundation not only for basic reading ability, but for skills in writing, listening and speaking at minimum level. English reading ability is here meant to grasp the general idea of a passage in newspapers and magazines, or to get the practical information on internet. English writing ability is to express oneself with simple phrases or sentences. Finally, speaking ability is to exchange greetings or introduce oneself at subsistence level (?). Those elementary levels are highly recommended to all the people.¹⁶ We should translate an impossible goal into reality by changing the target of English education from communication ability into decoding ability development in elementary and secondary schools. As for the English education aiming at developing communication skills at multiples levels, universities, technical colleges, and advanced private/public training institutes can take charge of it. Needless to say, these high educational institutions are not targeted at training the entire nation, but at the talented people who will be in charge of foreign assignment or international affairs work, according to the mid-term supply-demand plans for skilled manpower. Consequently, we should establish two goals of English education: one is aimed at developing English decoding ability in elementary/secondary schools; the other is, at developing English communication ability in institutions of higher learning beyond colleges/universities, seminaries, and institutes of technology.

2.2.3 Introduction of Specialist Professional System for Foreign Languages

It may be worth consideration of setting up foreign language professional system in relevant government/business sectors. If it would work, newly recruited civil servants and business workers in the sections of international trade and foreign language-related businesses could have only to charge overseas tasks. Otherwise, other different sections could also employ their professional foreign language staffs (i.e. official interpreter) who will be wholly responsible for foreign language-related tasks. Thus, if we manage well such a professional foreign language system, all officials and business workers don't have to indiscriminately learn English communication skills. This system doesn't only enable them to deal with new business environments in the age of globalization and information, but necessary to make the best use of the “dualistic” English education system as proposed above: while the basic English education (till the end of middle school) is concentrating its energy on building up decoding skill of students as world citizens, the professional higher English education(atthe university level) is aiming at developing various English communication skills to train people of distinguished talents. Accordingly, any company which requires English can employ the latter. In retrospect, educational system can normally develop only when it harmonizes with social demand.

3. Conclusion

Till now, we've analyzed Korea's craze for early English Education as a self-portrait of Korean contemporary society, and suggested its way to be solved. Due to the change of international environment, the fervor for early English education and the feverish condition of the regular school education, Korea is filled with education fevers, but English education environment condition has proved “ineffective.” To solve the problems of English education, we proposed to fundamentally modify the goals of English education in schools by dividing English skills into two: English decoding ability in elementary/secondary schools and communication ability in universities and professional language training institutions. To optimize the use of professionally trained English speakers and to improve world business efficiency in public institutions, we also suggested establishing the system of foreign language expert jobs. To conclude, it's only when all educational requirements (teaching materials, teachers and learning environment, etc.) are well equipped that early may be better than late language start. Some old Korean advocators for early foreign language education give an extreme example of Japanese language education during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), in saying they could speak Japanese well even after several decades, despite their learning Japanese only for six years at elementary school. However, we should remember that Koreans, as subjects of the Japanese emperor, learned all subjects in Japanese at that time. Koreans were forced to speak Japanese as an official language in and out of school. On the other hand, it is relatively easy for us to learn Japanese because both Korean/Japanese languages are similar in sound and/or have similar patterns.

¹⁶Park Byung-soo [in Korean], “English Fever, What is Problems?”Hangul (Korean Alphabet) Foundation, pp. 1-6.
<http://www.hangul.or.kr/M10-20001-3.htm>

In analyzing the feverish conditions of English education and setting up measures or counter-measures, we should always remember that there is no royal road to learning English. In spite of the development of high-tech civilization facilities that make our daily lives much more convenient, the basic ways to learn English have not been so changed over the years. There is no secret formula to study English quickly. And early education is not panacea for all.

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English, early education, education fever, cultural capital, globalization. 1. Introduction. The English language craze in South Korea has made people obsessed with English according to the logic of globalization. But the significant differences between Korean and English, particularly in sentence structure and morphology (word structure), make it hard for most Koreans to learn English. Ultimately, the problem of English education is that of "constructed reality" into which the success psychology of each Korean is condensed; therefore, it must be viewed from the historical, structural, institutional, hierarchical, and cultural perspectives of Korean society. This paper presents a critical review of the English language craze in South Korea from multi-perspectives.

Problem 1. The problem of early learning, which affects the psychological and age characteristics of a particular child, is always the most relevant, since the study of a foreign language in primary school corresponds to the most favorable and susceptible to knowledge period of children's development. It is especially important to remember that primary school students are inattentive due to this period of their development, so even if children are distracted, cannot focus on the educational material or stop listening to the teacher, it does not make sense to punish them with a bad grade or scold them, since this method will only work for the next few minutes. Korean learners of the English language face numerous challenges in acquiring the language on a proficient level, although English is introduced to children at an early age. English is incorporated into the primary school curriculum from the age of four, yet only a small minority master the language on a proficient conversational level. Unfortunately, the reasons seem to stem from cultural and social differences, the significant differences between the two languages; Korean and English, and the Korean Educational System is also a contributing factor. This post was written by our ITTT graduate Introduction to Education Fever

Strictly speaking, education fever in South Korea refers to this desire to focus intensively on academics and schoolwork so that mental learning can be maximized and knowledge can be broadened. Problems with Education Fever

Economic Strain. One of the first issues with education fever is the closely tied financial component. While most levels of education are never cheap and tend to pose a considerable load on parents, they are especially harsh on South Korean families. In addition to the monetary burden, education fever has a tremendous bearing on the mental and physical health of South Koreans, namely through the amount of stress placed upon students.