

A Comparative Study of the National English Curricula of Korea, China and Japan: Educational Policies and Practices in the Teaching of English*

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The purpose of the present study is to investigate and compare the current state of English education in three major countries in the East-Asia region. Particularly, this study focuses on the English curriculum being implemented in Korea, China and Japan. Comparisons are made in the English curricula of these countries in terms of performance standards, levels, organizations and contents of the curriculum. The results of the analysis showed that there were several differences in starting point of teaching English in schools, goals, performance standards, and differentiation of levels for English teaching in these countries. For example, the starting point of teaching English in Japan was later than that in both Korea and China. The English Curricula of each country was also organized according to different criteria. Meanwhile, it was found that English is considered to be a very important subject in educational contexts in these countries. Thus, English was divided into several courses and developing students' communicative competence to the fullest was one of the major goals of English education in these countries. The English curriculum of each country was featured by its unique emphasis on different aspects of English education. For instance, the English Curriculum of Korea had more specified contents than those in China and Japan. While the English Curricula of Korea and China present performance standards around a specific skill chosen, Japan tended to emphasize the integration and connection among the language skills. Implications for curriculum development are presented on the basis of the analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the international society of the 21st century, networks have been an indispensable

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means to obtain and deliver information due to the development of the information technology fields. The acceleration of the digital economy has increased the importance of an ability to communicate in English as a major means for international business communication. Under the influence of the major changes of these environmental circumstances, attention to the effective teaching of English has come to a peak. It is not to exaggerate that all attention has been paid to English education ever since English became one of the major subjects in elementary schools in Korea from 1997. Serious problems in relation to English education in Korean schools have been raised so far. One of such problems lies in students' inability to communicate naturally and effectively in English with native-speakers of English although they have received 6 years of regular teaching in middle and high schools. This problem is directly and indirectly related to the expansion of private English tutoring and attending of private institutes, and immigration or early leaving for English-speaking countries to study English. At the national level, several scholars and teachers have pointed out that English should be an official language — at least for a certain region — indicating many disadvantages due to the lack of English competency. The report of the committee for the Japanese Prime Minister issued in January 2000, included a suggestion that English should be a second official language in Japan. During the recent years, a proposal to make English an official language in Korea has received strong attention among the public. The spread of the Internet has increased the importance of English as an international language and thus the discussion of making English an official language seems to have continued for the time being. However, it is necessary to raise questions as to how English should be taught in Korean contexts in which the purpose of using English is limited.

Up to now, there have been many studies on English curricula and ways of evaluation in Korea. To name a few, there are studies on the development of national curricula for cultivating communicative ability (Duk-Ki Kim, Doo-Bon Bae, & Im-Deuk Kim, 1992; Yoon Lee, 1997), the studies on national curricula and plans for syllabus models (Yak-Woo Park et al., 1997; Jai-hee Lee, 1998), comparative studies on Korean national curricula and foreign countries (Eun-Ju Kim, 1997; Oryang Kwon, et al, 2004). Except for Oryang Kwon et al's study, there has been a paucity in the systematic analysis of English education in east-Asian countries with similar conditions to Korea. Instead, the majority of these studies have been focused on Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language on the basis of English-speaking countries. English education should be performed with an agreement between goals, contents, and evaluation. In this respect, it would be meaningful to make a comparative analysis on English education in Japan and China, which hold similar educational needs and interests to those of Korea. It is expected that this analysis can provide some valuable bases on developing a model of English education appropriate for Korean contexts.

The present study attempts to analyze the main contents of English education on the

basis of English curricula and suggest a future-oriented effective model of English education for Korea. The study also aims at an analysis of English education in these East-Asian countries whose purposes of English education hold common features in many areas (English as a Foreign Language, English for a Specific Purpose, etc.). Therefore, the study can bear important implications on English education in Korea since it analyzes the contents of EFL education from the TEFL perspectives done by the researchers in one of these countries, not from other perspectives such as TESL. Accordingly, it seems possible to develop and make suggestions about English education fit for the unique situations of these East-Asian countries in which English is being taught as a foreign language, rather than English education for a second language context. In other words, through the examination of the current states and characteristics of English education in Korean, Japan and China, this study aims to propose a new paradigm for English education to meet the needs of school contexts in Korea.

II. BACKGROUNDS OF THE STUDY

1. The English Curriculum

A curriculum is defined as “the whole body of knowledge that children acquire in schools” (Richards, 2001, p. 39). In other words, a curriculum includes principles and procedures for the planning, implementation, evaluation and management of educational program. According to Tyler (1949), a curriculum model can be described as involving aims/objectives, content (what to teach), organization (how to sequence and grade teaching materials), and evaluation. A curriculum of an educational program can be examined from multiple perspectives: First, the planning stage includes a variety of decision-making processes such as how to plan a curriculum on the basis of needs analysis from students, how to establish goals and objectives, how to select and grade the contents of teaching, placement of students according to their proficiency levels, and development of teaching/learning materials, tasks and evaluation tools. Second, the implementation stage involves examining how the intentions of the curriculum developers are embodied by observing the processes of learning and teaching in the classrooms. Third, the evaluation stage includes assessing students’ achievements and performances in relation to the goals and objectives in the curriculum and seeking out the reasons of students’ failure, and considerations for developing a subsequent curriculum in the future. Finally, the management and administration stage involves the examination of useful resources for learning and teaching, and relationships between schools and community.

As presented in the above, a curriculum refers to planning, implementation, evaluation,

management and administration. A syllabus differs from a curriculum in that it focuses on how to select and sequence/order the contents of a curriculum. According to Nunan (1988) and White (1988), a syllabus can be classified into a product-oriented or process-oriented syllabus depending on whether it focuses on the outcome or the process of learning. Some examples of the product-oriented syllabus are a situational syllabus, topic-based syllabus, structural syllabus, and notional-functional syllabus. The process-oriented syllabus includes a process syllabus, task-based syllabus, and procedural syllabus. In the past, the traditional syllabus was centered on the pre-specifications of the contents of teaching and thus was teacher-centered, instruction-centered, and information/knowledge-based. However, due to the advent of a variety of syllabi emphasizing students, negotiation of meaning, and problem-solving activities in an English classroom in the 1970s, there has been a paradigm shift in the curriculum development. Thus, the student-centered and process-based syllabus took the place of the teacher-centered and product-based syllabus. This new trend in curriculum development starts from examining and analyzing the needs and interests of students involved through needs analysis. According to Brown (2001), the student-centered or learner-centered curriculum means providing diverse syllabi depending on the proficiency levels and needs of students. In other words, in the learner-centered curriculum, the students can engage in deciding contents and methods of teaching. Further, it encourages student creativity and the enhancement of student self-esteem and feeling of achievement.

The basic problems that need consideration for developing an English curriculum lie in what language competence the students should achieve after learning English. Several definitions in relation to language competence have emerged. In the 1960s, under the influence of structuralism in linguistics, language competence was defined as a kind of building block skills including pronunciation, lexis and grammar. Therefore, language competence was thought to be achieved through practicing these low-level skills separately. Learning a foreign language was referred to as a synthetic skill from small to larger units. However, understanding lower-level skills cannot be directly connected to the ability to communicate in real-life contexts. Hence, scholars and curriculum developers came to agree that language cannot be separated from social contexts, and language is a tool for interaction and communication. According to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the purpose of language learning is to develop communicative ability. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) viewed communicative competence consisting of four sub-components including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Later Bachman (1990, 1996) claimed that language ability is comprised of organizational competence and pragmatic competence highlighting functions and sociolinguistic aspects of language. The Seventh National Curriculum of Korea incorporated the concepts of CLT, the Whole Language Approach

and Task-Based Learning as its bases. Thus, the main goals of the Seventh National Curriculum are to cultivate communicative ability, and this can be accomplished through a variety of communicative tasks, integrating listening, speaking, reading and writing.

2. Previous Studies on EFL Curricula

There have been many studies on English curricula in terms of the goals/objectives and contents, and implementation of curriculum. Specifically, these studies have mainly focused on the analysis of the English textbooks and classroom activities (Duk-Ki Kim et al., 1992; Jai-hee Lee, 1998; Yoon Lee, 1997; Yak-Woo Park et al., 1997). Despite a sufficient number of studies on curricula, there has been a scarcity of studies which made comparisons of curricula across countries. Eun-Ju Kim (1997), for instance, analyzed and compared the contents of English curricula between Korea and other foreign countries including the U.S., Britain, Israel, and Hungary. On the basis of the comparative study, she made several suggestions on the directions of curriculum development in Korea. First, EFL instruction should integrate the four skills of language from the beginning. Second, EFL education should aim at a learner-centered curriculum on the basis of students' ability, needs and purposes of learning. Third, EFL education needs to focus on promoting a communicative ability in order for students to interact effectively for various purposes in everyday contexts. Fourth, EFL curriculum should offer more flexibility to material writers and teachers in writing textbooks and implementing tasks/activities in the textbooks to suit their own teaching situations. Fifth, EFL instruction should help students understand and appreciate the diversity of languages and cultures, including their own, in order for them to fully participate in this rapidly developing society. Finally, EFL teaching needs to connect learning English with the learning of other disciplines.

Soon-Bok Han (1996) explored how English is being taught in elementary schools overseas carefully examining the cases of such countries as the U.S., Sweden and France. In her analysis of EFL teaching in those countries, she found that in the U.S. (especially Los Angeles) the ESL curriculum is organized around a variety of themes and tasks. In addition, it was revealed that the integration of the language and other subject areas was well implemented. In Sweden, the meaning-function oriented syllabus was the basis of EFL education. In France, English is being taught at the second grade in elementary schools and also adopts a meaning-function oriented syllabus similar to that of Sweden. Nunan (2003) investigated the place of English in the curriculum in several countries in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of the issue of age of initial instruction, language instruction and teacher training. He found that there exist serious problems and inconsistency in the language education policy and implementation of English curricula in these countries. Oryang Kwon, et al. (2004) conducted a comparative study on the English proficiency of

Korean, Japanese and Chinese high school students and provided some practical implications on the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in East Asia.

III. METHOD

This section describes the data for analysis and specific methods of analysis of the English curricula in three countries - Korea, Japan and China - in terms of the goals/objectives, the levels and contents of the curricula.

1. Data for Analysis

The data for analysis are presented in Table 1 below. The English curriculum of China was translated into English by a Chinese graduate student majoring in English education at a graduate school in Seoul. The researchers and the Chinese student discussed the areas of difficulty in understanding and then translated into English together. For the English curriculum of Japan, the original version written in English was obtained and used. The curricula of these two countries were the most recent versions issued between 1997 and 1999.

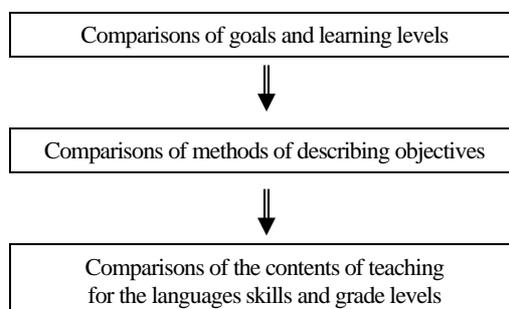
TABLE 1
Lists of Data for Analysis

Country	Data	Year
Korea	The Foreign Languages Curriculum (I)	1997
China	The Criterion of the English Curriculum of High School (Ministry of Education in China)	1999
Japan	Course of Study for Junior High Schools: Foreign Languages (English), Tokyo Shoseki	1998
	Course of Study for Senior High Schools: Foreign Languages (English), Tokyo Shoseki	1999

2. Method of Analysis

In order to propose future directions of an English curriculum in Korea, the curricula of three countries - China, Japan and Korea (whose geographical situations are similar to one another and where English is being taught as a foreign language) - were analyzed in terms of the goals/objectives, the beginning stage of English education and the learning stage at different school levels. In addition, the methods and contents of performance standards for different grade levels were compared.

FIGURE 1
Procedures of Analysis



IV. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSIONS

1. Comparisons of Learning Goals and Levels

The analysis of the contents of learning goals and levels in the three countries revealed that there are some differences in the contents of goals and the division of levels. It was found that the curriculum of Korea aims to develop students' basic communicative ability in English. The National English Curriculum of China is to promote students' integrative ability to use language, including the four skills of language, culture, and study strategies. As in the National English Curriculum of Korea, the goal of the English Curriculum of Japan is to cultivate students' communicative competence.

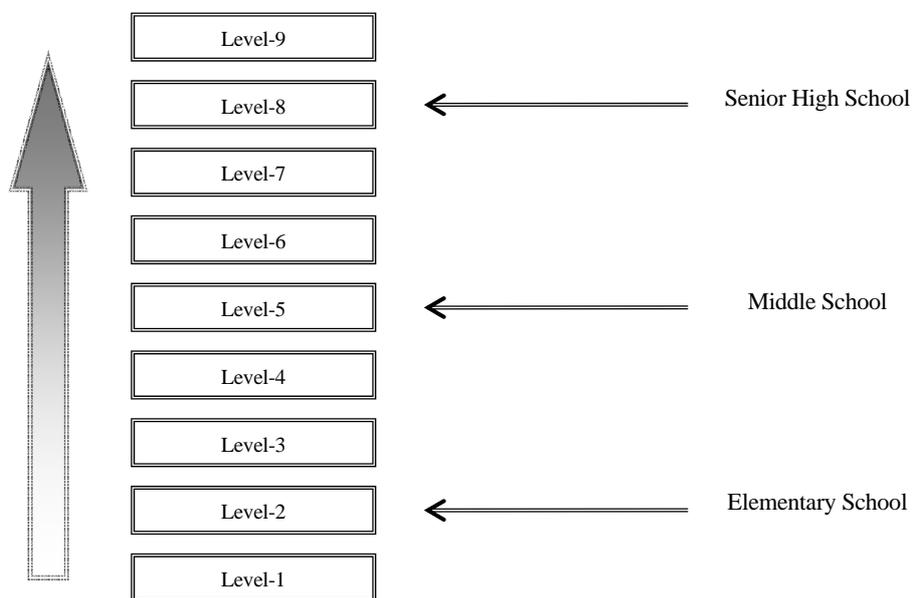
TABLE 2
Goals of English Education

Country	Goals
Korea	To develop basic communicative abilities to understand and use English necessary for daily life and to provide a basis to introduce and develop the Korean culture by accepting foreign cultures wisely.
China	To develop students' integrative abilities of language use, leading to self-directed learning.
Japan	To understand the information and intentions of a speaker and to express one's own ideas; to provide students motivation for communication; and to appreciate foreign language and culture through language learning.

Next, there are some differences between the three countries at the starting point of teaching English in schools and the contents of English education. As shown in Table 3, Korea, China and Japan differ in the establishment of performance levels. In Korea, "level

differentiation” is being used for English. Under the name of the National Common Basic Curriculum, English should be taught from the third grade in elementary school to the first grade in high school as a requirement. After elementary school, the four levels of English courses are offered from middle school to the first grade in high school. Along with the National Common Basic Curriculum, “in-depth and supplementary differentiated curriculum” for English is offered from grades 3 in elementary school through 10 in high school. The in-depth and supplementary differentiated curriculum is operated depending on students’ achievement levels and teaching situations. For high school, English I, English II, Reading Comprehension, English Conversation and English Writing are offered as elective English courses tailored to students’ interests and needs. The elective courses are divided into general elective courses and in-depth elective courses. General elective courses are organized around liberal arts and daily life, and in-depth elective courses are designed to help students develop students’ occupational needs, dispositions and aptitude (Ministry of Education of Korea, 1997). In the high school elective-centered curriculum, “what to teach” is presented as “contents” of teaching rather than “performance standards” used for the previous level.

FIGURE 2
The Levels in the English Curriculum in China



In China, English is first taught from the third grade in elementary school and through to the third grade in senior high school. As Figure 1 shows, levels 1 through 9 are run: level 1

refers to the third and fourth grades; and level 2 from the fifth and sixth grades in elementary school; levels 3 through 8 in middle and senior high school; finally, level 9 is applied to those who prepare to be admitted into foreign language universities beyond the third grade in senior high school (Figure 1).

In Japan, the curriculum is organized and implemented for middle and high school respectively, and English is first introduced in middle school not in elementary school. The middle school curriculum is divided into the 7th, 8th and 9th grades. However, in case of high school, distinctions among grade levels are not made. Instead, performance standards for each subject matter are presented, and according to the curriculum, certain subject matters should be taught prior to others. For English in high school such courses as Oral Communication I, Oral Communication II, English 1, English 2, Reading, and Writing are offered. The starting point of English education and distinctions of levels are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Starting Point of Teaching English and the Differentiation of Levels

Country		Korea	China	Japan
Starting point		Third grade (E)	Third grade (E)	First grade (M)
Differentiation of performance levels		Grade level	Acquisition level	Grade level
	Beyond high school	-	Level 9	-
	High school	Reading Comprehension Conversation Writing English II English I (Elective-centered curriculum)	Level 8	Oral Communication I Oral Communication II English 1 English 2 Reading Writing
		National Common Basic Curriculum (Level-differentiation)	Level 7	
		10-a, 10-b	Level 6	
	Middle school	9-a, 9-b	Level 5	Grade 9
		8-a, 8-b	Level 4	Grade 8
		7-a, 7-b	Level 3	Grade 7
	Elementary school	Grade 6	Level 2	
		Grade 5		-
		Grade 4	Level 1	
		Grade 3		

* E: Elementary school, M: Middle school, H: High school

2. Comparisons of Organizations of the English Curricula of Three Countries

Comparisons of the organization of the English curricula of Korea, China and Japan are made, focusing on the high school curriculum. The case of Korea is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
The Organization of the English Curriculum in Korea (Ministry of Education of Korea, 1997)

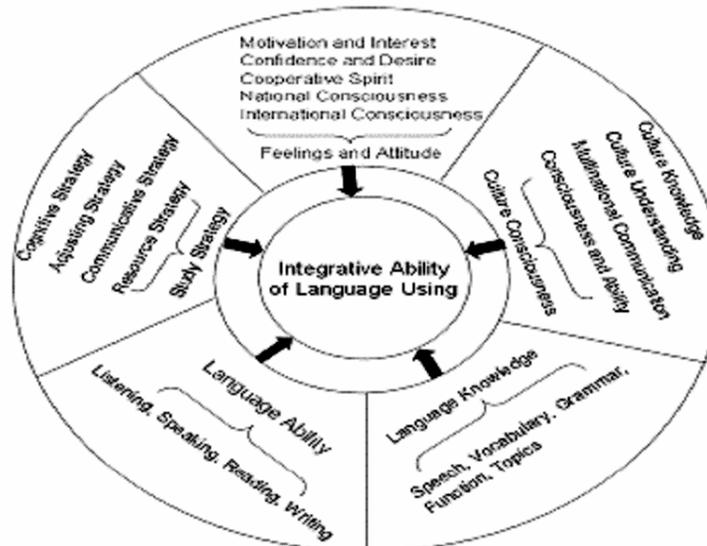
Foreign Language Curriculum (I)
I. The National Common Basic Curriculum (General English)
1) Nature/ Characteristics of English Education
2) Goals of English Education
3) Contents
(1) Organization of Content:
– language functions
– communicative activities
– language materials
(2) Performance Standards According to Grade/Level
Grade 3: Listening/Speaking
Grade 4: Listening/Speaking/Reading
Grades 5-6: Listening/Speaking/Reading/Writing
Levels 7-a –10b: Listening/Speaking/Reading/Writing
4) Teaching/Learning Methods:
(1) Differentiated curriculum with in-depth and supplementary activities
(2) Level-centered/differentiated curriculum
5) Evaluation:
(1) Differentiated curriculum with in-depth and supplementary activities
(2) Level-centered/differentiated curriculum
[Appendix]: Language materials, Communicative functions/Examples, List of basic vocabulary items
II. High School Elective-Centered Curriculum:
1. English I
2. English II
3. Reading Comprehension
4. English Conversation
5. English Writing

In the case of China, as presented in Table 5, the general goals of English education are described and then specific explanations of each level follow. As shown in Figure 3, the primary goal of English education is to cultivate students' integrative ability in language use. The integrative ability in language use includes 5 sub-components: language ability, language knowledge, cultural awareness, feelings and attitude, and study strategy. Under each sub-component, several performance standards are presented.

TABLE 5
The Organization of English Curriculum in China (Ministry of Education of China, 1999)

I. Introduction
II. Goals of Curriculum
III. Criterion of Contents
1. Language ability (Level 1- Level 9)
2. Language knowledge (Level 2, Level 5, Level 8)
3. Feelings and attitude (Level 2, Level 5, Level 8)
4. Study strategy (Level 2, Level 5, Level 8)
5. Cultural awareness (Level 2, Level 5, Level 8)
IV. Pedagogical Implications for Areas
1. Teaching area (Case 1- Case 5)
2. Evaluation area (Case 1- Case 6)
3. Development and implementation of teaching materials
4. Textbook writing and application
[Appendix]:
I. Pronunciation; II. Grammar; III. Function; IV. Topic;
V. Teaching References; VI. Classroom Language; VII. Vocabulary List

FIGURE 3
The Goals of English Education in China (Ministry of Education of China, 1999, p. 4)



In the case of Japan, as summarized in Table 6, English is divided into five subject areas and the performance standards and contents of each subject area are presented. The content of each subject deals with required language activities, implementation of language activities, and kinds of language materials for use. A subject matter itself consists of levels and thus performance standards for levels or grades are not stated.

TABLE 6
The Organization of English Curriculum in Japan (Ministry of Education of Japan, 1999)

I. General Goals
II. Goals and Contents of Each Subject Areas
1. Oral Communication I
1) Goals
2) Contents
(1) Language activities
(2) Implementation of language activities
(3) Language materials
3) Implementation of Contents
2. Oral Communication II
3. English 1
4. English 2
5. Reading
III. Development of Curriculum and Syllabus
1. Guidelines for the development of curriculum
2. Guidelines for the development of syllabus

In the case of Japan, there are some differences in describing the contents of curriculum for middle and high schools. As presented in Table 6, in high school, English is divided into six subject areas (Oral Communication I, Oral Communication II, English I, English II, Reading and Writing). The goals and contents of each subject area are presented as well. The contents of each subject area are further divided into types of language activities, implementation of language activities, and language materials/resources for use. Table 7 shows the types of English courses and learning goals in Japan. As shown in Table 7, English is divided into five main subject areas and each area contains different purposes. For instance “Oral Communication I and II” focus on production skills and develop speaking topics from every day life contexts to more various situations.

TABLE 7
Types of English Courses and Learning Goals

Type	Learning Goals
Oral Communication I	To cultivate the basic ability to understand and express themes and information familiar to a daily life
Oral Communication II	To cultivate the ability to organize, present, and discuss one’s thoughts and opinion about a variety of themes
English I	To promote the basic ability to express one’s thoughts related to a daily life through oral and written mode To provide students with a high level of motivation for communication in English
English II	To foster the ability to understand various themes and the ability to express one information or thoughts in oral and written mode To enhance motivation for communication in English
Reading	To promote the ability to understand a message and intentions of a writer To increase motivation for communication in English

The learning stages of each country are presented in Table 8. In the English curriculum of Korea, ‘contents’ of learning differentiate grade and levels. In China, the criterion of English curriculum divides English curriculum into nine levels different characteristics and ability. In Japan, a subject matter itself distinguishes levels and performance standards and contents of each subject matter are presented accordingly.

TABLE 8
Comparisons of Learning Stages

Country	Korea	China	Japan
Distinction of leaning stages	Contents are presented in terms of grade and levels	Content criterion includes five sub-components and performance standards for each level and areas are presented	Subject matter itself distinguishes levels and performance standards and contents for each subject matter

3. Comparisons of the Contents of the High School English Curriculum

This section presents the results of a comparative analysis of the contents of the English curricula of the three countries in order to examine the characteristics in distinguishing each level. The performance standards of the curriculum in terms of listening skills in Korea are shown in Table 9. In Korea, beyond elementary school, the curriculum is organized around levels 7 through 10 in middle school to the first grade in high school. The English curriculum of Korea represents a level-based and differentiated curriculum according to students’ levels in one class. Here, one grade level is divided into two sub-levels such as 7-a and 7-b: 7-a stands for the first half semester and 7-b the second half. Thus, the contents and performance standards of each level are more specified than those of China and Japan. China and Japan generally distinguish levels on the basis of the contents of instruction and types of subject matters. In Korea, the performance standards of each level tend to become more advanced. For example, the first performance standard of level 10-a, “Students are able to *understand* the themes and main points after listening to somewhat unfamiliar texts about general topics.” On the other hand, the performance standard of 10-b is paralleled to the previous level, 10-a, except for what students are able to do with the same kind of text. That is the first performance standard in 10-b, stated as “Students are able to *infer* the themes and main points after listening to somewhat unfamiliar text about general topics.” In this level, students should be able to make inferences more than just understand the themes and main points of the text heard. In the case of English II, the performance standards (2), (3), (4) all contain “making inferences” as what students should be able to do. This implies that making inferences is regarded as one of the most advanced skills in the high school English curriculum. However,

considering that inferring skill can be taught with easy material even in elementary school, including inferring skills only in high school does not seem appropriate.

TABLE 9
Performance Standards for Listening (Ministry of Education of Korea, 1997)

Levels/ Courses	Performance Standards
English II	(1) To understand main ideas of the speech, address, and broadcast (2) To grasp the themes and main ideas through inferring after listening to a variety of texts (3) To infer what might have happened before after listening to a variety of texts (4) To infer the intentions and attitude of the speaker and locate evidence of the inference (5) To understand the texts about general topics through evaluating the content synthetically (6) To record the summary of somewhat unfamiliar texts
English I	(1) To understand short lectures and radio news (2) To understand reports dealing with facts (3) To understand literal and implied meanings of texts about various topics (4) To understand the development of ideas, cause / effect, conclusion / evidence presented in texts about various topics (5) To evaluate the contents of texts about various topics
English 10-b	(1) To infer main ideas of somewhat unfamiliar texts (2) To distinguish between facts and opinions of the speaker (3) To summarize the content of somewhat unfamiliar texts (4) To understand the main points of short discussions (5) To understand the situation and main ideas of talks about general topics (6) To understand the development of ideas, cause / effect, or conclusion / evidence presented in somewhat unfamiliar texts about general topics (7) To compare various perspectives presented in short discussion
English 10-a	(1) To understand the themes and main points of somewhat unfamiliar texts about general topics (2) To understand the organization of a story including situation, characters, and events (3) To understand the main ideas and specific details of somewhat unfamiliar texts about general topics (4) To compare various perspectives presented in texts about general topics (5) To compare one's understanding with others' (6) To understand short announcements

Table 9 represents the descriptions of performance standards of the English curriculum in China in terms of listening skills.¹ As summarized in the table, at a lower-level, it

¹ According to Hedge (2000), foreign language learners need to develop a high level of listening proficiency, though the listening skill has been overlooked in ELT field. She claims that current interest in oracy has put listening in a central place in the language classroom. Thus, in this paper, out of the four language skills, listening as one of the most basic and important skill in foreign language learning is selected for comparisons.

requires grasping the general meaning of a text while at higher-levels, more advanced listening abilities are required with various challenging listening materials including radio program and news. In addition, students at these levels are required to foster the ability to make connections and judgment about the listening texts. For example, the performance standard (3) of level 6 in Table 10 states that “students should be able to identify the main characters, events, and their relationships in a narrative text.” However, the performance standard (4) in level 7, adds understanding the scene development and the ending of the story to the performance standard (3) of the previous level. However, it can be argued that the ability to understand the general meaning and specific details of a text can be cultivated simultaneously. That is, there seems to be no evidence that the ability to understand a general meaning should be preceded over understanding specific details. Furthermore, there seems no clear-cut distinction between the performance standards in each level. For instance, the performance standard (2) in level 6 and the performance standard (3) in level 8 only differ in the types of listening materials (simple speeches or discussion vs. discussion).

TABLE 10
Performance Standards for Listening (Ministry of Education of China, 1999)

Levels	Performance Standards
Level 8	(1) To be able to recognize different attitudes according to different tones (2) To be able to understand discussion and talk; and memorize the points on familiar topics (3) To be able to grasp the main idea of a short paragraph (4) To be able to, on the whole, understand the main idea or gist of a radio program and English news on TV (5) To be able to understand euphemistical suggestions and persuasions
Level 7	(1) To be able to recognize the main information during listening and to have correct judgment (2) To be able to take notes according to what students have heard (3) To be able to connect facts with related information during the listening (4) To be able to understand the description of characters and events, the scene development, and the ending of the story
Level 6	(1) To be able to grasp the key words in the listening text, and to understand the logic relationship among sentences (2) To be able to get the main idea and opinion from the listening text, simple speeches, or discussions (3) To be able to understand normal-speed stories or narratives, and understand the main characters, events, and their relationship (4) To be able to understand requirements and order of tasks and to complete the tasks on the basis of those requirements

TABLE 11
Performance Standards for Listening (Ministry of Education of Japan, 1999)

Courses	Performance Standards
English II	(1) Objectives: To enable students to understand a wide array of topics in spoken or written English and to convey the information or thoughts by speaking or writing, thus improving the ability and willingness developed by English I to communicate. (2) Contents: In order to attain the above objectives, a wider range of language activities should be conducted than those listed for English I.
English I	* Objectives: To develop a basic ability and willingness to understand what one hears or reads about familiar topics in daily life; to convey one's information or thoughts either by speaking or writing, thus becoming highly motivated to communicate in the target language. (1) Listening to spoken English, and understanding the information or thoughts the speaker conveys, or to get its summary or outline. (2) Reading written English, understanding the information or thoughts the writer conveys, and making a summary or outline of it. (3) Talking or exchanging opinions about information or thoughts that were heard or read in English. (4) Writing in a well-organized manner about information or thoughts that were heard or read in English.
Oral Communication II	* Objectives: To develop an ability and willingness to organize, present, and discuss information and thoughts on various topics. (1) Understanding and developing opinions and thoughts about the contents of spoken passages. (2) Summarizing information or thoughts on various topics, and presenting the summary effectively. (3) Talking about or discussing various topics. (4) Creating and performing skits.
Oral Communication I	* Objectives: To develop a basic ability and willingness to understand and express information and thoughts on familiar topics in daily life through aural/oral interaction. (1) Understanding spoken English and responding appropriately according to the situation or the speaker's intention. (2) Asking questions about various topics, and answering a speaker's questions. (3) Conveying information or thoughts appropriately to others depending on the situation and purpose. (4) Summarizing and conveying information or thoughts about what one hears or reads, and understanding spoken presentations given by others.

In Korea and China, the performance standards of each level are organized around the four skills of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing) whereas in Japan listening and speaking are integrated into one subject matter and the performance standards are presented according to each subject. For example, as presented in Table 11, in the case of Japan, "oral communication" is divided into two levels, Oral Communication I and II. In Oral Communication I, it is required to understand spoken English and respond appropriately

according to the situation or the speaker's intention, while in Oral Communication II students are required to present their opinions and thoughts, and summarize information on a variety of topics effectively. Looking at the performance standards of each subject (Oral Communication I and Oral Communication II), the performance standard (4) of Oral Communication I requires students to summarize and convey information or thoughts about texts heard or read. In Oral Communication II, the performance standard (2) focuses on summarizing and effective presentation skills based on the summary. The performance standards of the curricula of Korea and China are presented centering on one specific skill such as understanding the contents of a text for listening. On the other hand, the performance standards of the curriculum in Japan put an emphasis on the integration of skills such as making presentations on the basis of listening or reading. Thus, a major focus is placed on the cultivation of the abilities to give an effective summary through oral presentation, which contributes towards the enhancement of international competitiveness. In short, in Japan the performance standards of the curriculum seem to reflect practicality and user-centeredness.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Conclusions

The results of the present study can be summarized as follows.

First, regarding the starting point of English education, both Korea and China introduce formal English education from the third grade in elementary school. On the other hand, Japan begins to teach English from the first grade in middle school. In terms of the organization of the English curriculum, Korea employs the National Common Basic Curriculum for elementary school through the first grade in high school and Elective-Based Curriculum for the rest of the years of high school. The national common basic curriculum of Korea operates and is implemented through basic, advanced and supplementary basis reflecting differentiated curriculum according to students' proficiency levels and needs. In China the English curriculum is organized around nine levels according to school levels. For level 9, it is intended to prepare students for admission to foreign language universities. In Japan, the English curriculum is organized and implemented according to middle and high schools. The middle school curriculum comprises three levels - levels 7, 8 and 9, - while the high school curriculum is not divided into grade levels and instead presents the performance standards according to types of subject matters.

Second, regarding the goals of English education in these countries, there are some differences. The English curriculum of Korea puts a primary emphasis on cultivating basic

communicative abilities. The English Curricula of China and Japan seem to stress promoting the integrative ability of language use and the communicative ability for practical use, respectively. Third, concerning the organizations of the curricula, the curriculum of Korea comprises the national common basic curriculum and the Elective-Based Curriculum for high school. It is organized in the order of the nature of English education, goals, performance standards, teaching/ learning methods and evaluation. The curriculum of China consists of the overall purpose of English education: to develop students' integrative ability in language use, and this ability includes students' language ability in the four skills, language knowledge, feelings and attitude, study strategy and cultural awareness. On the basis of these components, specific performance standards are presented. The curriculum of Japan is divided into five major subjects for high school such as Oral Communication I, Oral Communication II, English I, English II, Reading. The curricula of these five subjects contain performance standards and specific contents of instruction. The contents are again divided into language activities, implementation of language activities and language materials.

Fourth, the comparisons were made in order to examine how to distinguish the levels and grades of the contents of instruction. From the study of contents and grading of the performance standards for the listening skills, it was found that the contents are more specified in the case of Korea than China and Japan. In the curriculum of Korea, the ability to make inferences seems to be regarded as a higher-level skill than understanding since the word "inference" is used only in the performance standards for high school and beyond. However, it should be noted that the ability to make inferences can be fostered from elementary school depending on the types of texts and the degree of complexity. In the case of China, at a lower-level, it is required to understand the overall idea of the text while for a higher-level, it is important to cultivate such skills as remembering, making judgments and connecting the content to other information. In these two countries, the performance standards are presented separately among the four skills; that is, performance standards related to listening skills only for promoting listening skills. However, the performance standards in the curriculum of Japan are presented in an integrative manner emphasizing a connection between the language skills.

2. Suggestions for Curriculum Development

The English curriculum can be regarded as the foundation, for leading English education of a country in a desirable way. Therefore, a good quality of English education cannot be expected if this foundation is not properly and wisely devised and implemented. In this respect, it is very important that the curriculum should be developed on the basis of the needs of students and teachers. In the era of globalization, it is indispensable that students

should be equipped with the ability to communicate naturally and effectively in English, the international language. This should be reflected in the English curriculum, and the contents of the curriculum should encourage students to participate actively in learning through a variety of communicative tasks necessitating the real use of language. It is also necessary to cultivate higher-level thinking skills rather than just communicative abilities in a daily life situation. For this, such cognitive skills as logical thinking and creativity should be encouraged in the English curriculum. One cannot postulate that students would have low cognitive skills just because they cannot express their thoughts in a foreign language. Hence, the performance standards and contents of the English curriculum should be developed considering students' cognitive ability, in addition to their language ability.

Based on the comparative analysis of the English curricula of Korea, China and Japan, we may make the following suggestions: First, higher-order thinking skills such as inference and creativity should be fostered systematically from the beginning stage of English education. For example, in elementary school, the curriculum can introduce a variety of cognitive tasks with simple, authentic materials. Several of these cognitive as well as language tasks can be synthesizing, making inferences and comparisons from stimulating pictures and easy texts. Second, according to the English curriculum of Korea, it is to be encouraged that the four language skills are presented in an integrated manner. However, in comparison with that of Japan, especially for the lower-level, it seems true that the integration and connections of the four skills from the initial stage of English language program are dealt with insufficiently. According to Brown (2001), comprehension and production skills are not separable and should be closely related to each other, and in many cases, one skill reinforces another skill. Thus, it is desirable that both skills are taught in an integrative way highlighting the connections of these skills. In other words, a focus should be given to what students are able to do with language rather than learning about language. In relation to the integration of the four skills, another implication can be suggested from the main purpose of English education in China. It can be proposed that feelings and attitude toward English and study strategies such as cognitive, adjustment, communication and resource strategies should be incorporated positively into the English curriculum of Korea.

Second, it is necessary that the performance standards and contents of the curriculum should be described in a flexible way in order for teachers to adopt an eclectic approach according to their own students and educational contexts. In other words, a top-down description of the contents of the curriculum from the curriculum developers' perspectives needs to be avoided. The 'top-down' approach in curriculum design may not reflect the teachers' and students' needs adequately if needs analysis are not conducted in advance carefully and systematically. Therefore, a user-centered curriculum for teachers should be developed so that they are able to adapt the curriculum to their unique situations. An

example of such curricula can be seen in the English curriculum of Japan in which the performance standards are generally presented.

Finally, suggestions proposed in the present paper may help us develop a more useful and practical English curriculum in Korea. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that Korea may adopt some strength from other countries' curricula selectively and judiciously. It should be remembered that English teaching in Korea basically differs from that in English-speaking countries in terms of learning purposes. In Korean context, students learn English to collect and transmit information and for academic purposes and international trade rather than to survive in a daily life. Thus, what Korean English learners need is not a local language being used in some of the English-speaking countries, but a global language for effective communication around the world. English as a global language holds unique characteristics in line with local cultures. Therefore, English teaching needs to be tailored to the unique nature and needs of people and situations involved. In this aspect, suggestions proposed in the present paper might be used to develop an English curriculum in other Asian countries according to their own educational and societal needs rather than to just follow the criteria and resources of English-speaking countries.

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