

第6章**Impacts and Effects of Ten Years of Elementary School English Education in Korea**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Kwon and his colleagues (Kwon, Boo, Shin, Lee & Hyoun, 2006) conducted a research project to assess ten years of English education in Korean elementary schools, which became compulsory nationwide in 1997 in Korea. The study, which was sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources, also had an objective to find means and measures to improve primary and secondary school English education. The study adopted a multi-method multi-trait approach, employing library research, in-depth interviews, survey questionnaires, and proficiency test administrations. It attempted to identify the impacts and effects of ten years' English language in elementary schools from many different perspectives and domains.

The English proficiency test used in the study was GTEC for STUDENTS, a standardized test developed by Benesse Corporation. Since the same test had been administered previously, in 2003, in a series of international comparative studies of high-school students in East Asia involving Korea, China and Japan, the 2006 Korean study used the same version of the test to compare the 2003 group, who had not experienced English learning in elementary schools, and the 2006 group, who had experienced it.

Kwon et al.'s (2006) impact study of the English language in elementary school (ELES) provides insightful implications for other Asian countries in similar situations. Their study results are presented below, in a form of translated version of their research report summary.

2. EFFECTS OF TEN YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENGLISH EDUCATION**1) Advancement of Academic Research**

During the past ten years, there have been a great number of research papers published on ELES (English Language in Elementary School), which

contributed greatly to the advancement of academic research not only on elementary school English education but also on English education in general in Korea.

2) Changes in Curriculums, Teaching Materials, and Teaching Methods

Curriculum changes in elementary school English has affected English teaching in classrooms. In the 6th National Curriculum, English was taught for two hours a week from the 3rd grade; however, in the 7th National Curriculum, 3rd and 4th graders learned English only for one hour a week, while 5th and 6th graders continued to learn for two hours a week. The 6th Curriculum set 500 words for elementary school English, but the 7th Curriculum reduced it to 450.

Remedial and advanced learning were introduced in the 7th Curriculum. The textbooks for the 6th Curriculum were developed by commercial publishers and authorized by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, but there was only one set of government-produced textbooks for the 7th Curriculum. Video and audiotapes were provided as teaching aids for the 6th Curriculum, but CD-ROMs and audiotapes were made available for the 7th Curriculum.

3) Changes in Teacher Education and In-service Training for ELES

As ELES became fully introduced, the curricula of the elementary school teacher education institutes were changed to meet the changed needs of the prospective teachers. Courses related to English and teaching methodology were increased. In-service training courses increased in number and type, with an increase in teachers taking in-service training.

4) Students' Perceptions and Self-evaluations of English

a. Elementary School Students' Own Evaluations

Elementary school students' perceptions and self-evaluations of their interest, confidence and communicative competence were generally positive. Only a few students were negative in their self-evaluation. These results seem to show a positive effect of ELES. Students indicated that they were less confident with productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing) than with receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading). They also indicated that they were less confident with written language (i.e., reading and writing) than with spoken language (i.e., listening and speaking). As ELES is characterized by an emphasis on spoken

language, the uncomfortable feeling of the students is understandable.

b. Secondary School Students' Own Evaluation

Secondary school students' interest and confidence peaked in the 7th grade (first year of middle school) and then gradually dwindled as they advanced to the 12th grade. While many students in middle school indicated that their English abilities and confidence had increased since elementary school, the number of such students steadily dropped in high school. Although their English abilities, if measured objectively, might have improved along with their advancement in grades, their perceived confidence was lowered, possibly because of the increasingly challenging vocabulary, sentence structures and content in higher grades. As the students advanced in their school grades, their interest and concern were inclined toward more utilitarian goals, such as school and college entrance examinations.

Students in middle school valued the positive effects of ELES higher than high school students did. There were also some signs that the ELES group (in 2006), who had learned English in elementary school, was more positive about the ELES than the non-ELES group (in 2003) who had not learned English in elementary school.

Middle school students listed the increase of their basic English knowledge (in vocabulary, listening, reading, speaking, writing and grammar) as the most positive effect of ELES. Many students also mentioned that gaining interest, familiarity with English and confidence were positive effects of ELES. This result shows that the affective objectives of ELES were accomplished to some extent. To an open-ended question asking about the negative effects of ELES, "None" was more frequent than other types of responses, reflecting indirectly the positive effects of ELES. As to the difference between elementary school English and middle school English, the most frequent response was that middle school English was more difficult than elementary school English. Students also were unfamiliar with foreign cultures and culturally appropriate English expressions.

High school students, too, listed the increase of basic English knowledge as a positive effect of ELES; however, there were more students who responded that they did not see any positive effects. The third most frequent response was that ELES made them familiar with English. If the second and third most frequent responses are combined, it shows there were indeed some positive effects of ELES. Like in the case of middle school students, "No negative effects" was more

frequent than other response categories.

5) Teachers' Evaluations and Perceptions of Students

a. Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions

As to the difference between the students in early years of ELES and in recent years, elementary school teachers agreed that the students' English abilities have improved greatly, especially in reading and writing. Many teachers thought that elementary school students were active in their learning of English. However, the students' interest and confidence were seen to diminish as their school grades advanced, although their interest and confidence were still higher than those in other school subjects. The teachers also said that polarization of English abilities becomes more evident in higher grades, to the point that it makes English instruction difficult because of the wide gap between the high and low achievers.

b. Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions

Secondary school English teachers acknowledged the positive transfer of ELES to secondary school English learning. A majority of teachers who took part in the questionnaire survey responded that their present students' English abilities were higher than the English abilities of the former students who had not learned English in elementary school. In all areas of confidence, activeness, pronunciation, listening, conversational competence, non-linguistic expression, cultural understanding and international perspectives, teachers rated their present students (i.e., ELES group) higher than their past students (i.e., non-ELES group).

While students' own self-evaluation was lowered in the upper school, the teachers who had taught both the non-ELES and ELES groups definitely saw improved English abilities and more positive affective traits that seem to reflect the positive effects of ELES. Nevertheless, like elementary school teachers, secondary school teachers also were aware of the wide gap between high and low achievers that makes it difficult for them to teach the students.

6) Social Changes

The impact of ELES was also evident in sociological aspects. For the past ten years, private tutoring, English teaching in kindergarten, and early study-abroad have increased steadily and remarkably. However, considering the fact that the

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nation's economy has also grown during the period, the cause-and-effect relationship between ELES and the increases in those areas should not be hastily drawn. Tutoring in other school subjects has also increased during the same period.

7) Effects of ELES of Students' English Abilities

The investigation into the effects of ELES was also made in the area of the students' actual improvement of English abilities. The present study made use of a standardized test called GTEC for STUDENTS, a test developed by Benesse Corporation of Japan. As there had already been reference data, gathered in 2003, of the high school students who had not taken ELES, the present study replicated the 2003 test administration with an identical test; that is, a literally identical test that did not change a single test item. The students from the same five high schools that participated in the 2003 study took the test in September, 2006.

Table 6-1 10th and 11th Graders' Scores on GTEC for STUDENTS in 2003 and 2006

Skills	2003 (non-ELES) (n =4,043)		2006 (ELES) (n=4,019)		Mean Difference	t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Reading	190.4	49.9	205.5	53.2	+15.1	13.132	0.000
Listening	169.7	45.7	187.6	49.3	+17.9	16.944	0.000
Writing	54.4	38.4	66.5	32.3	+12.1	15.248	0.000
Total	414.5	120.4	459.6	121.5	+45.1	16.724	0.000

Table 6-1 shows the mean differences between the non-ELES group and the ELES group in reading, listening, writing and total scores. The test score comparison revealed that the ELES group of 2006 (Mean=459.6) outperformed the non-ELES group of 2003 (Mean=414.5) by 45.1 points. When the groups were broken down into 10th and 11th graders, the 10th graders of 2006 (ELES) scored 43 points higher than their 2003 counterpart (non-ELES), and the 11th graders of 2006 (ELES) scored 47.2 points higher than their 2003 counterpart (non-ELES). The ELES group's scores were significantly higher than the non-ELES groups in all sub-skills of reading, listening and writing.

A separate CAN-DO survey also revealed that the 2006 group felt more competent than the 2003 group in their English use and English-related activities in and out of school.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH EDUCATION

Based on the study results, some suggestions for the improvement and enhancement of elementary and secondary school English education were made. A brief summary of the suggestions is given below.

1) Measures to Improve Elementary School English Education

a. Elementary School English Curriculum

- (1) Teaching for productive skills needs to be intensified.
- (2) In order to improve students' abilities to use English, it is necessary to put a little more emphasis on written language.
- (3) Tailored instruction is necessary for upper grade students in elementary school in order to cope with the widening gap between students' abilities.
- (4) Educational content for the affective domain is necessary.

b. Elementary School Teaching Materials

Textbooks and workbooks for level-adaptive education need to be developed.

c. Teaching Methods of Elementary School English

Learning opportunities need to be expanded by establishing experiential learning centers.

d. Teacher Education for Elementary School English Teaching

- (1) The curriculum of elementary school teacher education institutes should allot more time to the courses aimed at improving the English proficiency of prospective teachers.
- (2) More native-speaker English instructors should be employed in teacher education institutes.

e. In-service Training for Elementary School English Teachers

- (1) Incentives are necessary for voluntary participation in intensive and camp-style in-service training programs.
- (2) In order to improve the qualification of teachers, in-service training programs should provide more courses in teaching methodology and techniques.

- (3) A system of ever-accessible, individualized, self-initiative training programs is necessary.
- (4) A variety of in-service training programs are necessary, including cultural experience and English villages.
- (5) Elementary school teachers need to be taught about secondary school English education.

2) Measures to Improve Secondary School English Education

a. Secondary School English Curriculum

- (1) The curriculums of elementary and secondary school English education should be developed to guarantee close and smooth connections.
- (2) Objectives in the affective domain should be continuously set in the curriculum.
- (3) More emphasis needs to be given to culture and culture-related topics in the secondary school English curriculum.

b. Secondary School Teaching Materials

Secondary school English textbooks should be closely linked to elementary school English textbooks to ensure a spiral development of the educational content.

c. Teaching Methods of Secondary School English

Level-adaptive classroom management is necessary in order to overcome individual differences and enhance the overall teaching effectiveness.

d. Assessment

- (1) A support system is necessary to help the teachers' assessment of the students' performance in English.
- (2) An assessment package needs to be provided to the teachers.
- (3) Writing and speaking tests should be included in the college entrance examination in order to develop productive skills in English.
- (4) An online portfolio system needs to be introduced to improve assessment.

e. Teacher Education and In-service Training

- (1) More native-speaker English instructors should be put in teacher education

institutes.

- (2) For a smooth and systematic transition from elementary school English to secondary school English, secondary school teacher education and retraining institutes need to develop a system to help the teachers' understanding of elementary school English education.

4. CONCLUSION

The research results and suggestions presented so far will provide important bases for the improvement of primary and secondary school English education in Korea. They will also provide implications and insights for a better English education for other countries in the world, especially those countries in Asia, like Japan and China, which share many common cultural and social traits.

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