

Policy Making in Foreign Language Teaching towards Globalization: the Act on the Promotion of Education of Critical Foreign Languages in Korea

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Abstract

This study focuses on the implications of the enactment of the Act on the Promotion of Education of Critical Foreign Languages in Korea. This act is a legal institutionalization of the state's responsibilities for and roles of teaching less commonly taught foreign languages. Foreign language education policy in the country has focused on English and a few major foreign languages. However, the Korean government came to realize the importance of teaching numerous languages that had been considered minor ones to cope with "glocalization". With the enactment of this Act, the Korean government officially recognized the importance of education related to various foreign languages within its legal framework for public education. The objective of this study is to review the background and outline of the Act and examine the implementation of the projects associated with it. This paper also discusses the expected effectiveness of the Act for teaching diverse foreign languages and issues in the implementation process.

Keywords: *education policy, critical foreign languages, Korea, glocalization, foreign language teaching*

Introduction

On the 4th of August 2016, the Act on the Promotion of Education of Critical Foreign Languages was enacted in Korea. Its aim is to establish the basis of systematically developed courses, support institutions and cultivate qualified professionals to teach foreign languages that have been less commonly taught. With the enactment of the Act, the Korean government officially recognized the importance of education in various foreign languages within its legal framework for public education. This represents a major step forward in encouraging the learning of foreign languages to which the general public has had limited access, and it can be considered a meaningful change in foreign language education policy.

The Act on the Promotion of Education of Critical Foreign Languages was crafted to address the multifaceted challenges that the country faces in international relations. To cope with an increasingly globalized and localized world, the Korean government came to realize the importance of teaching numerous different languages. The term “critical foreign languages” (CFL hereafter) ironically refers to the foreign languages that have been somewhat neglected in the country’s public education system. The objective of this article is to demonstrate the context of this legislation, to provide an overview of the Act and to discuss the practical implementation of the law. Because the law can be considered a key to broadening the variety of languages taught in the public education system, its enactment has a significant impact on the country’s foreign language education policy.

Literature Review

As interaction and integration among the world’s cultures, governments and economies have accelerated, foreign language education has become increasingly crucial. Of the many languages in the world, few are widely taught. Most languages taught in the public and private education sectors are the official languages of the United Nations, which are English, Chinese, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. For the time being, it seems that no language can replace English as an international mode of communication or lingua franca (McCrum, 2010). As English has been considered the world’s common language for international exchange, most non-English speaking countries’ education policies for foreign languages have concentrated on the language. The number of non-native speakers of English who learn the language through formal education is increasing. On the other hand, several scholars predict that the global influence of English will wane, and the major languages of the future may be different from those of today (Graddol, 2004; Kabel, 2016). According to David Graddol’s estimation of the power of

languages based on demographic and economic data, the hierarchical distance between major and minor languages will be reduced (2004, p. 1331). In terms of the number of young native speakers, Chinese, Hindi/Urdu and Arabic will be larger languages than English by 2050 (Graddol, 2004, p. 1330). The importance of local languages in emerging countries is growing rapidly as the global diversity of languages is maintained. The globalization and localization of languages are occurring simultaneously.

This phenomenon reveals characteristics similar to the concept of glocalization. Roland Robertson defines glocalization as “the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” (1995, p. 25). Other scholars also note the co-existence of globalization and localization. Glocalization is described by John Swales as a two-way process: one towards “a world increasingly dominated by multinational corporations and international and supranational entities” and the other towards “regional aspirations, niche marketing, [and] local involvements” (2004, p. 11). Anthony Giddens suggests that globalization “is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (2000, p. 31). The emphasis on local cultural identity in marginalized regions is discussed by Peter Geschiere, who argues that the aggressive openness of globalization has “the paradoxical effect of triggering an obsession with belonging” (2009, p. 6). A native language of a community is a crucial marker of the community’s local cultural identity and strengthens the community’s sense of belonging. To address a world where the impacts of globalization and localization occur simultaneously, an education policy for foreign language teaching should be designed in accordance with the process of glocalization.

Research Focus

The situation of foreign language education in Korea is not much different from that of other non-English speaking countries. English is taught as a compulsory foreign language at the elementary, secondary and higher education levels. Several major foreign languages, such as Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Spanish, are learned as second foreign languages at the secondary and higher education levels. Other foreign languages with less demand are taught only at the higher education level. The government’s foreign language education policy has focused on English for the most part and on a few other major foreign languages to a lesser degree. Foreign languages such as Polish, Hindi, Thai and Swahili are taught at only one or two private universities without government support. The state has not directed its efforts on a policy level to promote the education of these foreign languages.

With Korea's economic development and enhanced position in the international community, the country's public and private sectors have more opportunities to extend their activities to Southeast and Central Asia, South America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa. This has resulted in the growing need for experts who are capable of communicating in the languages of these regions. However, the public educational infrastructure for teaching these languages is not sufficient. Korea's foreign language education policy must be updated in accordance with the increasing exchange with all parts of the globe. In this respect, this study elucidates the background and outline of the Act on the Promotion of Education of Critical Foreign Languages and attempts to reveal issues in the implementation of projects associated with the Act.

Background of legislation promoting CFL teaching

The development of CFL teaching in Korea's higher education institutions has largely been concurrent with its expansion of diplomatic and trading relationships with the foreign countries in which the languages are used. Korea has experienced a significant transformation over the past few decades. It has evolved from a country devastated by the Korean War in the early 1950s into a developed nation that has the 12th highest gross domestic product in the world (International Monetary Fund, 2018). As a relatively resource-poor country, Korea's economy has relied heavily upon imports of natural resources and exports of manufactured products. Meanwhile, there has been fierce competition for international diplomacy between South and North Korea, especially during the Cold War era. In the process of its drive for export-oriented industrialization and the advancement of its international position, the Korean government has made efforts to promote international exchanges, amicable ties and cooperation with foreign countries. As a measure to enhance its relationships with foreign countries, the government has attempted to introduce partner countries' national languages into the university curriculum by supporting the establishment of departments that specialize in teaching foreign languages.

CFL departments began to be established in the 1960s. A series of economic development plans made by the government was initiated in 1962, and the main policy objective was to implement an export-oriented industrial structure in Korea. With this motivation, the government's education policy for foreign language teaching focused on training human resources who were to play key roles in the country's overseas expansion in the fields of trade and diplomacy. There-

fore, CFL teaching departments were established in consideration of the human resource demand for international exchange. Currently, eight universities in Korea maintain CFL departments, and thirty-three CFL-listed languages are taught in these departments (National Institute for International Education, 2017, p. 22). Since the first CFL department was established, CFL departments at universities in Korea have increased and diversified.

However, it seems that the Korean government has focused on the quantitative growth of CFL education by supporting the establishment of CFL departments rather than on the qualitative aspect. The country's foreign language education policy tends to unduly concentrate on English and a few other languages. In a globalizing world, as the opportunities for emerging market entry expand, so does the demand for CFL experts. It is time the government provided systematic support on a policy level to improve the quality of CFL teaching at higher education institutions in the country.

Outline of the Act on the Promotion of Education of CFL

Korea did not have an individual law that governed CFL teaching. To build the public infrastructure for CFL education, comprehensive and systematic regulations were needed. The Act on the Promotion of Education of CFL is an outcome of the Korean government's awareness of the importance of foreign languages that have not been generally taught. Policy making for CFL teaching by enacting the Act was inevitable in a world where globalization and localization occur at the same time.

The purpose of this Act, as indicated in Article 1, "is to prepare foundations for creative critical foreign language education by providing for the matters necessary to promote critical foreign language education, thereby providing various and specialized educational opportunities to people who wish to learn critical foreign languages and contributing to the enhancement of national competitiveness by nurturing talents with the ability to use critical foreign languages" (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2017a). The demand for international exchanges with CFL-speaking countries has increased; therefore, it has become the government's goal to obtain information on these nations and to fulfil its national strategic advancement by supporting the cultivation of manpower with high CFL proficiency.

The definition of CFL is stated in Article 2: "The term "critical foreign language" means a language prescribed by Presidential Decree as a language strategically required for national development" (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2017a).

CFL is similar in concept to LCTL (Less Commonly Taught Languages), a term used in the United States. LCTLs include a broad range of languages, many of which are gaining recognition for their strategic importance in the United States. With regard to the scope of CFL, the Korean government defined 53 languages as CFLs under Article 2 of the Decree. The 53 CFLs are the languages of emerging markets in which the volume of exchanges with Korea is increasing or is likely to increase in the near future. The relatively commonly taught foreign languages in the country, such as Chinese, Japanese and Spanish, are excluded from the list. The scope of CFL covers a wide array of languages from the globalizing world. Following the enactment of this act, the Ministry of Education asked a government-funded research institute, the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP), to conduct a fact-finding survey on CFL education in 2017. The objective of the survey was to prioritize CFL and allocate resources appropriately for the first five years to ensure the effective implementation of the Act. Based on the survey results, the Ministry selected 20 target CFLs to be supported for the first five years. The selected CFLs include Dutch, Mongolian, Burmese, Vietnamese, Swahili, Arabic, Uzbek, Ukrainian, Iranian, Italian, Malay-Indonesian, Kazakh, Khmer, Turkish, Thai, Portuguese, Polish, Hungarian, Hebrew and Hindi.

To implement this act, the government can designate CFL-Specialized Educational Institutions (CFL-SEI hereafter) and support their activities to promote CFL teaching. CFL-SEI are described in Article 8 as “schools having expertise and educational competency in critical foreign languages as specialized educational institutions for critical foreign languages” (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2017a). In the Korean education system, private universities equipped with expertise and educational capabilities in CFL are eligible to be designated CFL-SEI. The duties of CFL-SEI are also specified in Article 9: “Formulating and implementing an execution plan in accordance with the action plan; Education to nurture experts in critical foreign languages; Support for operation of curriculum for critical foreign language education; Support for research and development conducted by faculty of critical foreign languages” (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2017a). As mentioned above, the CFL-SEI will be the principal agents in implementing the CFL educational promotion project, and the government will be the source of financial support for the project. According to Article 7 of the Enforcement Decree of this Act, financial support may be granted to CFL-SEI to exchange and train critical foreign language experts, develop and operate educational programmes and improve the educational environment, such as purchase of educational materials and equipment (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2017b). Earlier in 2018, the designation process of the CFL-SEI was completed, and three institutions were

selected as CFL-SEI: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies and the Dankuk University and Cheongwun University Consortium. These higher education institutions were selected based on a comprehensive evaluation in terms of CFL education expertise and infrastructure status as well as a plan for the CFL education model submitted by each university. The selected universities are expected to improve their CFL education by reforming curricular and evaluation systems, developing the expertise of teaching staff and students, and upgrading the educational environment.

Key elements in projects for promoting CFL education

For the effective implementation of the Act, the National Institution for International Education, an affiliated organization of the Ministry of Education, announced “The first five-year (2017~2021) Master Plan for the promotion of critical foreign language education” (National Institution for International Education, 2017). This master plan contains the top priority tasks in the first phase of the projects for promoting CFL education. Three major agendas suggested in the master plan are improving CFL education at the undergraduate level, nurturing human resources specializing in CFL and expanding the base of CFL education. This chapter discusses the details of each agenda.

To strengthen CFL education at the undergraduate level, the CFL-SEI should develop standardized curricula and design reputable evaluation systems. A standardized curriculum for each CFL that is optimized for Korean students can improve the quality of education at the universities. Evaluation tests for CFL at various levels will be used to assess students’ proficiency in the languages. Once the development of standardized curricula and evaluation systems is completed, customized textbooks will be written in accordance with the curricula. Other tasks for improving CFL undergraduate education include enhancing the expertise of CFL teaching faculty by offering them training courses and providing extracurricular language programmes for students.

To utilize CFL human resources in various fields according to social demand, the CFL-SEI should nurture a new generation of scholars, professional interpreters and business-oriented personnel. The universities can produce new teaching staff and researchers in CFL through their master’s and doctoral courses. To foster professional interpreters, postgraduate programmes in CFL interpretation and translation can be established. The universities can also nurture CFL human resources

equipped with practical capabilities in business by operating joint courses and internship programmes with private enterprises.

To expand the base of CFL education, the selected universities should improve accessibility to CFL courses for the general public, private enterprises and local governments. Competent CFL online lectures will be produced and offered to the public via the K-MOOC (Korean Massive Open Online Courses) website (<http://www.kmooc.kr>). Customized CFL courses for public and private sectors will help to meet the social demand for CFL education. Using international academic networks, the CFL-SEI can operate exchange programmes with foreign universities and international organizations.

Concluding remarks

The Act on the Promotion of Education of CFL reflects the government's strategy for a paradigm shift in foreign language education. This legislation indicates the government's intent to improve efficiency and expand the base of CFL education. To materialize the legislative purpose, CFL-SEI were selected to carry out projects for CFL education.

However, several issues must be addressed. First, it should be noted that the CFL-SEI selection process faced difficult challenges. During the selection process, many concerns and animosities were expressed based on the possibility that the national budget was being allocated to only one or two universities. Rather than acknowledging efficiency by focusing its support on higher education institutions with substantive expertise, the Ministry of Education decided to distribute the budget to multiple universities. Considering the limited resources for CFL education, the government's unfocused distribution may undermine the realization of the objectives of the Act. Second, only a modest number of CFLs has been given priority for government funding. The selection of eligible CFLs was made based on a survey of a research institution, and the target CFLs were decided in consideration of the economic need for the languages. It would be desirable to contemplate other aspects as well, including those within the political, national security, diplomatic, and academic dimensions. It is vital to maintain CFL education with consistency and long-term planning as opposed to focusing on one-off performance or short-term gains. Third, challenges remain with regard to the standardization of CFL education, which plays a crucial role in expanding the base of CFL education and constructing its infrastructure. Standardized curricula, textbooks and evaluation systems should be developed organically and consist-

ently. Under the Ministry's supervision, CFL-SEI are required to cooperate in the standardization process. To ensure the efficiency and sustainability of the project, it would be beneficial to establish a special organization under the Ministry to carry out the joint projects.

The operation of the Act is still in its early stages. It is anticipated that follow-up studies will examine the implications of the Act and provide recommendations on institutional complementation based on the practical experience of carrying out the objectives of the Act.

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