

# Then and Now:

## Review on language policy and practices in Japan and Korea

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**Abstract**—Japan and Korea have unceasingly been promoting English language policy to higher education students. The policy does not merely consider English as a means of communication to create interactions among people but also a new capital that can enable people to get an access to rich flow of information and lead to shift of socioeconomic status and political condition. This perspective is firmly accepted after globalization has been globally widespread. Regarding the aforementioned points, the discourse about English in Japan and Korea is thought-provoking since they have made many attempts in language policy-making as well as the practices which obviously affect the future of English use itself in these countries. This paper aims at discussing issues and challenges of English language policy and practices in Japan's and Korea's higher education levels. The author utilized systematic review consisting of literature search, identified the relevant journal articles, and found frequent issues e.g. internationalization and English as Medium of Instruction (EMI). Finally, the result shows that there are similar issues and challenges towards English language policy and practices in Japan's and Korea's higher education levels.

**Keywords**—EMI; English; IHE; Japan; Korea; policy; practice

### I. INTRODUCTION

The issues of English proficiency and globalization have become trends around the globe unexceptionally East Asia countries. Certainly, the high requirement of English as the means of communication is closely related to its function as the new capital for everyone to possess [1]. Moreover, English has penetrated important sectors such as education and national development and got to the point of influential status [2,3]. Briefly, English proficiency bolsters human "technical knowledge and skills" improvement and results in wide opportunity for job employment in the context of globalized world [4-6]. Considering aforementioned tendency, Japan and South Korea as the leading East Asia countries took into account English proficiency to be their focus on language policy-making and its realization through educational institutions.

In Japan, government has planned many projects as part of their policy in order to promote dual internationalization both Japanese universities and Japanese students [7-9]. However, the practice of English policy in the educational setting has not been fully supported because the language of instruction for English classes is mostly in Japanese [10]. Furthermore, low birth rate, decline of students studying overseas, the surplus of

universities, a matter of indigenous language, and worry of foreignness in Japan lead to less efficiency of this country's competitiveness among other East Asia countries and countries around the globe without being uprooted from its identity [5,11-13]. Additionally, Korea has experienced slightly similar condition to Japan. Many programs have been conducted to guarantee English skills mastery improved and internationalization successful. Nevertheless, Korea has challenges on implementing English language policy in higher education institutions. Consequently, Korea should consider several points to change in order to promote English literacy and internationalization.

The discourse about English in Japan and Korea is then thought-provoking for researchers. Hence, there are several related researches and articles concerning about the policy and practices of English in these countries which have previously been published. Kedzierski asserts that EMI plays its significant role in NNS countries including East Asian countries [1]. For example, in Japan and Korea, the governments have already attempted to provide international classes or programs that can facilitate their own people to study in their own home country and attract international students to pursue their degree in these countries simultaneously. As a consequence, not only improving the quality of their own people to get ready and participate actively in global economy, the provision of international programs for foreigners can help Japan and Korea to increase their economic growth. In short, EMI has both values for its nature as language and source of income. Gyenes conducted an ethnographic study and revealed that the establishment of International Communication Longue (ICL) at one of private universities in Tokyo increased the small group students' interest on English [11]. Moreover, they were also motivated to study abroad. It means that ICL opens wide opportunity for students to learn FL and directly experience the FL environment through their involvement in the international exchange program offered by ICL. Further, it was found that less number of scientific writing publication in international refereed journals can indicate the less competitiveness and less openness of Korean universities towards globalization [14,15].

Referring to previous explanation, the phenomenon of policy practices in Japan and Korea certainly represent the English language policy practices in Asia. Therefore, what challenges these two countries get for their language policy and practice possibly occur in other countries in Asia continent

including in Indonesia. Considering few discussions about the issue about English policy and practice in East Asia and its impact for other countries generally in Asia, this paper aims to discuss Language Policy and Practice (LPP) in Japan and Korea contrasted to English language policy and practice particularly in Indonesia higher education institutions. Accordingly, this paper focuses on discussing 1) Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) institutions in Japan and Korea; 2) the use of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Japan and Korea higher education institutions; 3) implication of policy and practices related to internationalization and EMI in Japan, Korea, and Indonesian higher education institutions.

## II. METHOD

This study utilized systematic review. First, author searched the international relevant journal through scholarly literature review or research-based articles search engines [16,17]. Second, the author typed related keywords such as “English only policy internationalization in Japan Korea”, “English language policy in Japan”, “English in South Korea”, “Internationalization and Higher Education in Japan Korea”, “bilingual education policy in Japan and Korea”, and “language policy Japan Korea” to search engines database. Third, identification process was utilized in order to classify the aforementioned issues presented internationally in relevant journal articles. They were in the forms of literature review articles and research-based articles within period of 2000-2018. Fourth, based on the article classification, the author found frequent number of issues leading to underlined issues namely internationalization and EMI. The data were also supported with the information taken from related governmental webpages, reports, books, and online articles.

## III. IHE IN JAPAN AND KOREA

The term “internationalization” has gradually shifted in the last few decades. Knight asserts that in 1980s, internationalization was connected to the level of institution and activities conducted in that institution [18]. This definition changed at the time people see that internationalization involves various activities, programs, and services linked with international studies, international educational exchange, and technical cooperation [19]. It means the coverage of internationalization gets wider and already refers to mobility because the institutions enable mobility for everyone in their postsecondary education. Further, internationalization is considered as an attempt to integrate the international and intercultural dimensions in the higher education systematically in order to improve teaching-learning quality and students’ competencies as required and challenged by the world change because of globalization [20-22]. Regarding aforementioned definitions, internationalization can have various meaning for each country which takes it as their concern in education system and goals to achieve.

In line with the definition of internationalization in higher education level, language becomes one of the important issues to use during teaching-learning process and in this case, English is chosen as language of communication. Reasonably, it is necessary since English is prescribed as “a gatekeeper to

better jobs and professional opportunities” [23]. Moreover, this language is utilized as “language of government and education in postcolonial context” [24,25]. However, because of the growing numbers of countries which made use of English as international language, education policy reformation took place and resulted in the widespread of English teaching that enabled people to be proficient in English as well as in other required skills namely literacy, numeracy, and computer skills; all of them are directly connected to employment [26-30]. Not only getting attention from technological advancement, intensive global communication, political condition or educational sectors, English is also highly demanded because of economic movement. It is reasonable since English—one of *lingua francas*—takes its place to use as means of communication [31-33].

Taking a closer look at Japan policy, English education is highly considered to be taught because it is part of educational reform in the era of globalization [34]. Hence, this language becomes one of compulsory subjects taught in junior high schools and senior high school in order to prepare the students to be equipped for university examination [35]. Not only concerning about the practice of English teaching in the level of junior and senior high schools, a serious attempt was also taken to internationalize higher education institutions and make use of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI).

The initial step was carried out by the government in 1983—led by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone—and proposed ‘the international student 100,000 plan’ [36]. The government had a purpose of creating a set of shared understanding between Japan and foreign countries and nurture human resource in developing countries [37]. Maintained with highly attention and efforts, this target was achieved in 2003 with 109,508 students in total [38]. This achievement was so remarkable and motivated the government to expand their possibility to increase a number of international students pursuing their study in Japan by providing courses taught in English. Henceforth, in 2008, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced the international student 300,000 plan [39] and targeted to be achieved in 2020 [40]. For that reason, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) cooperated with The Ministry of Justice Immigration Bureau to reform “the education-oriented immigration policy and internationalization of higher education in Japan” [41]. These policies brought a wide opportunity for international students to pursue their study in higher education institutions in Japan. Regarding the policies, MEXT also prepared the program that could support their policy. It was carried out through the launching of the ‘Global 30 Project’ in 2009. In this project, 13 universities were involved and various approaches were utilized to “internationalize academic system and campuses” [42]. To maintain this project’s aim, English is used as Medium of Instruction (EMI) in undergraduate programs. Moreover, the use of English for the course program is also considered to bring an effect primarily for Japanese universities to create inter-university network so they could get wider access to accelerate the educational progress either in their own country or overseas [42].

Additionally, MEXT critically took into account the educational reform by increasing collaboration with

universities operated in Asia and particular parts of globe to ensure the advancement of internationalization of higher education institutions; this collaboration was undertaken in 2011 and named as ‘Re-Inventing Japan Project’ [43,44]. Getting many proposals from public and private universities through their participation in ‘Re-Inventing Japan Project’, MEXT launched a program namely ‘Go Global Japan Project’ in 2012 with the aim of giving high contribution to the ‘economic society’ development [45]. This project was preceded project for further project so-called ‘Top Global University Project’. There were 37 universities and classified into Type A and B [7]. Yet they were classified into dissimilar categorization, both of them were counted to convey Japan achieve the goal of “a truly advanced country intellectually as well as economically” [36]. Interestingly, Japan committed to provide degree program delivered using EMI, joint programs, and encourage the complete institutionalization of non-Japanese academic staff [46]. Moreover, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the plan of hiring 1,500 leading researchers to promote 10 Japanese universities among the world’s top 100 universities [47]. The aforementioned efforts indicate that Japan government put the issue of educational reform mainly in internationalizing higher education institutions and the implementation of EMI as the central ones that enable Japan occupy prominent place in the competitiveness of knowledge-based economy.

In the meantime, Korea experienced educational reform since 1992. It was Kim Young Sam who made administration’s approach to deal with globalization and utilized strategic policy on services sectors namely higher education [14,48]. This approach resulted in the 31<sup>st</sup> May Plan which shifted the ‘permission’ policy to the ‘minimal conditions’ policy in the purpose of establishing new institutions [49]. Hence, the control over a number of higher education institutions and student quotas was reduced so many new private higher education institutions and online universities were possibly established. In order to promote the establishment of new institutions under the program of internationalization, the attempts of exchange programs, spur of foreign institutions, faculty and students; and determined policies dealing with the export of Korean higher education services [14]. Particularly, those various attempts show that Korean government puts education as the central sector to consider. Moreover, education which is embedded with the internationalization aims at meeting societal needs which represented through labour market demand [50]. Besides, the internationalization of education in Korea was expected to bring new hope for Korean people to have a better future covering their national economic growth and their pride simultaneously [14,51].

#### IV. EMI IN IHE: JAPAN AND KOREA CONTEXTS

Discourse of internationalization and English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) occurring in higher education institution in Japan and Korea has already given impacts on government attention on education mainly in tertiary level. Mostly, the policy is determined in order to facilitate students and/or graduates to gain access to labour market. Then, internationalization enables Japan and Korea people to be considered as countries which achieve the concept of

globalization. However, both of countries have dissimilar concern about the background of why they accept and develop internationalization on their higher education institutions. Japan is motivated to internationalize their university basically because it is closely related with the attempt of developing “home-grown students into *global jinzai* (globally-minded human resources)” who are expected to play significant role in economic competitiveness [11]. Nevertheless, Japan has challenges on running the internationalization policy of their university since the number of domestic applicants is not interested in the offered program and less in number because of decline of birth-rate [41,52]. Therefore, overseas students are viewed as potential market to minimize the bankruptcy of universities as well as small number of domestic applicants. Further, according to Japanese policy, the use of English in Japan is regarded “as a tool to modernize the country in the Meiji Era” whereas this language now contributes actively to economy sector [12].

Similarly to Japan, Korea utilizes English as Medium of Instruction as part of internationalization policy for higher education institutions. Additionally, EMI and IHE are carried out to promote the government program of declining enrolment of domestic students to foreign countries for pursuing their education [14]. These policies successfully persuade international students to learn in Korea. Certainly, the flow of international students to Korea has drastically given impact to Korea mainly from export revenue [53]. Acquiring more benefits of internationalization and EMI in the education sector, Korea has continually been making attempts to increase number of international students aligned with the increasing offer of course program using EMI in teaching-learning process and research. As a result, Korea has concurrently managed their problem on the decreasing number of college student candidate, preference of home students to study abroad, and economy crisis at one time through their policies of IHE and EMI.

Concisely, IHE and the implementation of EMI have greatly been beneficial for Japan and Korea mostly for preparing human resources, improving education system, and driving economic sector progressively through export revenue. Nevertheless, it can be considered that ultimate objective of these policies is enabling graduates to be equipped for their competition in knowledge-based economy era.

#### V. IMPLICATION OF IHE AND EMI IN JAPAN AND KOREA FOR INDONESIA HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The implementation of IHE and EMI in Japan and Korea has successfully represented the education advancement mainly in Asia continent. Regarding that, Indonesia as part of Asia also has been experiencing long history of international education activity. However, the fluctuating condition of higher education in Indonesia, which was caused of the economic crisis and, recently, the integration of Directorate General of Higher Education from Ministry of Education and Culture to Ministry of Research and Technology, enforces Indonesia to do some adjustment in the policy decision related to IHE. The adjustment was conducted through the release of Ministry of Education Regulation no.26/2007 and Government Regulation no.17/2010 in which Indonesia had seriously taken a step to

open wide opportunities for international cooperation and partnership. Definitely, regulation must be supported with further action. Hence, several strategic attempts are conducted through socialization, seminars, joint programs, international students programs, increasing number of registered intellectual property rights, joint research, scientific writing publication in internationally reputable journals, and increasing of universities reputation in order to promote the realization of IHE in Indonesia [54]. The government program aiming at accelerating competitiveness of higher education got positive feedback from public universities which changed their status into dependent institutions or so-called *Perguruan Tinggi Berbadan Hukum (PTN-BH)* through legal document (Government Regulation) [55]. Further, considering the efforts of government to make higher education institutions internationalized, the popularity of EMI in the teaching-learning process is inseparable. Although specific regulation which leads to the use of English in teaching-learning process in higher education has not yet been available, English can still be legally utilized since Article 37 of Law of Higher Education no.12/2012 enables universities to make use a foreign language as the medium of instruction. Thus, EMI in Indonesia is legally protected and can be potential to “improve graduates’ skills competitiveness for global competition” [56]. Additionally, Ibrahim also asserts that the implementation of EMI emerges as the solution to meet the growing needs of illiterate in information stored in English and language proficiency for global communication [57]. Certainly, the efforts of Indonesia government are parallel with what Japan and Korea governments have made to advance educational practice mainly in Tertiary Education Institution. Nevertheless, problem of EMI possibly occurs during its implementation in Non-Native Speaker (NNS) classroom. The problems may vary due to the context in which the English is used. However, one of the common problems that can be barrier in NNS classroom is whether English is utilized fully or partially. Certainly, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia which put English as second or foreign language cannot forcefully demand students with diverse background to naturally be accustomed to English. Therefore, partial EMI can become an alternative solution for universities in NNS countries to cope with the problems of EMI implementation. At least there are three dimensions that take into consideration in the use of partial EMI, they are participants, scope of use, and settings [57]. Finally, the use of partial EMI can accommodate students to gradually achieve their language proficiency, fluency in communication and master their discipline area.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the policies such as internationalization of HE and EMI have already put Japan and Korea as the respected countries among others in East Asia and Asia mainly in the advancement of education and graduates potential. Nevertheless, IHE and EMI implementation which have been considered as part of globalization and new capital in knowledge-based economy era should be strongly supported with the efforts of strengthening identity and culture since the values and uniqueness of countries can be found in its identity and culture. Further, English proficiency is required as the *lingua franca* at which English does not solely belong to

American or British standard yet it belongs to NNS as well. Therefore, the curriculum design, teacher training, staff and mechanism, including supporting system need to be organized since there will be differences mainly in the values, model, settings, and principles of EMI implementation itself in the country where multi languages are used.

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