

To improve English Education – Part 2

There is no greater catalyst for discussion than controversy. My first article entitled *To Improve English Education* was published approximately one month ago. Degree verifications, training programs for teachers, background checks, and the hiring of qualified individuals were offered as ways to improve the current system. Since its publication, I have received numerous criticisms in the form of emails and posts on popular ESL/EFL sites. Some of them were constructive while others were too vague to be helpful. Regardless of what was said, there was a constant present among all of the responses I received, and that was the need for new direction. This article serves as part two of *The Ways in Which to Improve English Education in Korea*.

Effective EFL pedagogy is needed in order to facilitate learning. The problem many educators face is which pedagogical method to use. That answer, as N.S. Prabhu and Kumaravadivelu have pointed out, lies within the context in which English is to be used. For example, students in Korea strive to learn English in order to communicate with other countries. They study hours on end in order to try and get an edge over their competition. If the focus of study is on oral communication, then how is grammar-translation going to maximize learning? Moreover, if students are learning English in order to effectively communicate, how can we expect them to learn if instructors do not encourage dialogue among students in an English class? I am not talking about native English speakers. Instead, I am talking about Koreans teaching English as a foreign language. More often times than not, a Korean teaching English will use too much of the students' L1 and not enough of the L2. Consequently, this only hinders students' true potential. To reiterate, the context in which English is to be used should dictate the course of the class.

Besides effective pedagogical methods in a class, teachers wishing to teach EFL should be subjected to an English proficiency exam. Permission to teach English in South Korea should be contingent upon a satisfactory test score. It is a common misconception that because one is fluent in a language, that person can teach the language. This cannot be farther from the truth. Knowing how to speak a language and understanding its syntactic structure are different. Knowing how to pronounce words and being able to teach the pronunciation of words are different. Teaching language is an art form that requires careful strokes and meticulous detail, ergo someone teaching language should have some grasp of it. Some may venture to say, "Okay, then who should make such an exam?" My answer is someone qualified (e.g. has work experience in creating language assessment examinations, has the educational background needed to create such tests, etc.).

Another way in which to improve English education would be to create pay scales that adequately compensate for experience and education. Employers (such as hagwons, schools, and universities) tend to dismiss qualifications as irrelevant, minute details. They demonstrate this by paying someone with a master's degree in TESOL and several years experience the same as someone with a bachelor's degree in a non-education program and only a year of experience; educational institutions fail to see any correlation between education, experience, and pay; they do not realize the amount of qualified instructors that chose not to work at these places because of this practice.

By no means is this an attempt to lump all institutions in Korea into one group as that would not be fair. Instead, the previous example is given in order to draw attention to commonly held practices throughout the English education industry, practices which are costing this country a lot in terms of experienced, educated EFL instructors. If institutions were to map out a pay scale that adequately compensated for education and experience, not only would they see an increase in the amount of qualified individuals applying for jobs, they would also gain a tool through which to adequately evaluate potential candidates.

Government programs have caught on to the idea that pay should reflect education and experience. A prime example is illustrated in the EPIK program (http://epik.knue.ac.kr/sub2/sub2_3_1.asp). My question is why can't the rest of the English institutions realize this? Could it be that hagwons and other academic institutions just do not care about education, that they only care about the bottom dollar and that is it? Could it be that English education really is not valued as much as people say it is? Perhaps, the reason lies within both answers to the questions above; perhaps the reason includes more than just simple explanations. Perhaps...

English education in Korea has come a long way. However, there is much progress to be made before it can be regarded as an effective program. Some efforts being made to improve the current program hold real value and show potential while other efforts are pointless and serve as nothing but a knee-jerk reaction to recent events. Regardless of which efforts one chooses to focus on, the fact remains that progress is underway.

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