



Changing Attitudes toward Global Englishes, ELT, and the NEST-NNEST Dichotomy in Korea*

Jiyong Lee (Korea Military Academy, South Korea) SiHoo Lee (Seoul Nat'l Univ.)

Ghang Hyun Park (ChosunIlbo) Seohyun Yoon (Seoul Nat'l Univ.)



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Received: October 30, 2022

Revised: November 18, 2022

Accepted: November 30, 2022

Jiyong Lee
Professor, Dept. of English, Korea
Military Academy
Tel: 02) 2197-2637
jiyonglee0123@gmail.com

SiHoo Lee
Student, Seoul National University

Ghang Hyun Park
Journalist, ChosunIlbo

Seohyun Yoon
Student, Seoul National University

* This work was supported by the
Hwarang-dae Research Institute.

ABSTRACT

Lee, Jiyong, SiHoo Lee, Ghang Hyun Park and Seohyun Yoon. 2022. Changing attitudes toward Global Englishes, ELT, and the NEST-NNEST dichotomy in Korea. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 22, 1313-1326.

Approximately ten years after the ‘English fever’ spread throughout South Korea from the 1990s to the early 2000s, the severe obsession over “standard” English has appeared to diminish to some degree, coinciding with learners’ greater awareness of Global Englishes. To determine whether any changes in their attitudes toward English could be observed, 110 Koreans completed a survey asking questions about their perceptions of Global Englishes, ELT, and the NEST-NNEST dichotomy. Results showed that most considered English to be a global language that does not belong to a particular country. Moreover, many preferred to learn English from a NEST, mainly to enhance English fluency. While nationality was found to play an important role in the choice of the NEST, race was not found to be a determining factor. Such findings point toward a gradual shift in perceptions of English learning and education in Korea.

KEYWORDS

Global Englishes, ELT, NEST, NNEST, Korea

1. Introduction

English is indisputably a global language, which has earned its official status in 88 countries and is assumed to be the main auxiliary language for any organization that is based wherever in the world (Crystal 2003). Not only is English universally used in the realms of academia, politics, business, technology, and communications, it is the most widely taught foreign language (McKay 2022). Based on *Ethnologue's* 2022 report, the number of second language speakers of English has reached 1.08 billion worldwide, which far exceeds that of native English speakers that amounts to 372.9 million, giving rise to questions about the exact definition of the native vs. non-native speaker, the ownership of English, and the categorization of such English speakers. In accordance with the more recent spread of English due to globalization, more emphasis has been placed on the awareness of Global Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), characterized by instability, fluidity, dynamicity, and acceptance of all English varieties (Galloway and Rose 2015).

The spread of English has had far-reaching effects on all parts of the world, and Korea is no exception. As reported in Park's (2010) in-depth explanation of the 'English fever' that permeated South Korea (henceforth Korea), the obsession over English was brought by Korean parents' desire for upward social class mobility and government-led decisions, such as the inclusion of English listening tests in the national college entrance examinations in 1991 (combined with the paradigm shift in focus from grammatical competence to communicative competence) and the move to mandate English education in Grades 3-6 in elementary schools in 1997. Such an obsession has led to the creation of 'English villages' and English-medium kindergartens (henceforth called English kindergartens), a rise in the number of young Korean children studying abroad to study English, countless English-only institutions that provide private English lessons at a steep cost, and an increase in the recruitment of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), many of whom were hired only because they were (Caucasian) native English speakers.

The private sector in education witnessed and even promoted the craze for native speakerism (Holliday 2006), a pervasive ideology in English teaching that the native speaker represents Western culture, which is considered to be ideal. This belief was further cemented by the fact that American English was adopted as Standard English by the National Curriculum over half a century. However, in response to cries for considerations for the need to recognize and accept more English varieties, changes were made to the 2009 Revised National Curriculum of English (RNCE) in comparison to former versions, introducing 44 British English spellings for the first time and also acknowledging unprecedentedly that English should be learned as a lingua franca. Despite such government-driven efforts, however, previous research has shown that Koreans are still fixated on the idea that only native speakers provide "correct" models of English pronunciation, which learners should aspire (Ahn, Choi and Kiaer 2020). Furthermore, the study reported that Korean parents' overwhelmingly preferred native speakers from the United States and the United Kingdom as babysitters, especially Caucasians.

The dominating power of English in Korea seemed formidable, given its massive influences on various aspects of society. Much to everyone's surprise, however, the diminishment of English following its glorification slowly became evident in several dimensions: 1) government policies that ultimately downplayed the importance of English for adolescents, such as discontinuing the development of the National English Ability Test in 2015, which was first initiated in 2009 in efforts to enhance young learners' overall English proficiency and to replace the English Section of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), and adopting the absolute grading system for the CSAT English exam in 2017; 2) a reduction in the hours of English classes in elementary and secondary schools,

which is planned in the 2022 RNCE; 3) a gradual decrease in the number of teachers in the English Program in Korea (EPIK)¹ since its peak in 2011 (1,324 in 2018 vs. 2,151 in 2011); and 4) the changes in Korean university policies to either reduce the number of core English courses that students need to take or to switch them to elective courses. This decline in the importance of English and the native English speaker seemed to accelerate as technological advancements in machine translation tools and online dictionaries may possibly push learners to believe that they can rely on such tools without putting much effort into learning the target language (Zemach 2021).

In order to find out whether there is a shift in Koreans' attitudes toward English in response to such changes in education policies over the past two decades, the present study surveyed 110 Koreans in the MZ Generation regarding their perceptions of the following: 1) Global Englishes, 2) the English education system in Korea, especially early education through English kindergartens, and 3) native English speakers vs. non-native English speakers as their English teachers. These three areas were investigated because they were considered to be the most critical aspects directly associated with Korea's English education policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learners' Perceptions of Global Englishes

The modern spread of English through globalization to countries such as Korea, Thailand, and Denmark, combined with its historical spread via settler colonization, slavery, and trade and exploitation colonies, has given birth to various approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT). Due to the high volume of people using English, attempts have been made to define and categorize English speakers. One such model is Kachru's (1992) Three Circle Model, by which varieties of English are divided into three groups: the Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. Despite its shortcomings, one of which is that it does not provide a clear-cut distinction between users of ENL (English as a Native language), ESL (English as a Second Language), and EFL (English as a Foreign Language), the model helped to raise people's awareness that varieties of English exist around the world. This awareness led to the rise of paradigms such as World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and English as an International Language (EIL). Among such approaches, Global Englishes (GE) is a relatively new paradigm that encompasses the concepts of the three paradigms above. In contrast to traditional ELT approaches, Global Englishes language teaching (GELT) does not claim that native English speakers own English. In fact, it defies the notion of such ownership. Whereas traditional ELT approaches would encourage hiring of native English speakers because English spoken by such people is the 'norm', GELT focuses on diversity, flexibility and multiple forms of competence, thus promoting the recruitment of teachers from around the world (Galloway and Rose 2015).

With the recognition of the concept of English plurality, several researchers have investigated people's attitudes toward GE/WE and its implications. For instance, Sung (2015) found that university students in Hong Kong enrolled in a 'Varieties of English' course showed an overall positive attitude toward GE, reflected in their interview answers regarding increased awareness of GE and ELF communication, a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic reality of English today, a willingness to accept diversity, and increased confidence in using English as an ESL user. However, their perceptions regarding the superiority of the English spoken by native speakers was found to remain unwavering.

¹ This program is a national English teaching program sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Education, established in 1995 to recruit NESTs in efforts to improve the English proficiency of Korean students and encourage their cultural awareness.

Similar findings were obtained in Lee and Green's (2016) study of 60 university students in Korea, a country in which the global spread of English had such a heavy influence that the term 'English fever' was created and used nationwide. The results of a verbal guise test, whose other purpose was to promote participants' critical thinking of WE, as well as those of a questionnaire, revealed that while most participants still preferred inner circle Englishes such as the English used in the US and UK, the majority of them responded that it was also important to understand and learn a variety of WE or outer and expanding forms of English. Those who were found to be supportive of WE were influenced by internal motivations related to personal learning experiences and growth.

2.2 ELT and English Kindergartens in Korea

Due to the considerable difference in the monthly tuition fees between Korean-medium kindergartens (approximately \$500 US) and English kindergartens in Gangnam, one of the wealthiest districts in Seoul (approximately \$2000 US), the latter is considered to be aristocratic institutions for children from affluent backgrounds. Despite the steep cost, however, English kindergartens have gained so much popularity that signing up on a wait list is often necessary, most likely intensifying the belief that early childhood English education is the start of social inequality, which can result in significant life differences in terms of socioeconomic status, living conditions, life changes and opportunities, and ultimate future success (Choi 2021). This belief has led to the "English divide" issue, a widening social polarization based on English competence (Shin and Lee 2019).

Investigating the ideologies that Korean parents had regarding English education for their children, Lee, Kim, and Han (2021) surveyed 31 Korean mothers of children at preschool and conducted a critical discourse analysis. Korean mothers are known to partake in an active role in their children's education, and these participants were no exception. Two main findings were obtained, in that 1) Korean mothers constantly compared their children with others in order to increase the possibilities of their children to enter a good university, and 2) they equated one's parental responsibility with financial support, which was reflected in their belief that enrolling their children in an English kindergarten made them good parents.

Jahng (2011) proposed that a reconceptualization of the view of early English education in South Korea was necessary. Under the assumption that social, political, economic, and cultural factors all play a complex role, it was claimed that the national obsession over learning English at an early age, demonstrated by the popularity of English kindergartens, was more than a collective neurotic fever. Instead, this obsession should be understood in a broader context, in terms of instrumentalism, developmentalism, and cosmopolitanism. In other words, early English education is promoted by the government so that children can develop into cosmopolitan citizens with English language competency.

2.3 The NEST-NNEST Dichotomy in ELT

With the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching as one of the mainstream pedagogies in ELT, which emphasizes the importance of communicative competence, in conjunction with the globalization of English worldwide, a strong preference for native speakers was found, especially with regard to the perception of a "standard" English. Although the definition and criteria of a "native" speaker are controversial (Davies 2003), the term is still widely used and accepted by the public to this day.

In South Korea, native English-speaking teachers (NEST) have become extremely popular, especially during the 1990s (Kwon 2000). During this period, a large number of NESTs were recruited through the Fulbright ETA

(English Teaching Assistant) Program and the Korean Ministry of Education's EPIK program. Furthermore, universities and colleges in Korea, along with the private sector, also began to recruit NESTs on their own. Although this massive influx of NESTs resulted in greater awareness for the importance of communicative competence, concerns arose over the lack of qualifications of the NESTs and the discriminatory practices that emerged due to the distinction between NESTs and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).

In order to find out whether there was a difference in perception between NESTs and NNESTs by university students in South Korea, Chun (2014) surveyed 125 university students from a variety of majors. Analysis of the survey responses revealed differences in student beliefs regarding the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs. While NESTs were perceived to be more competent at guiding students to interact with native speakers outside the classroom, NNESTs were considered to be more thoroughly prepared for their classes. In addition, students were found to believe that NESTs were more suitable for advanced learners, and NNESTs more suitable for beginner learners, most likely due to the inabilities of Korean beginners and NESTs to express themselves in the other language. Despite such beliefs, however, the survey respondents did not seem to strongly favor a certain group.

In an attempt to find out how South Koreans generally perceive "native" English speakers on a daily basis, Ahn, Choi, and Kiaer (2020) examined the use of the Korean terms *won-eo-min* and *ne-i-ti-bue* (both meaning "native language speaker") in the news and social media. Words frequently associated with the two terms in newspapers, television news, Twitter, and weblog posts were analyzed. Results showed that while the notion of a native speaker is still obscure, the two terms under investigation were found to be quite commonly used, especially in relation to the model of "correct" English pronunciation.

3. Research Questions

Without a doubt, Korea has entered an era in which English is no longer held on an invincible pedestal. In this regard, it is deemed necessary to find out whether such changes in the status of English and the native English speaker have affected the perceptions and attitudes that L2 learners have on such topics. Therefore, the study attempted to address the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes that Korean learners of English have toward Global Englishes?
2. How do Korean learners of English perceive ELT in Korea?
3. What are the attitudes that Korean learners of English have toward the divide between NESTs and NNESTs?

4. Research Method

4.1 Participants

One hundred and ten Korean adults from the MZ Generation (a.k.a. MZers) participated in the survey (53 males, 57 females). In South Korea, there are five categories of generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z (Lee and Kim 2021). The MZ Generation refers to the pairing of the last two groups, the Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012). Although there is an apparent age gap between the two, these two groups are similar with regard to their exposure to advanced digital technologies, their interest in social justice and climate change (Waltzer 2021), and

preference for their own individuality (Lee and Kim 2021). Participants were recruited by word-of-mouth, and they completed an online survey that was conducted using Google Forms.

4.2 Survey

A survey was created with 16 questions. A link to the survey was provided when a person expressed interest in participating in the study. The survey was conducted in Korean since the target population of the survey was native Korean speakers. The questions included in the survey dealt with participants' attitudes and/or experiences regarding English as a global language, "standard" English, English education in Korea, and the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs. The survey mostly comprised multiple-choice questions, and two questions that asked the age at which the respondents first started to learn English and the age at which they believed was best for learning English. For the multiple-choice questions, participants were allowed to choose only one answer. For questions with an option labeled "Other", they were required to specify their answers.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Perceptions of English as a Global Language

Participants' perceptions of English as a global language are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Perception of English as a Global Language

Question/Answer	N = 110
Do you think that English is a global language (=lingua franca)?	
Yes	109 (99.1%)
No	1 (0.9%)
Do you feel the need to learn English as a lingua franca?	
Yes	109 (99.1%)
No	1 (0.9%)
Do you think it is necessary for people who are not from English-speaking countries to learn English?	
Yes	71 (64.5%)
No	39 (35.5%)
To which country does English belong to?	
United States	43 (39.1%)
United Kingdom	17 (15.5%)
Australia	0 (0%)
It does not belong to a specific country	50 (45.5%)
Do you think there is a "standard" English?	
Yes	59 (53.6%)
No	51 (46.4%)
Which do you think is the standard pronunciation of English?	
American English	55 (50%)
British English	9 (8.2%)
Australian English	0 (0%)
There is no standard pronunciation of English	46 (41.8%)

All but one respondent claimed that they viewed English to be a global language and felt it necessary to learn English as a lingua franca. The topic of the ownership of English is debatable, and nearly half of the participants, 50 respondents, believed that no specific country ‘owned’ English. However, 43 out of the 60 respondents who did believe in ownership stated that English belonged to the U.S., and 17 to the U.K. An interesting contrast could be observed, in that 30 out of the 43 respondents reported that they believed in the existence of a “standard” English and chose American English as the standard English pronunciation, but 4 out of the 17 respondents believed in the existence of a “standard” English and chose British English as the standard pronunciation. Whereas 19 out of the 30 respondents claimed that they learned from a NEST who came from the U.S., only one out of the 17 respondents learned from a NEST who came from the U.K. It seems that when deciding on the ownership of English, the 43 pro-U.S. respondents based their decisions on exposure to English in their daily lives and/or their own experiences of learning English. In contrast, the 17 pro-U.K. respondents to take into account the history of the English language. Such findings are somewhat similar to those of Kim (2018), which found that despite being aware of and being exposed to different varieties of English, both students and teachers showed a preference for teachers who speak a standard variety of English. It is worth noting that in Kim’s study, teacher respondents were more willing to learn British English over American English and were more reluctant than the student respondents to learn to speak any variety of English.

Although nearly half of the respondents did not believe in such terms, an overwhelming number of respondents who did believe that a “standard” English and “standard” English pronunciation exist chose American English as their standard. This was expected, as most Koreans are exposed to American English and learn English at school or academies from American English-speaking teachers through American English-based materials. Furthermore, Koreans are more familiar with American English, as it is the variety of English that they are exposed to in their daily lives through mass media, such as TV news and dramas, Hollywood movies, and music. The massive power that the U.S. has on all parts of the world may have also played a role in the respondents’ answers. It can be speculated that those who chose the U.K. as the owner of English and British English to be the standard pronunciation focused more on the origin of English when completing the survey, as opposed to their experience and exposure to English varieties. In short, respondents’ attitudes towards the ownership of English, the idea of a “standard” English, the idea of a “standard” pronunciation of English, and their experience learning English from a NEST all seem to be interrelated.

5.2 Perceptions of ELT in Korea

Figures 1-3 show survey findings on respondents’ experiences and beliefs regarding ELT in Korea. As illustrated in Figure 1, slightly over half the respondents ($N = 58$) reported that they first started to learn English at the age of 6 or 7, which is approximately the age at which they start attending elementary school.

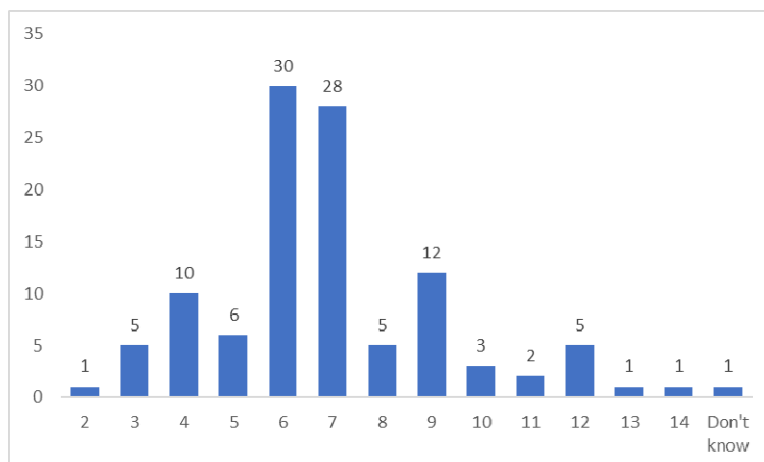


Figure 1. Age of Onset of English Acquisition

This finding was expected, as it was highly likely that they were children when the ‘English fever’ was in full bloom in Korea, and their parents would have felt obligated to expose their children (i.e., the respondents) to English in one way or another.

While there was more variance in terms of the age at which they believe it is best to learn English, a general consensus seems to be that English education should start at an early age, as shown in Figure 2.

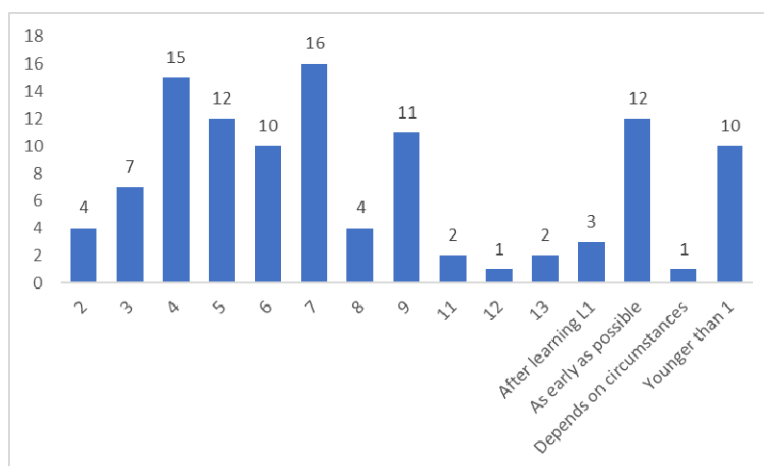


Figure 2. Age at Which English Acquisition Should Begin

It appears that they were aware of a ‘critical period’ when it comes to English acquisition. The existence of a critical period of peak sensitivity for language learning, after which further language acquisition becomes more difficult and effortful, as claimed by the Critical Period Hypothesis, has been supported by a large body of research (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2009, DeKeyser 2000, Granena and Long 2013). Although it is not known whether the respondents are aware of such a linguistic theory, a considerable number of respondents stated that English acquisition should start as early as possible and even before the age of 1.

Along the lines of the belief that there is an optimal time for L2 learning, a large portion of the respondents claimed that they believed attending an English kindergarten, a private institution that offers English immersion

programs to kindergarteners, was effective for English acquisition due to early exposure to English, as depicted in Figure 3.

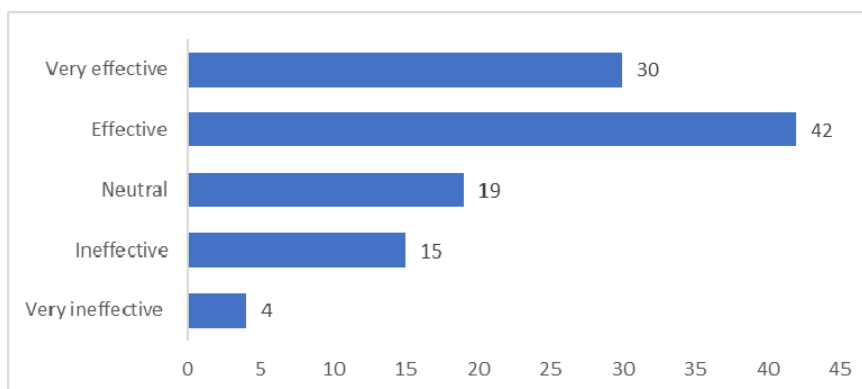


Figure 3. Opinions of Learning English at an English Kindergarten

English kindergartens were established during the ‘English fever’ era in response to the demands of Korean parents to provide their children with opportunities for English immersion alternative to studying abroad, individual desires for upward mobility in social class, various stakeholders in the private institution market, and government-driven efforts to train the younger generation to become global-minded citizens that could contribute to national interest. Since most respondents believed that English should be learnt at an early age, it is not surprising that the majority of them found English kindergartens to be beneficial for learning English, despite the costly tuition fee. However, two points are worth noting: 1) among the 19 anti-English kindergarten respondents, only three believed that English acquisition should start at the age of 9 or over, a relatively late age, and 2) a significant correlation was found between the age at which respondents thought English acquisition should begin and their opinions of the effectiveness of English kindergartens, $r = .417$, $p > .001$. Put simply, those who believed that English acquisition should start at an early age showed a tendency to believe that English kindergartens were effective.

5.3 Attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs

With regard to respondents’ own experiences and attitudes toward the NEST-NNEST dichotomy, a substantially high number of respondents ($N = 101$) reported that they had experience learning from a NEST, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Experience of Learning English from a NEST

Question/Answer	N = 110
Do you have any experience learning English from a NEST?	
Yes	101 (91.8%)
No	9 (8.2%)
If you have experience learning English from a NEST, where was that teacher from?	
United States	66 (65.3%)
United Kingdom	8 (7.9%)
Australia	9 (8.9%)
Other: Various people of different nationalities	8 (7.9%)
Other: Canada	3 (3.0%)
Other: Philippines	2 (2.0%)
Other: Europe	1 (1.0%)
Other: Cannot remember	4 (4.0%)

Among these 101 respondents, 65.3% claimed that they learned English from a NEST from the U.S., 7.9% from a NEST from the U.K., and 8.9% from a NEST from Australia. The respondents who learned from NESTs from other countries accounted for 17.9% at most. In short, the participants in the study or their parents very likely preferred NESTs from the U.S.

Table 3 presents the attitudes that the respondents have toward NESTs and NNESTs.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Syntactic Complexity Measures

Question/Answer	N = 110
Which teacher do you think is more effective for learning English?	
Non-Native (Korean) English teacher	24 (21.8%)
Native English teacher	86 (78.2%)
Why do you think that learning English from a Non-native (Korean) English-Speaking teacher (NNEST) is more effective?	(N = 24)
Teach in a way that is more suitable for Koreans	17 (70.8%)
Can relate better and be more comfortable with students	4 (16.7%)
Possess better English skills	0 (0%)
Other: Easier to ask questions	1 (4.2%)
Other: Korean should be the basis for learning a new language	1 (4.2%)
Other: Easier to teach difficult materials	1 (4.2%)
Why do you think that learning English from a Native English-Speaking teacher (NEST) is more effective?	(N = 86)
Possess better English fluency	25 (29.1%)
Provide more on-the-spot sense of learning	21 (24.4%)
Have deeper awareness of English culture	32 (37.2%)
Other: All of the above	2 (2.3%)
Other: Can learn more practical English	2 (2.3%)
Other: Awkward to speak English with a Korean	1 (1.2%)
Other: Can learn English like L1	1 (1.2%)
Other: Can reduce fear of English	1 (1.2%)
Other: English becomes more familiar through experience	1 (1.2%)

The participants' responses indicate that learning English from a NEST was considered to be more effective than learning from a NNEST. There were no participants who believed that a NNEST possessed better English skills than a NEST, confirming the notion that a native English speaker is still the "uncrowned King of linguistics" (Mey 1981) in the English language teaching (ELT) industry. Such perceptions align with the way English

teachers are recruited in Korea, where a strong preference for NESTs over NNESTs can be observed. This preference was reflected in the establishment of the EPIK, where teachers generally come from one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States (Jeon and Lee 2006).

Eighty-six respondents (78.2%) thought that learning English from a NEST was more efficient. The main reasons for their choice were that they believed a NEST has a deeper awareness of English cultures (37.2%), possesses greater English proficiency (29.1%), and can provide a more on-the-spot sense of learning (24.4%). On the other hand, only 24 respondents (21.8%) believed that a NNEST was more effective, stating that their teaching method was more suitable for Koreans (70.8%) or that their relationship with students was better (16.7%). This finding points to the conclusion that the Korean MZ Generation seems to prefer learning a more “native” or “standard” English over a unique ‘Koreanized’ version of English. Again, such a belief has led to hiring an increasing number of NESTs without any proper consideration for their education or professional backgrounds (Park 2009).

As displayed in Table 4, whereas 92 respondents (83.6%) reported that they preferred to learn from a NEST from the U.S. (65.5%), the U.K. (14.5%), or Australia (3.6%), 91 respondents (82.7%) showed no bias toward the race of the NEST.

Table 4. NESTs vs. NNESTs: Nationality, Race, and Native-likeness

Question/Answer	N = 110
If you could choose the nationality of your NEST, which nationality would you prefer?	
United States	72 (65.5%)
United Kingdom	16 (14.5%)
Australia	4 (3.6%)
Other	0 (0%)
Does not matter	18 (16.4%)
If you could choose the race of your NEST, which race would you prefer?	
Caucasian	14 (12.7%)
Black	1 (0.9%)
Asian	4 (3.6%)
Does not matter	91 (82.7%)
What do you think is the biggest determinant when referring to someone as being able to speak English “like a native English speaker”?	
Pronunciation	20 (18.2%)
Fluency	61 (55.5%)
Vocabulary	22 (20%)
Other: Both fluency and vocabulary	1 (0.9%)
Other: Ability to explain English culture	1 (0.9%)
Other: Usage of English expressions	2 (1.8%)
Other: Being able to process information in the L1	1 (0.9%)
Other: Accent and speed	1 (0.9%)
Other: Don't know	1 (0.9%)

Race, unlike nationality, no longer seems to be an important factor when it comes to English learning for the Korean MZ Generation. This finding marks a slight change in the pervasive ideology in the ELT industry, i.e., native speakerism (Holliday 2006). It further contradicts the findings of previous studies claiming that racism permeates Korean society and education to this day (Kim 2020, Tanghe 2016). Nevertheless, nationality still seems to play an important role in the choice of the NEST. The preference for an American NEST is apparently still strong, which further reinforces the view that Koreans consider American English to be synonymous with

“standard” English, as evidenced by the finding that 43 out of the 55 respondents stating that American English was the “standard” pronunciation reported that they preferred a NEST from the U.S.

Finally, fluency (55.5%) was found to be the most prominent determinant of being “native-like”, followed by vocabulary (20%) and pronunciation (18.2%). It is worth noting that three times more respondents prioritize fluency over pronunciation, indicating a change in Korean learners’ perception of what it is to be a “native-like” English speaker. Given Korea’s notoriety for witnessing examples of parents forcing their children to undergo surgery for enhanced English pronunciation (Park 2009), along with the long-standing obsession over the pronunciation of the “White American English variety” that was claimed to be an indicator of successful English learning (Ahn, Choi and Kiaer 2020), a shift towards placing greater importance on fluency rather than pronunciation signals greater opportunities for NNESTs, whose fluency is likely to be considered better than their pronunciation in English.

In sum, the study obtained an intriguing pattern in that the Korean MZ Generation are displaying a less obsessive attitude toward English. More specifically, nearly half the respondents (46.4%) did not believe that there was a “standard” English, and 46 (41.8%) reported that they did not believe in the existence of a “standard” English pronunciation. On a similar note, pronunciation was not found to be a critical determiner of “native-likeness”. Furthermore, 91 out of the 110 participants claimed that race was not a factor of consideration when choosing a NEST. Two points are also worth mentioning: 1) among the 51 respondents who did not believe in the existence of a “standard” English, 40 (78.4%) stated that they did not think there was a standard pronunciation of English, while 47 (92.2%) reported that race was not a deciding factor when choosing a NEST; and 2) among the 46 respondents who did not believe in a standard English pronunciation, 36 (78.3%) claimed that race did not matter when choosing a NEST. In other words, even though the Korean MZ Generation still seem to show a strong attachment to the American English variety, a trend can be observed in that they are slowly breaking this obsession and embracing the concept of Global Englishes.

6. Conclusion

An investigation was conducted on whether there were any changes in the perceptions of Global Englishes, ELT, and the NEST-NNEST divide by Koreans during the post-‘English fever’ period. In doing so, 110 participants from the MZ Generation completed a survey, whose results indicated that most recognized English as a lingua franca and felt the need to learn English, especially at the age of 7 or younger and preferably at an English kindergarten. They also reported that they preferred to learn English from a NEST because they prioritized learning “standard” or “native” English, which they believed to be highly associated with fluency, rather than pronunciation. Furthermore, in the choice of the NEST, nationality was found to play an important role, while race was not a determining factor. Although an attachment to “standard” English could still be observed, their preference of fluency to pronunciation and disregard for race in the choice of the NEST indicate a gradual shift in perceptions of English learning and education in Korea in the post-‘English fever’ era, during which the obsession over English is slightly on the decline.

References

Abrahamsson, N. and K. Hyltenstam. 2009. Age of onset and nativelikeness in a second language: Listener

- perception versus linguistic scrutiny. *Language Learning* 59, 249-306.
- Ahn, H., N. Choi and J. Kiaer. 2020. South Korean perceptions of “native” speaker of English in social and news media via big data analytics. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 9(1), 33-56.
- Choi, L. J. 2021. ‘English is always proportional to one’s wealth’: English, English language education, and social reproduction in South Korea. *Multilingua* 40(1), 87-106.
- Chun, S. Y. 2014. EFL learners’ beliefs about native and non-native English-speaking teachers: Perceived strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 35(6), 563-579.
- Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a Global Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, A. 2003. *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*. Clevedon, Buffalo: Multilingual matters.
- DeKeyser, R. 2000. The robustness of critical period effects in second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 22, 499-533.
- Ethnologue, Languages of the World, United States. 2022. Web Archive. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0021868>
- Galloway, N. and H. Rose. 2015. *Introducing Global Englishes*. Arbingdon, UK: Routledge
- Granena, G. and M. H. Long. 2013. Age of onset, length of residence, language aptitude, and ultimate L2 attainment in three linguistic domains. *Second Language Research* 29(3), 311-343.
- Holliday, A. 2006. Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal* 60(4), 385-387.
- Jahng, K. E. 2011. English education for young children in South Korea: not just a collective neurosis of English fever! *Perspectives in Education* 29(2), 61-69.
- Jenkins, J. 2006. Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *TESOL Quarterly* 40(1), 157-181.
- Jeon, M. and J. Lee. 2006. Hiring native-speaking English teachers in East Asian countries. *English Today* 22(4), 53-58.
- Kachru, B. B. 1992. *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kim, H.-O. 2018. Students’ versus teachers’ attitudes and perceptions towards World Englishes. *Studies in English Language & Literature* 60(3), 361-385.
- Kim, H. A. 2020. Understanding “Koreanness”: Racial stratification and colorism in Korea and implications for Korean multicultural education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 22(1), 76-97.
- Kwon, O. 2000. Korea’s English education policy changes in the 1990s: Innovations to gear the nation for the 21st century. *English Teaching* 55, 47-91.
- Lee, K. Y. and R. W. Green. 2016. The World Englishes paradigm: A study of Korean university students’ perceptions and attitudes. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique* 15(1), 155-168.
- Lee, E. and Y. Kim. 2021. Development of mass customization tech-pocket smart fashion using computer embroidery machine: Website development reflecting the characteristics of generation MZ. *Archives of Design Research* 34(3), 41-59.
- McKay, S. L. 2012. Teaching materials for English as an international language. In A. Matsuda, ed., *Principles and Practices of Teaching English as an International Language*, 70-83. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Mey, J. 1981. ‘Right or wrong, my native speaker:’ Estant les régestesdu noble souverain de l’empirie linguistic avec un renvoy au mesme roy. In F. Coulams, ed., *A Festschrift for Native Speaker*, 69-84. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2011. *2009 Revised National Curriculum of English*. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Korea.

- Park, J.-K. 2009. Teaching English as a global language in Korea: Curriculum rhetoric and reality. *Asian Englishes* 12(1), 124-129.
- Shin, H. and B. Lee. 2019. “English divide” and ELT in Korea: Towards critical ELT policy and practices. In X. Gao, ed., *Second Handbook of English Language Teaching*, 73-90, Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Sung, C. C. M. 2015. Implementing a Global Englishes component in a university English course in Hong Kong: Student perceptions and implications for course development and implementation. *English Today* 31(4), 42-49.
- Tanghe, S. 2016. Promoting critical racial awareness in teacher education in Korea: Reflections on a racial discrimination simulation activity. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 17(2), 203-215.
- Waltzer, J. 2021. In Korea, “MZ” generation is a real thing. <https://www.lgnewsroom.com/2021/02/in-korea-mz-generation-is-a-real-thing>
- Zemach, D. 2021. Are machine translation tools a threat to English teaching? <https://bridge.edu/tefl/blog/are-machine-translation-tools-a-threat-to-english-teaching>

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable level: Tertiary