

***Participants' Perceptions on a Multi-goal  
Oriented English Language Education Policy:  
A Case of TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea)***

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This study examines the perceptions of participants in a government-initiated program, TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea), that aims to provide children in rural areas with English education opportunities with native-speaking instructors. The main goals of TaLK are 1) to lessen the English divide that exists in Korea by increasing English language proficiency among students in rural areas; 2) to offer opportunities for foreign college students to learn Korean language and culture; and 3) to offer Korean college students with opportunities to enhance their intercultural competence by interacting with foreign college students. Based on survey responses from 851 TaLK participants, 280 foreign college students, 398 Korean college students, and 173 English teachers, the analysis focused on the participants' perceptions of how well the implemented program reached its proposed goals and whether there was a difference in the perceptions across the three groups. Results show that TaLK was perceived by all participants to be somewhat successful, although the intense focus on the needs of foreign college students left

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the other participants desiring more support. The findings provide significant insights for how implementation of such native-speaking English teacher recruitment programs can be further improved and extended to other Asian EFL contexts.

**Keywords: English divide, English as a foreign language education, TaLK program, policy outcomes, participant perspectives**

## Introduction

Intense pressure and substantial investments among non-English speaking countries to develop English communicative competence among their citizens are extremely common in current times. However, one of the greatest challenges for English as a foreign language education is the shortage of trained English language teachers. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which is the earliest record of English being taught by a non-native speaker, the question of who is the better language teacher, the native speaker (NS) or the non-native speaker (NNS) has been debated (Braine, 2010). Despite the fact that nearly 80% of English language teachers world-wide are NNSs (Braine, 2010), the belief that native speakers have unique skills and knowledge that are needed for effective development of communicative competence in English holds strong in the minds of students, parents and educational policy makers worldwide. This kind of thinking has led many countries such as Japan (Butler & Lino, 2005), Hong Kong ([www.edb.gov.hk](http://www.edb.gov.hk)) and Korea ([www.talk.go.kr](http://www.talk.go.kr)) to implement educational policies that recruit native speakers of English as English teachers from various English-speaking countries including the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. According to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in South Korea, there are currently over 20,000 native speakers of English who are recruited to Korea to teach English annually. The demand for NS teachers continues to grow as English is now a compulsory subject matter from third grade in schools and a large percentage of white-collar jobs in Korea require

proficiency in English (Jeon, 2010). However, there are physically not enough NS teachers to fill the demand for English teacher positions in Korea, not to mention the world.

Although there have been several studies on the effectiveness of NS and NNS speaker teachers (Benke & Medyges, 2005; Boyle, 1997; Butler, 2007; Cheung & Braine, 2007; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Liu, 1999; Medyges, 1992; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), research that examines the implementation of NS recruitment policies in EFL contexts as well as the experiences of NS and NNS teachers in such programs are rare. Furthermore, the effectiveness of NS and NNS speaker teachers have been debated by only the gains in English language proficiency and not by any other societal effects or implications.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the goals of the TaLK program (Teach and Learn in Korea), an English teacher recruitment and cultural exchange program that has been implemented in Korea since 2008 were met as assessed by the experiences of the key participants in the program and whether the perspectives of the participants varied in any way. The assessment of this program from the multiple perspectives of the NS teachers, the NNS assistants and the elementary school teachers will provide insights that can contribute to the development and implementation of educational practices and policies aimed at improving English language education among citizens in other non-English-speaking countries. Such data are important because they provide empirical evidence that can be used to develop better practices that will benefit both national and international English as Foreign Language contexts that have a demand for English language teachers.

### **TaLK Program**

TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea) is a government-implemented program that recruits English-speaking NS college student volunteers from abroad to Korea to teach English in elementary after-school programs in rural areas of

South Korea. While in the past there have been other programs such as EPIK (English Program In Korea) and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) program in Korea, the TaLK program is unique in that it is the large-scale government-implemented recruitment program that has multiple goals. On one hand, TaLK addresses the societal concerns related to Korea's *English Divide* (Jeon, 2010; Kim, 2010; Shin, 2001), that is, inequities brought forth by unequal opportunities and access to English exposure between children from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds and from urban and rural areas. In addition, TaLK attempts to address another societal concern related to globalization. Korea needs to establish societal pipelines to raise the visibility of Korea, to make Korean people globally competent through increased English proficiency and understanding of other cultures.

To date over 3500 NS TaLK Scholars and 3800 domestic assistants have been recruited to teach in over 350 elementary schools. Depending on the contract, the NS TaLK scholars and their NNS partners are recruited to teach for either 6 months or 1 year for 9–15 hours per week. The NS applicants were selected based on their status as an undergraduate or graduate student in an English-speaking country, their native-like English proficiency level, and their willingness to experience living in Korea. Korean college student assistants were selected based on their educational background and their willingness to participate in the program and to commute to the school site. The NS teachers were compensated for their airfare and offered a living stipend as well as university credit in some cases, and the domestic assistants were offered living accommodations and reimbursements for any costs incurred associated to their participation in the program.

The TaLK teams were placed in elementary schools that submitted requests for the implementation of the program in their schools. Priority was given to the schools that were located in remote areas and that had the least amount of resources as assessed by the local educational administration office. Every attempt was made to distribute TaLK scholars widely to cities other than Seoul, the capital of South Korea. At each school, the school's English teacher supervised the implementation of the program and coordinated directly with the TaLK teams.

## **Review of Literature on NS Teaching Models in EFL Context**

The demand for NS teachers has increased with the shift away from grammar-translation approaches to communicative approaches in language education. The main teaching model employed in English language programs in Asian contexts is a co-teaching model between the NNS teacher and the NS English teachers. For example, Nishino and Watanabe (2008) reported on the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Program which was started in 1987 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. The program has placed over 6,000 NS teachers in public high schools in Japan. The unique feature of this program was to develop the proficiency levels of the NNS Japanese English teachers. By interacting with the NS teachers, the NNS Japanese teachers were expected to build their English language skills. There have also been several studies conducted in Korea regarding this model. According to a survey of Korean English teachers and NS English assistant teachers, Hong and Jung (2006) concluded that the co-teaching / team teaching model was the most ideal teaching model in EFL contexts. However, the implementation of this model proved to be challenging. Tensions between the NS and NNS teachers arose due to the pressures felt by Korean teachers to have to perform in English, preferential treatment of NS teachers by students, as well as difficulties caused by unclear roles and responsibilities between the teachers. The researchers found that although the presence of NS teachers contributed somewhat to the students' communicative ability, the desired outcomes in students' English language learning were not reached. Rather, the tensions between the NS and NNS teacher had a negative effect on students' learning. Similarly, Choi (2009) identified problems with co-teaching models. She noted that co-teaching requires training in teamwork, yet most of the teachers in such programs had not received any professional development on co-teaching strategies. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of the NS and NNS teachers were not clearly laid out at the beginning of the relationship; thus, the difference in expectations led to

problems during class instruction. In addition, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the NNS Korean teachers were overburdened with administrative duties and that many of the NS recruited were not trained teachers. Choi concluded that these factors need to be addressed in order for co-teaching models between NS and NNS to be successful.

In addition, most studies have found that NS-led classrooms have had positive effects on building student motivation and interest in learning English. Shin et al. (2003) found that although there were no significant differences in gains in English proficiency levels among students in classrooms with NS teachers and those without NS teachers, the presence of NS teachers appeared to have increased internal motivations to learn English and the students perceived the instructional activities led by NS teachers to be more interesting and fun. Na (2007) examined the development of Korean middle school students who learned English from NS teachers over a course of the year. She found that the students in NS-led classrooms had more confidence in their English, better pronunciation and fluency, greater cultural understanding and stronger motivation to learn English. Similarly, Kim (2006) studied the effects of NS teachers on primary school children's English learning from the perspectives of the students, parents, Korean teachers, and NS teachers. He found that students generally enjoyed NS-led classes more and thus, their interest level and motivation to English were raised. His study also showed that the EFL students needed the assistance of Korean teachers to scaffold their understanding of the NS teachers' discourse. Furthermore, he also found that Korean teachers reported that their English proficiency and cultural understandings increased due to the opportunities to work with the NS teachers. Although the handful of studies points to added benefits of NS-led EFL classes, there are not enough studies that have fully investigated the perceptions across NS and NNS participants on a large-scale basis.

By shedding light on the TaLK program by examining the perspectives of NS teachers, NNS domestic assistants, and English NNS teachers in regards to how effectively the TaLK program has reached its multiple goals, this study will provide a more complete understanding of the conditions,

processes, and outcomes of a major national initiative to enhance the English learning opportunities for Korean children as well as establish baseline data for further improvements in such policies.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to assess the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the performance of the TaLK program, this study adapts Jeon and Paek's (2008) proposed conceptual framework for EFL education policy evaluation in the Korean EFL context by combining the Analysis-Design-Development-Implementation-Evaluation' (ADDIE) model (Molenda, 2003) and the modified version of program evaluation model (Kirkpatrick, 1996). This hybrid model was selected as a heuristic framework for analysis because it enabled us to have an eagle eye's view on the whole process. According to this model, policies can be evaluated in five different stages from inception to performance evaluation. The five stages are 1) needs assessment of the participants to determine whether the policy directly addresses their identified needs; 2) goals setting to ascertain whether the goals are clearly presented and relevant; 3) implementation planning to assure that the logistics of the plan are specific and feasible; 4) assessment of practice to examine whether the actual practices are in accordance with the plan; and 5) evaluation of the policy to gauge whether the policy was able to meet its goals. In this paper, we report on this final stage from the perspectives of the key participants.

The final stage, evaluation of the policy in terms of whether its goals were met, can be assessed according to these three aspects: 1) changes in the learning process or educational outcomes (behavior change); 2) administrative expertise accrued for the implementation of policy (knowledge change); and 3) changes in people's response toward the policy (response change). Behavior change includes any observable changes in learning behaviors and attitudes including motivation, interest, and changes in English proficiency, for example. Knowledge change consists of any practical knowledge gained while

implementing the policy. Finally, response change entails any reactions toward the policy including beliefs, doubts, and satisfaction about policies. These three facets offer a clear heuristic framework to guide the analysis of how well the goals of the TaLK program were met.

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 851 participants from three different groups (280 TSs, 398 KAs, and 173 ETs) were surveyed. The first group, TaLK NS scholars (TS) were from the United States of America (67%), Canada (16%), New Zealand (6%), Australia (5%), United Kingdom (4%), South Africa (1%), and Ireland (0.4%). Approximately 56% of these applicants were of Korean ethnicity and others were White. Fifty-eight percent were female and 42% were male. The average age was 28.4 ranging from 19 to 37 years of age. The TSs were either recent college graduates (36%) or college students (64%) (i.e., freshmen (4.8%), sophomores (17.9%), juniors (20.9%), and seniors (20.2%). The majority of the participants were education, humanities and social science majors, while 17% were science and engineering majors and 12% were business majors. The three main reasons among the TSs for participating in the TaLK program were for better career opportunities, overseas work experience, and English language teaching experience.

The second group, TaLK Korean assistants (KA) were university students in Korea appointed to assist the TSs in the classrooms and to help them acculturate to Korean society. Their motivation to participate in the program ranged from wanting to improve their English competence, work with foreigners, and gain experience teaching English. Over 51% were education and humanities majors, while the remainder consisted of students from the social sciences, engineering, and business disciplines. Seventy-four percent were female and 26% were male and the average age was 23.16, ranging

from 18 to 39 years of age.

The third group was English teachers (ET) in public elementary schools in rural areas of Korea. Their schools were located in the Chung-nam (13%), Chung-buk (2%), Jeon-nam (7%), Jeon-buk (8%), Jeju (2%), Gyeong-nam (11%), Gyeong-buk (17%), Gangwon (7%), Gyeonggi (8%), Daegu (6%), Busan (4%), Ulsan (8%), and Incheon (2%) provinces. They had an average of 11.6 years (range of 1-34 years) of experience teaching in elementary schools. 71% were females and 29% were males and the average age of the informants was 29.54 (range of 23-43 years of age).

### **Procedure and Analysis**

In order to capture the perspectives of a large number of participants spread throughout South Korea, we elected to do a survey with a few open-ended questions to gain more in-depth understandings of the patterns the survey data. The researchers pre-constructed survey items pertaining to the efficiency of the program application process, administration of the program, experience participating in the program, and program effectiveness. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each form also consisted of two open-ended questions which asked about any challenges or difficulties in the experiences of the participants as well as any recommendations they may have for program improvement. The survey was provided in English to the TSs and in Korean to the KAs and ETs. Due to the constraints of space in a single article, only the survey items relevant to our research focus, that is, the participants' opinions of the effectiveness of the program and attainment of goals, will be discussed in this paper.

The survey was implemented after the completion of the second and the sixth session. The survey for the TS and for KA group was carried out online, while the ETs responded to the survey on a paper-and-pencil basis. The response rate among the total number of participants in the program was 69% for TSs, 71% for KAs, and 93% ETs.

Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficients that were calculated to assess the reliability of each of the constructs. With the exception of "lessening of the English divide" construct, which was assessed with a single item in the survey, the remaining constructs consisted of multiple items. The items within each of the constructs appear to be highly correlated with one another and thus, the construct appears to be fairly reliable (Cronbach's alpha coefficients range: .82 to .95). The individual items for each of the constructs are presented in the results section.

TABLE 1  
*Reliability Coefficients for Constructs by Group*

Construct	Group	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Perception on lessening English divide	- TaLK scholar	1	-
	- Korean TaLK assistant	1	-
	- English teacher	1	-
Increase in students' English proficiency	- TaLK scholar	5	.92
	- Korean TaLK assistant	5	.92
	- English teacher	5	.95
Increase in TaLK scholars' Korean and familiarity with Korean culture	- Talk scholar	6	.82
	- TaLK scholar	4	.94
	- Korean TaLK assistant	4	.89
Increase in Korean assistants' English proficiency and attitude toward different culture	- TaLK scholar	2	.83
	- TaLK assistant	2	.85
Overall success of the program	- English teacher	2	.87

For constructs with multiple items, the means across the items in each construct were calculated and used to represent the group's response to the construct. Descriptive statistics are reported for each construct by group. For constructs that had responses from multiple groups, means were compared by using ANOVA followed by post-hoc Bonferroni test to assess how the groups differed from one another in their perspectives. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 18. A *p*-level of less than 0.05 was accepted as significant. The open-ended responses were organized by themes and translated into English when necessary. The qualitative responses are presented to offer insights into some of the challenges and areas of improvement for the program.

The results will be presented in order of the TaLK program's three main goals (i.e., lessening of the English divide, TaLK NS scholars' familiarity with Korean culture and language, and TaLK NNS scholars' improvement in English and understanding of other culture), followed by a discussion of the behavior, knowledge and response changes found in the data.

## **Results**

### **Goal 1: Lessening the English Divide**

Unequal access to private English language education has been a major contributor to the English divide. The ability to afford private English education as well as the availability of private English education opportunities in students' commutable vicinity is significantly different for residents in the different provincial areas in Korea. Jeon (2010) reports that by region, people in Seoul, the capital city, had the highest education expenditure, spending on average 296,000 won (260 US dollars) per student per month, which is 2.4 times more than was spent in rural areas. Because English proficiency is positioned as a gatekeeper in the academic and professional sectors of society, this form of social inequality is considered to

be a major problem by the Korean government. For this reason, one of the main goals of TaLK is to provide English language learning opportunities with NSs of English for children in rural areas that traditionally come from lower SES family backgrounds and have little, if any, access to English learning opportunities with NSs, which generally cost nearly 2-3 times as much as English classes with NNSs.

In order to assess the participants' opinions of whether the TaLK program was able to alleviate the English divide to some extent, the TSs, KAs, and ETs were asked to rate the degree of their agreement with the statement 'I think this program has helped to reduce the English divide in Korea'. The concept of the English Divide was covered during orientation and therefore, the TSs and KAs were familiar with this term. The group means and standard deviation of their responses to the item are shown in Table 2. In general, all three groups agreed somewhat with the statement.

TABLE 2  
*Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions on Lessening of English Divide*

Survey Item	Group	M(SD)
I think this program has helped to reduce the English divide in the Korean society.	TS	3.69(.89)
	KA	3.30(.97)
	ET	3.04(.93)

TABLE 3  
*Multiple Comparisons of Perceptions on Lessening of English Divide*

Groups	Mean difference	SE	Sig.
TS-KA	.38	.07	.00
TS-ET	.65	.09	.00
KA-ET	.26	.09	.00

A one way ANOVA revealed that the mean difference was statistically significant across the three groups,  $F(2, 85) = 27.68, p < .00$ . The post hoc test showed that the mean differences were significant for each pair as shown in

Table 3. Thus, the participants had significantly differing perceptions about the impact of the TaLK program in reducing the English divide with the TSs having the most favorable perception of the effectiveness of TaLK, then the KAs and the ETs with the least favorable perception in this regards among the three groups.

The TS group's results were further confirmed by their qualitative responses which commonly referred to their perception that TaLK provided an unique opportunity to children who showed visible improvements during the short time that they were in the program. For example, one TS stated,

I feel that a lot of these students are very interested in having a foreigner teach at their school. They are very excited to learn and greet me in English whenever they see me. In the beginning, many of the students did not want to learn and just sat in class without participating. The same students have started to open up to me and many of them want to learn English and are excited when they learn new vocabulary or phrases.  
(Male TS, Kangwon)

Interestingly, the TSs' attitudes may have been more favorable than the other groups because their direct experiences with English language education were mainly limited to students who self-elected to participate in TaLK after school. In other words, the self-elected students may have a greater tendency to be more motivated to learn English. Yet, this finding supports earlier studies that have reported an increase in internal motivation to learn English when being taught by NS teachers (Kim, 2006; Na, 2007; Shin et al., 2003). In contrast, the ET group had the least favorable perception of the effects of the program in reducing the English divide. As professional educators who have been in the educational system for an average of 11 years, this group seems to consider a broader array of factors that are needed to realistically reduce the English divide. For example, one ET stated,

I think just the fact that they had an opportunity to interact with native

speakers was a huge help, however, in order to reduce the English divide, a lot more needs to happen. The program needs to be sustainable, more hours of instruction are needed. (Female ET, Chun-nam)

The lessening of the English divide can also be assessed by examining whether the students were able to improve their English language competence. The construct of English language competence in the survey was composed of two dimensions: improvement of students' English language proficiency and improvement of students' motivation, attitude and confidence towards English. All three groups were asked to rate their agreement with the items on a Likert scale.

The results of the means of the three groups on the two items are presented in Table 4. The overall mean scores indicate that the TSs saw the most improvement in the students' English skills, then the KAs and the ETs. There appears to be a repeated pattern of ETs having the least favorable assessment and the TSs having the most favorable perception. Although the TS, KA, and ET all agreed that the amount of English use increased among students, the ETs were quick to point out:

because there were so many students that signed up for the program, the student to teacher ratio was so high that the students did not get ample time to interact 1 on 1 with the teachers in order to really improve their English proficiency. (Female ET, Chun-buk)

TABLE 4  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings Pertaining to English Language Competence*

Survey items for in English language competence	Group	Item <i>M(SD)</i>	Total <i>M(SD)</i>
1. The amount of English use has increased among students.	TS	4.00(.72)	3.97(.68)
	KA	3.94(.73)	
2. Students' English communicative competence has improved.	KA	3.71(.91)	3.66(.85)
	ET	3.62(.90)	
	ET	3.40(.94)	3.30(.88)
		3.20(.91)	

Furthermore, the means of the individual items also show that the TSs perceived that the students used English much more than before, while the KAs and ETs did not agree with the statement as strongly. The difference in the perceptions between the participants may also be accounted for by the researchers' observations of students' tendencies to speak in the dominant language of the interlocutors during their interactions. In other words, the researchers noted that students had a tendency to speak in Korean to their Korean ET teachers during class or not speak at all. When they did speak in English to their ETs, they were forced responses to an instructional activity rather than the result of a natural mode of communication. However, in the classes taught by TSs because the students knew they had to speak in English in order to communicate with their teachers who were non-speakers of Korean, their oral responses were more voluntary. In fact they reported feeling uncomfortable when speaking in English to their ET teachers who they know are NNSs of the language. For example, some students reported that

Speaking in English to my Korean teachers is awkward. I can speak more naturally in English to the foreign teachers. (Female, Gyeonggi)

I enjoy speaking in English with foreigners. It is much more fun than speaking in English with my Korean teacher. (Female, Incheon)

It is likely that the ETs may not have observed as large of a difference in the students' English language use than before the TaLK program because students may have refrained from using English unless it was as a required response in the instructional activity. Thus, it is not surprising that the ETs did not see as much of an improvement in the students' English language competence as the TSs.

TABLE 5  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings of Items Pertaining to Affective Factors*

Survey items for perception of affective factors	Group	Item <i>M(SD)</i>	Total <i>M(SD)</i>
		3.92(.88)	
1. Students' motivation to learn English has increased.	TS	3.92(.85)	3.92(.80)
		3.93(.84)	
2. Students' attitudes toward learning English have improved.	KA	3.72(.87)	3.69(.81)
		3.55(.92)	
3. Students' interest in learning English has improved.	ET	3.79(.88)	3.46(.86)
		3.63(.94)	
		3.16(.92)	
		3.61(.91)	

Overall, all the groups held somewhat favorable perceptions that students' motivation, attitude and interest in learning English increased after participation in TaLK program as shown in Table 5. In particular, the TSs perceived that students' motivation, attitude and interest in English had increased more than the other groups and did not see a difference among these factors. What was interesting was that the KAs and ETs agreed more strongly with the statement that the students' motivation and interest in learning English increased but agreed less with the statement that their attitudes toward learning English have improved.

The KAs and ETs perceived that the students' attitudes toward English did

not change as much as their motivation to learn English unlike the TSs who did not perceive a difference between the students' attitudes and motivation. Although the students' motivation to want to learn English and their interest in learning English may have increased, it is likely that the students' attitude toward learning English may not have changed much as suggested by the ET and KA responses. The high stakes pressure placed on English competence in terms of its gatekeeping role in college entrance examinations and job placements in the Korean society position English as a subject that the children must excel in. For this reason, although students' motivations are perceived to be high, their attitude toward English may be that it is difficult and burdensome (Jeon, 2010). The TSs did not perceive a difference between the students' attitudes toward English and motivation to learn English, while the ETs and KAs, who are much more aware of the realities of the role of English in the lives of these students alike, noted the difference.

Results of the one-way ANOVA show the three groups differed significantly in their perceptions about the students' English improvement,  $F(2, 848) = 37.33, p < .00$ . Further, the groups also differed in their perceptions about the students' motivation and attitudes,  $F(2, 845) = 17.58, p < .00$ . The differences in the ratings of the groups indicate significant variations in their perspectives of the same program. Interestingly, there appears to be a consistent pattern in the perception ratings. The more removed the group is from the direct day to day implementation of the program, the greater the tendency to perceive the outcomes more negatively. That is, the TSs, who were working with the students daily, had the most favorable ratings of the outcomes, while the KAs, who served mainly as assistants to the TS when called upon, had the second most favorable perceptions and the ETs, who were not directly involved in the day to day teachings of the TaLK program, had the most critical opinions.

In order to find out which groups' perceptions differed significantly, post-hoc Bonferroni tests were conducted. For students' English improvement, the ratings were significantly different for all three pairs. The greatest difference existed between the TS and ET ratings in regards to the students'

improvement in English as was discussed above. Regarding the perceptions of students' affect toward English learning, the same pattern emerged as those of student's English improvement. That is, all pairs were different in their perceptions to a statistically significant degree as shown in Table 6. As mentioned before, ETs had the most negative perceptions. The fact that the ETs did not perceive as much of an improvement across the board as the other groups may be due to their lack of faith in government sponsored programs (Kim, Woo, Jeon, & Jin, 2010) as well as the physical workload placed upon them in terms of coordinating with and mentoring the TSs and KAs and facilitating the program at their local schools. For example, the following quote summarizes the essence of the experiences of most ETs, "Our plates are full just with our own class teaching and school administrative duties, and then on top of that to add the responsibilities that come with TaLK was really difficult to handle. Preparing documents and reports related to *TaLK*, *managing the relationship between the TS and KA*, *arranging for the TaLK scholars cultural experience, accommodations, etc. these were a huge responsibility for the supervising ET*" (Female ET, Busan).<sup>2</sup> Thus, given the amount of administrative work involved and the lack of visible English gains among the students from the ETs' perspectives, the TaLK program may not seem to be worth the cost and the resources invested in the program. Although it is unrealistic to expect one policy to be able to fully deal with a serious and deep social concern in a short amount of time, what can be noted is that the findings show that the TaLK program is seen by the participants to have some potential to reduce the English divide.

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<sup>2</sup> Italics refer to translated responses from Korean participants.

TABLE 6  
*Comparison of Mean Differences Across Groups*

Groups	Students' English improvement		Increasing affective factors	
	MD*(SE)	Sig.	MD(SE)	Sig.
TS-KA	.31(.04)	.00	.24(.07)	.00
TS-ET	.67(.08)	.00	.46(.08)	.00
KA-ET	.36(.07)	.00	.22(.08)	.00

*Note.* MD: Mean Difference between the two groups.

## Goal 2: TaLK Scholars' Familiarity with the Korean Culture

Another main goal of the TaLK program lies in providing opportunities for foreigners to be introduced to the Korean culture, language, and society. In order to assess how effectively this goal was met, we asked TSs about their experiences related to Korean language acquisition, Korean cultural understanding and attitudes toward Koreans. Overall, the TS group's perceptions regarding the three aspects were quite positive as shown in Table 7. The TSs reported the greatest increase in their understanding about Korean culture, followed by Korean language acquisition, but less increase in developing a positive attitude toward Koreans. Although the majority of scholars participated in the program for only 6 months, many of them expressed that they had ample opportunities to develop language and cultural skills which influenced their attitude toward living and working in Korea positively. For instance, one TS mentioned, "Pairing us with university students. This gave us an opportunity to have cultural exchange with someone near our own age and gave us another area of support in Korea. The TaLK program enabled me to get to know Korea better and understand the culture and language. I feel that after working with the Korean people, I can come back and work in Korea in the future." (Male, TS, Chung-buk)

TABLE 7  
*Descriptive Statistics of Talk Scholars' Perceptions of Their Korean Experiences*

Goals	Survey items	Item <i>M(SD)</i>	Total <i>M(SD)</i>
Korean language acquisition	1. My Korean language skills have improved.	3.95(.89)	4.03(.74)
	2. I would like to develop my Korean language skills more.	4.10(.92)	
Understanding Korean culture	1. My understanding of Korean culture has improved.	4.21(.76)	4.12(.72)
	2. I am able to work with Korean people well.	4.02(.81)	
Attitude toward Korea	1. I want to work in Korea in the future.	3.70(1.09)	3.84(.96)
	2. I feel comfortable in Korea.	3.97(1.01)	

We note that these favorable responses may be due to the fact that the majority of TSs were of Korean heritage. It is typical for heritage speakers to have some level of oral proficiency in Korean particularly in listening comprehension skills and some familiarity with the Korean culture before arriving in Korea (Lee & Shin, 2008). Therefore, with some baseline familiarity, the additional opportunities provided by the TaLK program to enhance their language and cultural proficiency may have resulted in positive outcomes. However, for the non-Korean TS scholars, who may have started the program without any prior experience with the Korean language or culture, cultural adjustments may not have come as easily, especially in cases where they were placed in the more rural areas of Korea. A non-Korean TS responded, "I am not Korean... I think that this program is directed more to Korean Americans and if it continues to have non Koreans in the program, it should have more services to help them adjust to the Korean lifestyle." (Male TS, Gyonggi)

### Goal 3: Improvement of English Language and Cultural Understanding Among KAs

The final goal of the TaLK program is to enhance KAs' global competence by gaining English proficiency and cultural understanding. To examine the extent to which participants' perceived the attainment of this goal, the TSs and KAs were asked about the KAs' improvement of their English proficiency and increase of cultural understanding. As shown in Table 8, both groups' perceptions were quite positive. Both groups perceived KAs' understanding about other cultures to have increased more than their English competence. Although the mean difference between the KAs and TSs for improvement in English proficiency ( $t = 1.25$ ,  $df = 667$ ,  $p = .21$ ) and cultural understanding ( $t = -.05$ ,  $df = 665$ ,  $p = .96$ ) were statistically insignificant, the TSs rated the improvement of the KAs English skills to be higher than the KAs. The two groups were similar in assessing this aspect of gain of the TaLK program probably because they worked and interacted closely together for a prolonged period of time.

TABLE 8  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings of Items Pertaining to KA's Attainment*

Survey items	Group	Item <i>M(SD)</i>	Total <i>M(SD)</i>
Korean assistant's/ My English use has increased.	TS	3.63(1.01)	3.63(1.07)
		3.62(1.09)	
Korean assistant's/ My English communicative competence has improved.	KA	3.66(1.01)	3.53(.95)
		3.39(.99)	
Korean assistant's/ My understanding of another culture has increased.	TS	3.73(1.04)	3.69(.99)
		3.65(1.01)	
Korean assistant's/ My interest in another culture has increased.	KA	3.68(.90)	3.70(.87)
		3.71(.95)	

## Discussion

As discussed in the conceptual framework, the effectiveness of policies can be assessed in terms of participants' behavior change, knowledge change, and response change. Each of these aspects will be discussed in light of the findings gathered from the surveys of TS, KA, and ET.

Behavior change refers to any observable changes in learning such as students' test scores, behavior changes towards learning, and changes in their English proficiency. The most visible change in behavior was among the students as assessed by the perception of the three groups of instructors. The survey results showed that throughout the TaLK program, the students' motivation and interest in learning English were heightened. Many TSs mentioned similar sentiment as the following statement, "I think this program was an overall success ... the kids were amazing and their interest in English improved drastically. They were not afraid to speak to me 1 on 1 toward the end of the program." Further, students' motivation to learn English as well as their interest in learning English and their confidence in learning English was perceived by TSs, KAs, and ETs to have increased.

The TS also underwent some noticeable behavior changes. For example, some of the TSs that arrived in Korea without any prior experience with Korean culture, began to express interest in learning Korean and took up all the opportunities for Korean cultural experiences such as domestic travel to historical sites and museum excursions, for example. Later they stated that they felt at home in Korea and could see themselves live and work in Korea. In general, although there were some rough periods of adjustment to the new culture and society, the TSs' attitudes toward the Korean people, language and culture appeared to be very favorable as the female TS responded,

The first orientation and the POE orientation were successful in the transition into Korea. I can imagine how much harder it would have been without them. They allowed everyone to make friends all over Korea. Another factor is all the good exposure Korea is getting as a

country...I think the program is successful in creating international ties for everyone. (Female TS, Region not responded)

Based on the survey data, the TS scholars seem to have benefited the most from the program. They perceived the increase of their knowledge of Korean language and culture to be much greater than the increase in English language competence of the students in the TaLK program. The role of TaLK as not only an education program but an ambassadorial program was highlighted in the data. Although the program seems to have benefited all the participants to some extent, some participants commented that the program was primarily geared toward exposing the TSs to Korea. In other words, TS scholars seem to have benefitted the most from the program. One ET stated,

I really don't know who the program is intended for. I wish we can implement the program with the best interests of the children in the center. As I have been following the protocol of this program, it seems to me that it is really a program to benefit the native speaking TaLK scholars. (Female ET, Kyung-buk)

Secondly, knowledge changes include any proposed ideas about the problems and ways for improvement in the process of policy implementation. Based on the findings of the study, we can derive some important implications for the improvement of such policies in the future. First, from the TSs' perspectives, applicants without previous English language teaching experience need more hands-on training on pedagogical methods and classroom management techniques as well as better teaching materials. For example, a TS commented,

Don't give us lectures on theories on how to teach, instead have us watch actual REAL classes at schools and then have us help co-teach and perhaps have us teach solo under the supervision of Korean teachers before placing us in the classroom. (Male TS, Chonnam)

There was also confusion as to the role of the KAs in the programs by the various participants. More clarification about the opportunities and the responsibilities and training is needed for the KA group so that they can both efficiently serve in their designated roles and also benefit and learn through the TaLK program. One KA stated,

in the orientation for the Korean teaching assistants, the convener stated that the Korean teaching assistants are not “helpers” but are “co-teachers” who are expected to work on teaching plans together and prepare for the class together...I think there needs to be clearer delineation of responsibilities and we all need to be given the same message...otherwise tensions will form. (Female KA, Daegu)

ETs showed somewhat favorable attitudes toward the policy and displayed a positive disposition toward the continuation of the program, their open ended responses, however, revealed an interesting tension. The TaLK program increased their physical workload and their English proficiencies were overshadowed by those of the TaLK scholars. Thus, from the teachers' perspectives, there was not much to benefit from. In the future, ETs need to be given support or resources to help implement the program at their schools. Further, it would be helpful to build in English immersion and interactional opportunities for ETs with the TaLK scholars in order to help ETs to build their English proficiency. Also ETs need to be given the time and resources to implement the program. In the current state, the ETs were expected to take on the role of the program implementer at their schools in addition to all their regular duties without any extra compensation.

In sum, the program is at its infancy. For future implementation, the policy needs to focus on more standardization of its implementation as we found that there was much variation in the experiences of the participants across the TaLK program sites. Therefore, standardization of the content and instructional approaches as well as standardization of recruitment and implementation procedures that address the problems mentioned above may

lead to more consistent and positive outcomes.

Last but not least, response changes which include any changes in participants' beliefs, doubts, and satisfaction towards policies being implemented, make up the final set of observed changes. TS, KA and ET groups were asked to assess the overall success of the program as well as whether the program is worthy of being continued. The descriptive statistics of each group's responses on the items are shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9  
*Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions About Overall Success of the Program*

Survey questions	Group	Item <i>M(SD)</i>	Total <i>M(SD)</i>
	TS	3.79(.83)	3.81(.79)
		3.83(.88)	
Overall, this program has been successful.	KA	3.34(1.01)	3.54(.96)
This program should be continued.		3.75(1.05)	
	ET	3.05(1.04)	3.10(1.01)
		3.14(1.11)	

The TS group held the most positive views toward the success of the TALK program. Again, the ET group held the least positive views about the program in comparison to the other groups. Bonferroni post-hoc analysis shows that the mean differences of the perceptions among the three groups were statistically significant,  $F(2, 846) = 32.12, p < .00$ . Table 10 presents the results of multiple comparisons of perceptions on the success of the program.

TABLE 10  
*Multiple Comparisons of Perceptions on the Success of the Program*

Groups	Mean difference	<i>SE</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
TS-KA	.27	.07	.00
TS-ET	.71	.09	.00
KA-ET	-.44	.08	.00

The greatest difference in the participants' perceptions regarding the overall success of the program was between the TSs and ETs. This may be due to the fact that the ETs did not receive any direct benefits from the program and mostly felt the administrative burden placed upon them to implement the TaLK program. In contrast, as was previously indicated, it seems that the TSs' experiences with the TaLK program were very positive and many of the TSs' mentioned that the program offered unique learning opportunities that were beneficial for them. Programs are likely to be more effective when all the participants involved are equally committed to the cause and motivated to make it successful. It seems that among the key participants in the TaLK program there were clear inequalities in the responsibilities and benefits afforded to the different groups of participants. In order to assure the continued success of this program, more careful planning needs to take place to assure that all the participants receive equal benefits and/or compensation for their participation in the program.

## Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of participants in a government-initiated program, TaLK, that aimed to provide children in rural areas with English education opportunities with native-speaking instructors. The findings show that overall all the participants had fairly positive experiences in the program and felt that the program had achieved the main goals to some extent. For example, 75% of the TSs, 55.9% of the KAs and 63.6% of the ETs perceived that the program was effective in lessening the English divide in Korea; 84.1% of the TSs, 72.9% of the KAs and 63.6% of the ETs indicated that the students' English language competence improved; 95.5% of the TSs responded that their understanding of the Korean culture improved, but their opportunities to develop proficiency in Korean were insufficient; and 76.3% of KAs responded that their English language ability had increased. The differences in perceptions across the three groups were

statistically significant for the most part, suggesting that the experiences and positions of the participants are different and need further in-depth examination. For example, the TSs appeared to have the most positive assessment of the program with over 81% stating that the program should be continued, whereas in contrast, the ETs rated the program outcomes least favorably among the groups with only 54.5% stating that the program should be continued. This appears to be a result of the ways in which the TaLK program was implemented in that it catered to the conveniences of the TSs, but added a burdensome workload to the ETs.

In a society where the quality of educational opportunities are so noticeably divided between metropolitan and rural areas, governmental policies such as TaLK that provide opportunities for marginalized students to experience English exposure with native English-speaking teachers are clearly needed. The findings show that the program holds strong potential to increase English language competence more widely among Korean students, but also to introduce the Korean culture, language and society more globally to foreigners. As this program becomes more established, it is likely to gain ground as an international model for language and cultural exchange. One TS summed up the sentiments of many fellow participants in the following way,

I think the TaLK program has strong foundations and its intentions are laudable. Sharing cultures, focusing on under-resourced elementary schools, focusing on conversation, reaching out to different countries, reaching out to ethnic Koreans, and providing an orientation and training period are successful achievements. The TaLK team has done a great job overall, especially for a pilot program being tested on such a grand scale. I think the program will continue to improve and I hope it remains committed to its original objective. It has the potential to receive international attention because it is one of a kind. (Male, Kyong-buk)

The TaLK program still has many areas for improvement. However, the beauty of this education policy is in its impact on the multiple facets of the

society, ranging from children's English language education to promoting the globalization of Korean language and culture. The need for NS English language teachers is not likely to diminish in the near future, and it is quite commendable that such efforts are being expanded to include other societal needs such as promoting the globalization of the Korean language and culture. As we continue to implement TaLK, however, more focus needs to be placed on examining the longitudinal outcomes of the program both in terms of students' learning and the societal benefits of the program. Although this study is one of the first attempts to evaluate this program, it has begun the development of pathways for its evaluation that can lead to more accurate assessment of long-term effects as well as provide insights for other EFL contexts who may be interested in implementing similar types of programs and policies.

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## Appendix

### TaLK orientation program (8<sup>th</sup> Orientation)

	1	2	3	Lunch	4	5	6	7
	09:00-10:00	10:20-11:20	11:40-12:40	12:40-14:00	14:00-15:00	15:20-16:20	16:40-17:40	19:00-20:00
2.3(Fri)- 2.6(Mon)	-Arrival, Dorm Registration - Mini-orientation - Getting-Over-Jet-Lag Program (Optional) - Field Trip for Early Arrivals (Optional) * 4th of February: Gapsa Temple Stay (Magok Temple, Gongju, Chungcheongnamdo) * 5th of February: Dogo HotSpring (Dogok HotSpring, Asan, Chungcheongnamdo) * 6th of February: Korean Folk Village (Yongin, Gyeonggi-do)							
2.7 (Tue)	Registration (09:30-10:00)	Orientation & Open Bank Account (10:00-11:30)	Lunch & Travel (11:30-14:20)		Opening Ceremony (14:30-15:30)	Seoul Scavenger Hunt & Travel (15:30-20:30)		
2.8 (Wed)	Understanding Cultural Differences		Taekwondo	Lunch	My TaLK Life	Korean History & Society		-Optional Activity ①Korean (B/I) ②Korean Cooking ③Samulnori
2.9 (Thu)	Traditional Korean Painting	Korean Education System & English Fever in Korea	Special Lecture : To Teach Children	Lunch	Understanding Korean TaLK Scholars	How to Build Desirable Relationships in School	Explore Korea (Korea Tourism)	
2.10 (Fri)	Cross-cultural Issues for TaLK Scholars	Second Language Acquisition	How to Be a Good Presenter in an Elementary School Class	Lunch	Korean Paper Craft	Introduction to the 8th TaLK Program		
2.11 (Sat)	Medical Checkup (08:30-13:00)			Lunch	Free Time			
2.12 (Sun)	- Optional Activity (Cheongnamdae Visit: Presidential Retreat)							
2.13 (Mon)	How to Utilize Drama Techniques in Class		Child Psychology	Lunch	Child Psychology	Education Technology (PowerPoint Use in Class)		-Optional Activity ①Korean (B/I) ②Korean Cooking ③Samulnori
2.14 (Tue)	Cooperative Learning (Listening & Speaking)		How to Utilize Songs & Chants	Lunch	Teaching Mixed Levels	Curriculum Design		
2.15 (Wed)	Reading & Writing Instruction		First Day: Effective Self-Introduction and Warm-up Activities	Lunch	Learner's Motivation: Education Magic	Working with Culture in the Korean English Language Classroom		
2.16 (Thu)	Afterschool English Class & English Camp	Storytelling Instruction		Lunch	Team-teaching Demo class & Lesson Planning	Class Management		
2.17 (Fri)	Elementary English Curriculum & Official English Class	Solo Teaching Demo Class & How to Utilize the TaLK Supplemental Textbook		Lunch	Pronunciation Instructions (Effective Communication)	Creating Your Own Teaching Materials		
2.18 (Sat)	-Field Trip (Farm Stay: Giwa Village, Buyeo)						Back to Venue	
2.19 (Sun)	-Optional Activity (Seoul Trip: Namsan Tower, Gyeongbok Palace, etc)							
2.20 (Mon)	Lesson Planning(1) & Creating Teaching Materials (09:00-12:40)			Lunch	Meeting with POE Supervisors (13:30-15:30)		-Optional Activity (19:00-20:30) ①Korean Pop Dancing ②Making Korean Kites	
2.21 (Tue)	Teaching Practioe(1) (09:00-12:40)			Lunch	Teaching Practioe(1) (14:00-18:00)		-Optional Activity (19:00-20:30) ①Korean Pop Dancing ②Making Korean Kites	
2.22 (Wed)	Lesson Planning(2) & Creating Teaching Materials (09:00-12:40)			Lunch	Teaching Practioe(2) (14:00-18:00)			
2.23 (Tue)	Teaching Practioe(2) (09:00-12:00)			Lunch	Farewell Session (14:30-22:30) -Seoul City Tour -Nanta Performance		Bag packing	
2.24 (Fri)	Check-out & Load Luggage (09:00-10:40)	Questionnaire & Closing Ceremony (11:00-11:20)		Lunch	Departure for Assigned POE Orientation Venue			