

A while ago an article of mine was published in several different venues; it discussed English education in Korea and the lack of accountability on the country's part to hire competent instructors that are capable of lifting English education to a whole new level. My words were acrimonious and cantankerous yet condign; the Ministry of Education (MOE) was and still is culpable. Now, almost two months later, I offer Korea remedies to the problems that plague the English education system. These solutions are by no means absolute; rather, they serve as a catalyst for change.

One way in which to improve the English education system in Korea is to mandate background checks. As university transcripts are required to obtain a teaching position in Korea, so should criminal background checks. Such measures would deter those with criminal backgrounds from attempting to enter South Korea. The scope of background checks should not be limited to criminal screenings, they should also include educational screenings.

Degree verification is another way in which to improve the English education system in Korea. Foreigners wishing to teach English as a foreign language in Korea should be required to submit a degree verification form from their university to the MOE before entering the country. Some may complain that this process is arduous and time consuming, while others may feel that this shows a lack of trust between employer and employee. The fact is that in this day and age, one cannot be trusted until s/he has proven herself or himself, especially in the field of education. This leads us to another way in which to improve English education in Korea – qualified instructors.

In order for English education in Korea to improve, the MOE will need to hire qualified instructors and abrogate their obsolete hiring process. Instead of allowing anyone holding a bachelors degree in any discipline to teach, the MOE needs to tighten the requirements to only allow those holding language related degrees (e.g. linguistics, education, English, etc.) or certifications (e.g. TEFL, TESOL, etc.) in teaching English as a second or foreign language to teach the English language. Contrary to conventional thought, this crucial step will allay many of the problems schools face.

Also, training programs for those new to Korea should be mandated across the board. More often than not, even those with the aforementioned degrees still do not know nor understand pedagogy. Moreover, those unfamiliar with Korean culture may not

understand how students in this particular environment learn. It is a misconception among many that just because a person holds a degree in a language related field that s/he can effectively teach English as a foreign language. On the contrary, most cannot. Korea should remedy this problem by implementing required training programs to those new to the country. Training programs should not be ambiguous. Instead, they should be pertinent. A good training program includes the following characteristics:

- ✓ An introduction to Confucian ideology (the predominant way of thought in Korea).
- ✓ Communicative challenges (such as cultural, socio-cultural, psycho-cultural, and environmental influences) one will face while in Korea
- ✓ Simulated obstacles that are most likely to be experienced by foreigners
- ✓ Handouts which include important phone numbers and commonly used Korean phrases

A training program such as the one just outlined would help alleviate the pressures many foreigners face when first arriving to Korea and assist in acclimating the foreign teacher to his or her new surroundings.

Foreigners should not be the only ones to have to undergo the qualification process and training program; Koreans should have to undergo the same processes. Far too often have I run into Korean people who teach English as a foreign language incorrectly; they too do not understand the fundamentals of pedagogy nor do they have the skill-set required to teach the English language. They employ such horrid and outdated methods of teaching English (such as grammar-translation) and use horrendous pronunciation (such as cashee and toastuh) that is borderline reprehensible, yet, they show no compunction. Do these teachers not realize that if their students leave Korea and use this type of pronunciation, they will most likely not be understood, that these words are Konglish and not English?

These remedies are by no means the only way to tackle the problems that plague the English education system in Korea. Rather, they are the building blocks from which to build a sound foundation for English education, the tools needed to help lift English language learning to the next level. The gauntlet has been thrown. Will Korea and The Ministry of Education finally take action, or will they continue to do nothing and hurt their very own?

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