

The government's role in the early development of English language education in Korea (1883-1945).

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Abstract

Since English as a foreign language was introduced to Koreans more than a century ago, it has enjoyed the status as the most popular foreign language during the greater part of its existence in South Korea. The position of English in Korean society has been further strengthened in recent years. There have been unprecedented discussions among the Korean intellectuals and elite on the possibility of elevating the language to an official language. In order to understand why and how the English language has become an important part of present-day Koreans' lives, an investigation of how the language was initially introduced is necessary. This study examines the introduction of the English language and the beginning of English language education in Korea. More precisely, the focus is the critical roles that the government played in the early development of English language education. The incipient stage of Korea's English language education is divided into two periods, the first period when the Korean government was actively involved in the formation of English language education and the second period when the Japanese colonial government suppressed its development. During the first period between 1883 and 1905, English language education in Korea was introduced and shaped by the Korean government: the government established Korea's first institutions of English language education and enacted and promulgated national regulations for foreign language education. During the second period of 1906-1945, from the Protectorate Treaty to Korea's liberation from Japan, English language education came under the control of the Japanese government-general and was enslaved to the colonial system, whose sole purpose was to serve Japanese gains; thus, the early burgeoning English language education abruptly came to a halt and stagnated. This study attempts to identify the language educational policies during the two periods, the subsequent changes made in the policies, and the social contexts that brought about these changes and discusses implications of these findings for present-day English language education in South Korea.

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