

Private Education as *De Facto* Language Policy in South Korea

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South Korea is well known for its distinctive, sometimes excessive, enthusiasm for education. This education fever is derived from South Koreans' concern with the pursuit of education as a way of achieving socioeconomic status and power, and thus, competitions to score well on tests have been valorized in South Korea. Now that English has become the language of power and opportunity in South Korea, this paper aims to examine how education fever has promoted *de facto* English language policy over top-down English language policy. By referring to Cooper's (1989) and Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) frameworks, this paper interprets private education in South Korea as *de facto* policy, which exercises greater influence on how language policy is developed in practice than a top-down statement can.

South Korea is well known for its particular, sometimes excessive, enthusiasm for education. This *education fever*, what Seth (2002) defines as "national obsession with the attainment of education" (p. 9), started from South Koreans' concern with the pursuit of formal education "as a way of achieving status and power as well as a means of self-cultivation" (p. 9). Socioeconomic stratification in South Korean society has been sustained and deepened through the pursuit of education, as "universities are strictly ranked, employers know whom to hire by referring to which university applicants graduated from, and parents know whom to endorse as prospective sons or daughters-in-law by referring to their educational or university background" (Song, 2011, p. 43). Since a prestigious university, a good company, and thus a successful life seem all dependent on one's academic excellence, competitions to score well on tests have been valorized in South Korea.

In South Korea, although Korean is a predominantly used language and thus English is not used on daily basis, this traditional education fever started narrowing down to English education fever ever since governmental promotion for English initiated. Undergoing the Asian financial crisis in 1997/98, South Korea entirely opened itself to the global free market, as it accepted International Monetary Fund's relief measures that lifted regulations on foreign ownership and privatization. With this economic restructuring of the nation, a significant cultural change emerged; that is, a meritocracy achieved through intense competitions is deluded to be most valued, and within this economic doctrine, "English has been institutionalized as one of the terrains where individuals and institutions must compete to be deemed meritorious" (Piller & Cho, 2013, p. 39). Consequently, English rapidly became a critical criterion to show one's competence at school and at work. Now that English has become the language of power and opportunity in South Korea just as in many other parts of the world (Tollefson, 1995), the current

study aims to delve into how education fever has promoted *de facto* language policy over top-down language policy.

To do so, I will use Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) framework of *language-in-education planning* (LiEP) to shed light on inconsistencies in current English language education policy and its implementation. Through this analysis, I will identify *de facto* language policy, which is "practiced in relation to feasibilities and realities and, therefore, often does not comply with written policies that are imposed from top-down" (Shohamy, 2010, p. 182), in the South Korean context and discuss the repercussions of this *de facto* policy. How the South Korean context generates *de facto* policies that are not intended in top-down policies is also worth examining, as "various language policies are practiced and carried out while overlooking or even ignoring the declared ones, given *specific contextual conditions*" (Shohamy, 2010, p. 183, emphasis added). Then, the final part of the study will elucidate that *de facto* policy carries considerable clout in that top-down policy intended to diminish the power of *de facto* policy instead consolidates it.

Conceptual Framework

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) introduce the term *Language-in-Education Planning* (LiEP) and explain that LiEP is "the most potent resource for bringing about language change and the key implementation procedure for language policy and planning" (p. 122). They describe the six areas of language-in-education policy implementation, which are different from those of language policy as summarized in Figure 1. Addressing how language policy is implemented in different contexts of language education planning, Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) six areas of LiEP draw our attention to the importance of implicit language planning and policy that are conducted unnoticed and off the record "in spite of official policy texts" (Johnson, 2013, p. 10), and to their impact on language change. This idea lies in the same vein with the concept of *de facto* policy, which can be defined as policy in practice—policy locally produced without or in spite of *de jure* policy (Johnson, 2013). *De facto* policy emphasizes that language planning does not always happen in a top-down manner, explicitly declared by the government. In this line, instead of analyzing policy documents as fixed texts (or as what is officially stated in the law, i.e., *de jure* policy), Shohamy (2010) suggests that language planning should be examined through "multiple stakeholders beyond governments and school, all engaged in some way or another in the act of policymaking and practice" (p. 183). She enumerates teachers, test makers, principals, textbook writers and publishers, testing agencies, parents, students, school board members, and researchers as stakeholders. Instead of looking at language policy from the perspective of two opposing linear forces—top-down and bottom-up forces—she argues that taking into account these different stakeholders' engagement despite the declared language educational policies provides us with a better understanding of how *de facto* language policies are practiced.

As a case study that illustrates the significance of examining *de facto* language policies in fully comprehending language policy, Menken's (2008) analysis of testing as *de facto* language policy is worth paying attention to. In her book, Menken (2008) explains that the current education policy in the US, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), emphasizes assessment for all students, which seemingly provides all

Figure 1

Six Areas of Language-in-Education Policy Implementation

1. Education Policy	the articulation of an education policy separate from the general policy
2. Curriculum Policy	the description of what languages are to be used, when, for how long, how and for which students
3. Personnel	the determination of the source for educators, how they would be educated, retrained, and rewarded, and who would educate them
4. Materials	the consideration of what instructional material, space, and equipment are needed, how much, how soon, for what methodologies, and at what cost
5. Community	the understanding of community and parental attitudes and the development of approaches to those attitudes, and the identification of funding sources
6. Evaluation	the appraisal of curricula, student success, teacher success/ interest, and cost-effectiveness

(Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, as cited in García & Menken, 2010, p. 252)

students, including minority students, with an equal educational opportunity and access. Yet, the standardized form of testing by NCLB is originally designed for English native speakers, and thus, despite its name, results in “English language learners left behind.” Menken (2008) claims that standardized tests have become *de facto* language policy in the US since they shape classroom practices, “impact language education, and result in the standardization of testing languages and the creation of linguistic hierarchies” (p. 179). Her study well illustrates that *de facto* language policy, the testing mechanism in this case, can exercise greater influence on actual language practices than the top-down statement can.

In the next sections, the documented English language education policy from the 1990s to the present in South Korea will be examined to provide the background of this study, and Kaplan and Baldauf’s (1997) LiEP framework will be adopted to analyze the actual implementation of this language education policy. Based on this analysis and the current data relevant to private education provided by Korean Statistical Information Service, the claim that private education functions as *de facto* language policy will be further supported.

Recent English Language Education Policy in South Korea

During the late 1980s and through the 1990s, South Korea faced a turning point through major sociopolitical and economic changes. South Korea started hosting large-scale worldwide events such as 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Seoul Olympics. This was a step toward globalization that prompted the Korean government to feel the need to improve its people’s English communicative skills (Spolsky, 2002). Moreover, as Demick (2002) explains, South Korea’s undergoing the Asian financial crisis of 1997 “made Koreans realize how much English was valued in

the process of globalization” (as cited in Park, 2009, p. 52). Thus English started to be considered a critical resource required for the country to survive and further develop economically. Not only fast-paced globalization but also academia’s emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Nunan, 1987; Savignon, 1987, 1991) contributed to the Korean government’s awareness of the importance of English communicative competence, and this operated remarkable changes in South Korea’s English language education policy.

Examining the English language education policy presented by the Ministry of Education reveals policy oriented towards both *status planning* and *acquisition planning*. According to Cooper (1989), the object of status planning is the allocation of languages to certain functions, including official, provincial, wider communication, international, capital, group, educational, school subject, literary, religious, the mass media, and work functions (pp. 100–119). Among these functions, international and school subject functions are particularly relevant to South Korea’s context. The English language education policy document by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2011) specifies the aim of English language education in South Korea:

These days, international exchange is prevalent, and nations are closely related to each other to the extent that the whole world is referred to as a global village...[I]n such an environment, English, as a language used internationally, plays an important role in understanding people whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from ours and in allowing communication and the establishment of bonds with them. Therefore, the ability to communicate in English is one of the key abilities to be developed for students at school. In other words, in order to play a leading role in the era of globalization and information, the ability to understand English and communicate in English is essential. Also, it is fundamental to be qualified with English communicative competence to improve one’s quality of life through leading a cultured life and to reinforce individual capacity...[M]oreover, we need to help them [students] understand foreign culture properly and develop their qualifications and knowledge as a citizen of the world. We aim to improve their basic communication ability that is necessary for understanding and using everyday English. Through understanding foreign culture properly, they will build a foundation to advance our own culture and introduce it to foreign countries. (pp. 2–4, my translation)

An emphasis on the importance of cultivating a citizen of the world and promoting cultural exchanges through communication indicates English language policy in South Korea seeks an international function. In keeping with Cooper’s (1989) claim that “status planning of international language of wider communication takes place in connection with determining what foreign languages will be taught in the schools” (p. 106), the document states that this international function needs to be achieved through the medium of school education, connoting a school subject function.

García and Menken (2010) argue that acquisition planning and status planning are likely to occur concurrently, and this explains the case of South Korea. According to Cooper (1989), acquisition planning refers to organized efforts to promote the learning of a language, and acquisition of a foreign language is one of the three overt goals of acquisition planning. In South Korea, since English is taught as a foreign

language under a centralized educational system, and English teaching abides by the nation-wide English language education policy, there obviously exist organized efforts for English acquisition. The following sections will explicate how status and acquisition planning are documented with specific directions throughout the current (6th and 7th) education curricula and how well those directions are carried out in order to attain the goals of status and acquisition planning.

The 6th Education Curriculum (1992–1999)

From the 1st to the 5th education curricula (1946-1991), English was taught through the Grammar Translation method at public schools, with the major pedagogical focus on grammar rules and reading comprehension. However, realizing that the heavy grammar orientation was not conducive to developing learners' communicative skills, the Ministry of Education (1992) published the 6th education curriculum, redirecting its previous focus on English grammar and reading comprehension towards English communicative competence, adopting CLT. As Kwon (2000) specified, embracing CLT intended to emphasize fluency over accuracy, "not necessarily meaning that accuracy was abandoned" (p. 61). The 6th curriculum stated that the ultimate goal of CLT is the achievement of communicative competence through communicative activities and authentic materials (Li, 1998). Another major change aside pedagogy that occurred with the 6th education curriculum was that English teaching began at a younger age, from the third grade in elementary schools, starting in 1997.

Li (1998) surveyed and interviewed 18 Korean in-service English teachers about CLT and summarized the list of difficulties they encountered when implementing CLT. The most noteworthy difficulties were teachers' deficiency in oral English and lack of confidence, students' low English proficiency, large classes, the grammar-based National College Entrance Examination, and lack of efficient assessment instruments. Since in-service teachers at that time had neither received English education through CLT nor practiced CLT in teaching, their expertise lay more in grammar than in spoken English, making their confidence in adopting CLT low. Considering that CLT is student-centered and requires students' active engagement, it is hard to expect smooth execution of CLT. Moreover, the fact that proper instruments assessing students' communicative competence were not available but the grammar-focused examinations persisted is indicative of little room for implementing CLT-based pedagogy.

The 7th Education Curriculum (2000–Present)

Despite the failure of CLT in the previous curriculum, the Ministry of Education continued to highlight communicative competence even in the 7th education curriculum, still without the systemic planning of support measures. While the 6th education curriculum emphasized functional/communicative competence and fluency over accuracy, all of which are away from the features of the traditional grammatical syllabus, the 7th education curriculum espoused a unique grammatical-functional syllabus, providing both communicative and grammatical competence. In other words, the 7th education curriculum differs from the 6th in that emphasis that used to be placed more on fluency than on

accuracy is now placed on both fluency and accuracy equally. However, in that the central aim of the 7th English curriculum is improving communicative competence (Kwon, 2000), it is basically an extension of the 6th curriculum's spirit. One salient difference is the 7th English curriculum espoused Teaching English through English (TEE) instead of CLT. TEE sets up English as the main language of communication between students and instructors and emphasizes the use of English during the class hour (Ministry of Education, 1997).

It has been reported that even though TEE is recommended in the national primary and secondary English curriculum, most English teachers do not really instruct English in English but rather use English only for classroom management (Choi & Lee, 2008). Actually, many teachers are known to prefer the English Please class, which allows code-switching between English and the mother tongue Korean, to the English-Only class (Jo, 2011). According to Stevens, Jin, and Song (2006), a survey conducted by the Korean Ministry of Education showed only 7.5% of the 67,000 elementary and secondary school English-language instructors in South Korea had the ability and language skills necessary to lead classes entirely in English as of the year 2000 (p. 171). As prerequisite conditions for successfully implementing TEE in the classroom are not met, its effectiveness has not been satisfactory either. For example, Lee (2008) found that Korean college students who went through the 7th English curriculum did not demonstrate correct production of pitch accents. Lee argued that this result implies an inefficiency of TEE in improving students' communicative competence, as a production of pitch accents is one of the critical indicators of communicative competence in English (Um, 2004), the main target TEE intends to improve.

One of the major problems in implementing TEE is that teachers do not have a sufficient proficiency in spoken English (Nunan, 2003) and experience serious perceptual difficulties in speaking English as an instructional language (Butler, 2004). Another obstacle is the mismatch between the grammar-oriented assessment system and the communicative orientation of TEE (Jo, 2011). Im and Jeon (2009) also find that it is more challenging to implement TEE at high school than at middle school due to heavier focus on the National College Entrance Examination, which remains grammar-oriented.

Referring to these difficulties in applying TEE in South Korea's public education system, English language education researchers have revealed an inherent problem of TEE in the South Korea context and suggested some future directions. Jo (2011) points out that the English-Only policy is simply unrealistic in EFL settings such as Korea and the English-Please policy would be a better shortcut to gradually and successfully maximize the use of English in classroom. Im and Jeon (2009) criticizes that TEE pedagogy is imposed from unidirectional top-down policy without providing any support to teachers and insisted that teachers' opinions be reflected first and then documented in order to better implement TEE. Moreover, as Lee and Lee (2011) claimed, in order to promote teachers' attitude and confidence in teaching English in English, governmental support for teachers and continuous teacher training in TEE are indispensable. Min's (2008) data also show that both elementary and secondary school English teachers agreed upon the necessity of more systematic teacher training. The necessity of revising curricula and assessment for more adequate implementation of TEE has been also raised (Liu, Ahn, Baek, & Han, 2004).

The implementation of state-authorized language policies is oftentimes left to the discretion of lower-level educational institutions. The Ministry of Education of South Korea published top-down language policy and gave instructions to elementary and secondary schools to take responsibility for improving students' communicative competence in English. Despite this national drive, top-down policy has not been successfully implemented at the micro level as planned. The following section will examine what the above-mentioned difficulties in the public education domain imply and what repercussions have subsequently followed due to these difficulties.

Language-in-Education Planning

In order to better understand South Korea's English language education policy, its implementation procedures need to be further analyzed through Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) perspective above and beyond just viewing it as output of status and acquisition planning solely within Cooper's (1989) framework. As their LiEP framework subdivides different areas of language planning, such as curriculum, personnel, community, materials, and evaluation, it is expected to provide microscopic insights on how different stakeholders such as parents and testing contribute to *de facto* policymaking. Among the six areas of language-in-education policy implementation (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), community policy and evaluation policy in particular call for attention in analyzing South Korea's case.

Community Policy

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), "Language education does not occur in a vacuum. Students and teachers live in the community beyond the classroom, and students have parents who are concerned about the education their students are exposed to" (p. 134). This statement underscores the impact of parental attitudes on language education policy implementation.

It is no exaggeration to say that Korean parents play a pivotal role in shaping English education in South Korea. Dissatisfied with the way English language education policy is conducted at public schools as discussed above, Korean parents started resorting to means outside of public educational institutions, sometimes to an extreme extent. According to Stevens et al. (2006), some desperate mothers speak English to their unborn children, mothers join mother-child English programs when their child is still a toddler, and there are long waiting lists for the few English-medium kindergarten programs, although the tuitions are much higher than the costs for usual Korean-medium kindergarten programs. Moreover, some parents force their children to undergo a surgical procedure called frenectomy because they believe that a longer and more flexible tongue could fix a tongue-tiedness condition and help these children better pronounce English sounds such as /r/, which is known to be particularly difficult for Koreans to produce (OhmyNews, 2012). The private English education sector is one of the biggest industries in South Korea, and many fervent parents send their children to cramming schools, private tutoring, English camps, and language training overseas. It has been even reported that one-third of South Korean family income is poured into private English education (Stevens et al., 2006). South Korean parents

are eager to make financial sacrifice for the sake of their children's good education to the point that "high-status families that, in the past, were large landowners have little land today, since they have gradually sold it off to provide college education for their children" (Sorensen, 1994, pp. 25–26). Moreover, the number of young children sent abroad for English education has increased tremendously year by year, and one of the serious repercussions caused is a situation of family separation in which mothers stay in a foreign country for their children's education while so-called *wild goose* fathers remain in Korea to provide financial support. Taking into account that South Korean parents, rather than the public education system, take the initiative in helping their children learn English with help outside the formal school curriculum, we can infer that this micro-level language planning prevails in spite of declared language education policy.

Evaluation Policy

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) assert that evaluation of students' performance is necessary for a reality check to see if changes expected in policy are happening in a timely manner. They add that assessment is essential since feedback and evaluation results can be reflected in the modification of policy.

Although English language education policy in South Korea has shifted its focus from grammar and reading comprehension to communicative skills throughout the 6th and 7th education curricula, the form of assessment has not changed. If we are to evaluate whether current curricula are conducive to improving students' communicative competence, assessment needs to be redesigned to measure this additional domain. A lot of in-service English teachers agreed that since the English section of the National College Entrance Examination is still highly grammar- and reading-based, it is tremendously challenging to teach English through CLT in South Korea (Li, 1998). Kim (2002) argues that as long as classroom instruction is subordinate to the National College Entrance Examination, it is difficult to implement TEE; thus, it is crucial to minimize the gap between testing and instruction. In fact, from 1994 onward, the National College Entrance Examination has included an additional part, Listening Comprehension, along with grammar, reading comprehension, and translation items in order to adjust to the curricula change, but its grammar-based nature has remained unchanged (Li, 1998).

This assessment tool, which is not in sync with the curricular agenda, determines whether one can be admitted to one of the first-tier universities. The competition to score well on the examinations is relentless to the extent that South Korea is considered to possess "the most exam-obsessed culture in the world" (Seth, 2002, p. 5). According to Sorensen (1994), "the Korean educational system has become a 'testocracy,' with the influence of the high school and college entrance exams rippling throughout the system" (Sorensen, 1994, p. 17). Exams play a central role in the Korean educational system and their influence goes above and beyond the public education system. Feeling insecure about only relying on the public education system, a number of parents and students react to this so-called examination hell (*sihom chiok*) by putting extra time and resources into private tutors outside of school. Considering that evaluation policy runs counter to the current English language education curricula and too much emphasis on evaluation has engendered parents' and students' commitment to the resources

outside of the public education system, we can conjecture that evaluation policy in South Korea contributes to shaping implicit language policy.

Private Education as *De Facto* Policy

A close look at community policy and evaluation policy in South Korea in the previous section indicated that neither areas of LiEP implementation line up with top-down English language education policy. South Korea's community and evaluation policy implementation has brought about the rise of a private education sector. It has been claimed that "young Koreans start formal English learning at an early age, but there are also more opportunities for private English tutoring in South Korea" (Hu & McKay, 2012, p. 350). Indeed, in a number of Asian countries including South Korea, "the quality of English language education in the public sector is so poor that 'no one learns English in school'" (Nunan, 2003, p. 606), which demonstrates great influence that private English education carries.

Taking its enormous impact on Korean students' English learning into consideration, it seems plausible that private education functions as *de facto* policy. Due to low faith in the public education system and the pressure of examinations, parents keep sending their children to cramming schools and private tutors, and this has produced the private education industry as a huge market in South Korea. According to Park (2009), money put in this private education sector is increasing exponentially from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$15 billion in 2005 and \$20 billion in 2006. Also, as can be seen from Table 1, Korean students' average rate of participation in after-school programs, which are not provided by the public education system, has increased annually, which implies that every year more students seek external help outside of the public education system. The fact that among all the school levels, high school (referring to both general high school and vocational high school) and general high school account for the highest rates indicates that as less time remains until the National College Entrance Examination, they rely on external help even more. This trend shows how much students are reliant on external help in seeking academic success.

Table 1

Participation Rate in After-School Programs (Including Free Education) (%) (2008–2013)

Year	Average	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	General High School
2008	45.1	38.1	36.8	67.3	74.1
2009	51.3	43.1	43.1	74.1	80.1
2010	55.6	45.0	50.0	79.0	84.6
2011	56.6	50.4	48.3	74.7	80.9
2012	57.6	52.6	49.4	73.0	77.1
2013	60.2	58.2	50.5	72.3	74.8

(Adapted from Korean Statistical Information Service, 2013)

Table 2 shows a large influence of private education on students' school performance. It portrays that the amount of money spent on private education is associated with students' performance at school throughout seven years. The

Table 2

Monthly Private Education Expenditures by Student's School Performance (in ten thousand South Korean won)¹

Year	School Performance	Private Education Expenditure	Subjects: General Curriculum Private Education	Subject: Arts and Physical Education, etc.
2007	within top 10%	30.0	24.8	5.2
	within bottom 20%	12.0	8.8	3.0
2008	within top 10%	31.5	26.1	5.3
	within bottom 20%	12.9	9.4	3.4
2009	within top 10%	31.5	26.8	4.7
	within bottom 20%	17.1	12.4	4.6
2010	within top 10%	30.5	25.8	4.7
	within bottom 20%	16.6	12.3	4.2
2011	within top 10%	30.6	25.4	5.2
	within bottom 20%	16.5	11.9	4.5
2012	within top 10%	30.7	26.4	4.3
	within bottom 20%	16.1	11.7	4.3
2013	within top 10%	31.6	26.7	4.8
	within bottom 20%	16.2	11.4	4.7

(Adapted from Korean Statistical Information Service, 2013)

gap in monthly private education expenditure between the top 10% students and the bottom 20% students is big, and this indicates that the gap in students' academic achievement is closely related to the degree to which private education is involved. Overall, most of the expenditure goes into general subjects such as English and Math, leaving very little amount spent on arts or physical education. From this, it can be inferred that English education in South Korea falls under the significant influence of the private education section. In a nutshell, Table 2 shows that private education largely correlates to students' good academic results, especially in general subjects such as English, the duty which supposedly the public education system should serve.

Table 3 further shows that the private education section is replacing the public education system in terms of taking the responsibility for students' academic performance. According to a survey that asked parents reasons for choosing private education of general subjects, "makeup for classes" (where "makeup" is used in the sense of "compensate") accounts for the largest proportion, which implies their low satisfaction with public education. This indicates that many parents and students rely on private education for English learning because they feel that they do not receive good enough education from school.

The above analyses show that the community of strong parental supports and the evaluation systems play a significant role in invigorating private education industry in South Korea. Private education has enormous authority as *de facto*

¹ Ten thousand South Korean won equals approximately \$10 US dollars

Table 3

Reasons for Private Education of General Subjects (%)

Year	Preparation for Higher School Level	Anxiety	Study in Advance	Makeup for Classes	Child Care	Others
2007	33.6	36.4	58.6	52.0	3.7	5.2
2008	32.0	33.1	59.9	52.3	1.8	4.2
2009	28.4	23.3	49.2	72.3	2.5	3.9
2010	29.5	25.0	48.4	75.1	4.6	4.0
2011	29.7	23.7	52.1	77.6	4.7	4.9
2012	25.1	18.9	42.5	73.0	4.4	5.1
2013	23.6	17.7	41.2	72.4	3.8	4.7

(Adapted from Korean Statistical Information Service, 2013)

policy, since it is private education that actually shapes how Korean students are taught English and how they academically perform in English at school.

English Education and Social Inequality

Just as standardized testing, a *de facto* language policy, resulted in the social problem of “English language learners left behind” in Menken’s (2008) study, South Korea’s *de facto* language policy, the private education sector, has contributed to a serious social problem – social inequality, which has left behind students from financially limited families. Shohamy (2010) argues for “the need to interpret language educational policies within broader contexts—global, national, regional, and local—in given points in time, driven by sociopolitical and economic factors” (p. 183). In a similar vein, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) also claim there is the possibility that nonlinguistic forces at the micro-levels can play their roles in language planning and thus the individual user cannot but get influenced by the society’s social, political, and economic conditions. Thus, language planning and policy need to be observed within societal contexts. As there emerged a large middle class that can pay for high-priced tools to learn English in South Korea (Stevens et al., 2006), more and more parents started sending their children to private educational institutions, and private education has come to enjoy a significant status in English education.

In spite of the growth of the middle classes, this private education has turned out to be a favor exclusively for socioeconomically privileged people. Nunan (2003) argues that considerable inequity exists in most of the Asian Pacific countries with regard to access to effective English language teaching because the quality of English language education in the public sector is poor; and “only children who stood a chance of learning English were those whose parents could afford to send them to private, after-school language classes” (p. 606). This also applies to the case of South Korea. For instance, Sorensen (1994) explained that in South Korea, “poor parents resent the advantages of tutoring and other extracurricular help affluent parents are able to provide their children” (p. 34). Song (2011) well describes how English education functions to maintain and reproduce this social

inequality. He argues that the privileged can afford to send their children to private language schools with native English-speaking teachers, whereas those who cannot may have to be satisfied with private schools taught by Koreans only. Even if some parents can purchase private English lessons, they might not be able to afford short-term English language courses overseas. Moreover, parents who can afford short-term courses overseas might not be able to afford early overseas education, which is reserved only for the privileged parents. This indicates that the socioeconomically disadvantaged may do their best to give their children private education but the privileged always have the capacity to surpass them.

Indeed, Table 4 well portrays how the private education participation rate is polarized in South Korea depending on average monthly household income, indicator of socioeconomic privilege. Throughout the years, the gap in terms of private education participation rate between students from low-income families and from high-income families continues to stay large. The difference in the rate of participating in private education for general subjects such as English and Math between the two groups is also significant, implying that students from better-off families benefit far more from the advantages of private English language education than students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

Table 4

Private Education Participation Rate by Average Monthly Household Income (%)

Year	School Performance	Private Education Participation Rate	Private Education General Curriculum	Arts and Physical Education, Hobbies
2007	less than 1 million won	36.9	27.4	14.9
	more than 7 million won	93.5	87.8	48.6
2008	less than 1 million won	34.3	25.4	13.1
	more than 7 million won	91.8	86.2	48.0
2009	less than 1 million won	35.3	26.5	13.8
	more than 7 million won	91.1	86.3	47.0
2010	less than 1 million won	36.0	27.7	13.5
	more than 7 million won	89.1	82.0	44.2
2011	less than 1 million won	35.3	27.1	14.0
	more than 7 million won	85.3	77.8	42.5
2012	less than 1 million won	33.5	23.0	14.6
	more than 7 million won	83.8	76.9	35.7
2013	less than 1 million won	31.3	21.8	13.0
	more than 7 million won	83.5	74.1	42.6

(Adapted from Korean Statistical Information Service, 2013)

Considering that English in South Korea has a strong influence on which university and which company you can enter, the gap in the degree to which one can access private education would engender a wide disparity between the

socioeconomically privileged and disadvantaged in terms of one's success in life. Students who have a limited access to private education would aim at college entrance at best, whereas those who take full advantage of private education would pursue not only an entrance to a first-tier university but also attainment of a global mindset by entering universities or companies in English-speaking countries, which would perpetuate a stratified society. Song (2011) claims that even if South Korea appears to be egalitarian "since a top university can be attained through hard work, commitment and academic ability" (p. 45), this meritocracy lacks its true meaning because in reality parents' economic capacity virtually determines their children's educational attainments.

What is more serious is that this inequality in educational attainment is likely to get passed down from parents to their children, and thus it is reproduced and exacerbated. As a case study, Park and Abelmann (2004) analyzed discourses of three mothers, each from different socioeconomic status, on how differently they perceive English education depending on their socioeconomic backgrounds and how they manage their children's English education. A working-class mother worked as a laborer after high-school graduation and has undergone economic hardship, and this background contextualizes her education management. While she is aware of the importance of English for their children's social mobility and success in future, part of her is still unsure if their children's future will actually be transformed. Above all, the reality of her class marginality and economic circumstance makes her settle for an English worksheet program for her children even though she knows that "worksheet English is at the very bottom of the highly stratified (private education) market" (p. 653). A middle-class mother has been afforded time abroad and had decent work opportunities, but she believes that emigration or study abroad is not a panacea for her children's English and successful life. Nevertheless, since she is also aware of the importance of attending prestigious universities to join the mainstream in South Korean society and thus the importance of English, she is wavering between sending her children to cramming schools or sticking to the home-after-school method, in which parents manage their children's study (as opposed to private after-school classes). It can be inferred that it is her low faith in public English education and refusal to join the English frenzy rather than her economic capacity that has shaped her ambivalent attitude towards English education. An upper middle-class mother is sure about the power of English, and she does not hesitate about investing when it comes to her children's English education since she already experienced in her own education in South Korea that public English education is not trustworthy. Not only her financial privilege but also her belief in the power of English contributes to sending her children abroad and to private after-school classes. This case study illustrates how parents' socioeconomic status and their ensuing perceptions about English differently affect their children's English education. This corresponds to Song's (2011) argument that knowledge of English in South Korea is "one of the mechanisms for maintaining and sustaining inequality as it is already structured in South Korea" (pp. 42-43).

Shohamy (2006) argues for the hidden agenda of language policy by the groups in power in the sense that they "want to control and manipulate language in order to promote political, social, economic and personal ideologies...[L]anguage is used...to show economic status (haves/have nots)" (p. xv) and from

a similar perspective, Cooper (1989) claimed that sometimes language planning is employed to maintain or strengthen the power relations between elites and counter-elites. Although English language education policy as top-down policy in South Korea does not seem to plan on hidden agendas or conspiratorial intents in favor of a certain group of people, the private education sector as *de facto* policy seems to have self-generated its own system that benefits the socioeconomically privileged and handicaps the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Moreover, although Cooper (1989) claimed that status planning of English promotes both the international and school subject function of language, how these two functions are unequally distributed and realized depending on students' socioeconomic status through *de facto* language policy is worth noticing. Higher socioeconomic-status students tend to attain more access to using English as an international language as they can afford, both financially and proficiently, to attend institutions abroad, while lower socioeconomic-status students must be satisfied with learning English just as a school subject. In this sense, it can be cautiously concluded that *de facto* language policy in South Korea reproduces the power relation of elites and counter-elites.

Language Policy as Solution and Intervening *De Facto* Policy

As the South Korean government is also aware of inherited social inequality resulting from private English education (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2011), supplementary top-down language policies at national and local levels have been created. For instance, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2008) (the former Ministry of Education) decided to increase English class hours at elementary schools by an extra one hour per week, with the purpose of helping reduce private education costs and relieve the English education gap caused by social inequality. Also, according to Sorensen (1994), some public schools have set up extracurricular programs such as supplementary classes (*pochung suop*), a program usually offered for students failing in English and math, and autonomous study (*chayul haksup*), which is an optional study hour when students are expected to study on their own under teachers' supervision, normally after school until nine or ten o'clock at night. Following the Ministry of Education's advice, all these programs intend to relieve financial burden on private education and to ameliorate English education gap. However, the increased number of hours for English class at school seems to rather have inspired parents to think that they should put extra resources and time in private English education rather than rely on public education. Because of autonomous study and supplementary classes, public schools close late. However, many private after-schools operate past midnight, and parents are still willing to send their children to late-night private lessons regardless of their crammed schedule. These cases show that even if additional policies are announced to solve the social problems caused by *de facto* policy, the impact of *de facto* policy again overrides that of top-down policies.

Shohamy (2006) states that "declared policies will thus be seen to have only limited effects on *de facto* language practice, as it is through language practice that declared policies can be openly challenged, changed, negotiated, and resisted" (p. 75). Consistent with her argument, declared policies, such as increased English class hours, autonomous study, and supplementary classes, seem to have limited

effects on relieving social inequality intensified through private education. Rather, they seem to reinforce the power of private education as *de facto* policy. Private education occupies so much space in English language education in South Korea that there is no way declared policy can elude *de facto* policy's leverage. Private education has planted itself as a powerful factor in the English language education domain in South Korea.

Conclusion

Private education as *de facto* policy, which is idiosyncratic to the South Korean context, seems to have taken over top-down policies' authority to English language education. Does this necessarily entail that top-down policymakers have not realized what driving forces there are behind private education? It appears that they do comprehend the private education sector is propelled by parents' discontent with public education quality (community policy) and the mismatch between the agenda of the curriculum and the English assessment tool (evaluation policy). In fact, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education introduced the TEE certificate system in order to ensure that by 2012 all the in-service English teachers would be skilled enough to teach English in English (Korea Association of Primary English Education, 2009). The aim of this policy was obviously to enhance the quality of public English education, so that parents would no longer need to rely on private education, but the problem remained in the unchanged assessment format, focused on measuring grammar knowledge and reading comprehension. A few years later, however, the National English Ability Test (NEAT) was designed and adopted as an optional English test for college entrance from 2012. Because NEAT included a speaking part, which is a major priority of the current TEE-based curriculum, this testing policy was intended to solve the problem of mismatch between the previous assessment tool and the curriculum. Nevertheless, since the TEE certificate system, which was implemented from 2009, had not reached its goal of preparing all English teachers to be qualified for TEE, as Jo's (2011) studies have shown, there again emerged a worry that private education would unyieldingly substitute for the public education's role in teaching communicative skills to students. For this reason, NEAT as an optional English test for college entrance was terminated after two years.

It seems the South Korean government and the Ministry of Education are aware of the fact that via parental attitudes and assessment tools focusing on grammar/reading comprehension, English education fever as an ideology contributed to private education as *de facto* policy. Instead of creating a supplementary top-down policy that takes into account only either community policy or evaluation policy, a policy that simultaneously considers improvement of public education and assessment needs to be developed in a timely manner. Only such language policy will minimize negative effects of *de facto* policy, if not eradicate them, and offer a truly egalitarian opportunity for all students to learn English.

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