



## A Study on the Change in the Native English-Speaking Teacher Program in Korea: From the Historical Institutional Approach

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This study aims to analyze the current state of the Native English-speaking Teachers (NEST) program in Korea and predict its future direction. Specifically, the historical institutionalist approach was adopted to determine how 26 years of the NEST program has developed and how it will continue to develop. The analysis period focused on before and after the Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008 to 2013), which implemented a comprehensive English public education policy. The research has found that structural factors and institutional ones have influenced the current state of the NEST program. The structural factors included the policy environment, such as the administration's direction, education policy, and English education policy. Institutional factors included the direction of English education policy, the teacher qualification system, the relationship between stakeholders, and the professional operating agency. Findings also determined the current state of the NEST program in terms of teacher qualifications, status and roles of the NESTs, size and methods of placement, and professional operating organization. The historical institutionalist approach provides two possible scenarios regarding the future of the NEST program. While the program will follow the current system with few changes as indicated by the path dependency factor, a considerable change is expected to occur through structural factors, including the development of information technology and the implications of infectious disease policies affecting the aforementioned institutional factors. Contrarily, the second scenario could accompany a significant reduction of the NESTs and the expansion of the role of Korean teachers.

**Keywords:** native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), NEST program, English education policy, Historical Institutional Approach (HIA), English Program in Korea (EPIK)

### Introduction

This study aims to identify the factors affecting the operation and change of the native English speaking teacher program (hereinafter NEST program), which is being implemented as one of the major English education policies pursuing communicative language teaching. Several countries have invited NESTs to utilize the strengths of English proficiency or to compensate for the perceived lack of local English teachers. As a result, an official program related to NEST recruitment (i.e., NEST program) was introduced (Copland et al., 2016). In Korea, the NEST program has been operational since 1995 and is currently being implemented in major Asian countries including Japan, the province of Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

In the mid-1990s, Korea defined the wave of globalization and knowledge information as 'the period of historical transformation.' To actively respond to these changes, Korea promoted the 5.31 educational reform with the aim of innovatively changing the framework of Korean education (Ahn & Ha, 2015). During this period, interest in English education emerged as the plan to strengthen foreign language



education proposed by the Globalization Promotion Committee was included as a task of “strengthening globalization education and foreign language education.” Prior to 1995, English classes were difficult to access except for classes in public schools typically taught by Koreans. Consequently, English classes led by native English speakers attracted attention as an effective English education method and began in 1995 under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Since then, the number of active NEST English teachers increased steadily from 59 to 1,017 in 2005, and then rapidly to 8,546 in 2010, before decreasing to 4,813 as of April 2019.

Previous research on the NEST program in Korea has often focused on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and measures to improve the program. The former includes the studies on the effectiveness of cooperative classes (Hong & Kim, 2020; Jang & Ahn, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2013) and studies on class satisfaction (Choi & Kim, 2013; Shim et al., 2016). On other occasions, research on program improvement either focused on improving the selection and placement management system (Hong et al., 2009; Jeong, 2013; Kim et al., 2012; Park et al., 2010; Park & Ha, 2013) or on adapting the NEST program (Kang & Kim, 2011; Lim et al., 2017; Park & Kim, 2012). With these preceding studies alone, it was difficult to find answers to how the NEST program has developed over the years or how it will continue to develop.

Based on this perception of the problem, the historical institutionalist approach was applied to analyze how the macroscopic environment and corresponding stakeholders (i.e., students, instructors, administrators, and policymakers) influenced the current state of the NEST program. Historical institutionalists believe that institutions are formed and changed by reflecting political, economic, and social contexts, and that policies are created as the form of combination of the components of the system changes. They explain that institutions are formed in unequal power relationships, are maintained in the direction of entrenchment of unequal power relationships, and policies once formed based on historicity and path dependence do not change easily (Kim, 2020, p. 18).

For this study, a systematic review of documentation and extant literature was used. In order to establish an analysis framework, literature and papers related to historical institutionalism were analyzed, and government policy documents, publications, various media reports and web data were analyzed to study the NEST program. This study started with the question, “Why are NESTs still assistant teachers in Korea?” This is because the status of NESTs as assistant teachers is considered to contain the current state of the NEST program. To answer this question, it attempted to analyze the current state of the NEST program in Korea and predict its future direction through analyzing how it has historically changed while interacting with the environment.

To this end, the analysis focused on the changes in the NEST program before and after the Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008-2003), which served as an opportunity to bring about a major change in the NEST program. The research questions set for analysis are as follows.

1. What are the policy environment factors that influenced changes in the NEST program?
2. How have the improvements in the NEST program influenced the current state of the NEST program?
3. What institutional factors influenced the NEST program?
4. How will the NEST program change in the future?

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Policy on Native English-speaking Teachers (NEST) in Korea**

Tens of thousands of NESTs work in educational institutions across the world, from kindergartens to universities. A variety of factors, such as their qualifications, experience, and national origin, influence their status (Copland et al., 2016). According to extant literature, NEST programs are performing particularly well in Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, with Southeast Asia being the subject

of most doctoral studies over the past few years (Bryant, 2011; Heo, 2013; Liu, 2009; Sutherland, 2012; Tran, 2014; Tsai, 2007). The introduction period and operation methods of NEST policies differ from country to country, and these differences appear to be caused by the country's educational policy environment and historical changes.

NESTs, the subject of analysis in this paper, refer to English teachers from native English-speaking countries. Those who have specific qualifications are hired through selection procedures and teach English in cooperation with Korean teachers in Korean elementary, middle, and high schools. NESTs are selected and hired by the National Institute of International Education (hereafter NIIE) and deployed through various channels including the English Program in Korea (EPIK). In general, the qualification criteria applied by NIIE are applied to them through partial changes. In principle, EPIK instructors have a one-year contract period, work 8 hours a day for five days a week, and teach 22 hours a week. As a native of seven English-speaking countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and South Africa, they must complete TEFL, TESOL, and CELTA for more than 100 hours or have education majors and secondary teacher certificates.

The purpose of English education using NESTs is based on the premise that NESTs are helpful in effectively developing communication skills in English through school classes. Korea's NEST program was started based on the English education theory (Savignon, 1983), which emphasized that communication skills are systematic interactions rather than information delivery, and expanded language education to include cognitive understanding as well as ability to use language optimally (Holliday, 2006). Based on this perception of communication skills, foreign language learners' opportunity to communicate with fluent speakers (e.g., NESTs) and planning learners' experience in foreign language communication are necessary for communication-oriented foreign language education (Canale & Swayne, 1980). In addition, the recognition that it is difficult to cultivate Korean English teachers who can communicate in English fluently during their English teacher training courses contributed to the introduction of the native English speaker system. In other words, NESTs' fluent English proficiency is the reason why they are recognized as expert-level English teachers, which is often emphasized by the mass media, and as a result, the NEST program has been adopted (Oda, 2017).

However, there are still objections to these claims. Elements of learning English include what to teach and how to teach it. While the textbook is only learning content, the teacher serves as a content provider and a model of the content in use. Studies have been published that criticize the recognition that native English teachers are excellent learning providers because of their English fluency (Crystal, 1999, 2012). Non-native English teachers (NNEST) suffer from a sense of inferiority due to a lack of English proficiency and difficulties due to the dual responsibilities of having to learn English while also teaching English subjects (Lee, 2011). However, there are many strengths of NNESTs. Examples are that they can present a good learner model, can effectively teach learning strategies, can provide reference points with learning English based on their own experiences, and can predict the difficulties of English. In addition, NNESTs can better understand and respond to the needs of students, allowing high levels of communication with students about teaching and learning methods (Medgyes, 2001).

The NEST program was introduced as an effective way to teach English in an environment where English is not used as a native language, thereby supplementing the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, and is consequently being operated in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Singapore, etc. (Copland et al., 2016). The introduction period and operation method of the NEST program differ from country to country, and these differences appear to have occurred according to the country's environment and historical changes.

## **Historical Institutional Approach**

In the process of being formed into a policy, the logic of rationality and politics of social problems can either compete or coexist in complementary relationships. Therefore, it is difficult to ensure that the final alternative is reasonably selected from an efficiency perspective because conflicts of interest are inherent

in the stage of seeking alternatives to achieve policy goals (Rho, 2012). Shin (2000) argued that it is determined in the relative relationship between rationality and politics because it is in a dual structure of technical rationality and political interests in the process of establishing and implementing all policies, including teacher policies (Shin, 2016).

In historical institutionalism where history and context are the core concepts, understanding the context is essential when attempting to understand social phenomena or policies, and posits that history forms the context (Ha, 2011). Historical institutionalism, on one hand, focuses on the form and appearance of institutions and analyzes the effects of institutional changes on social outcomes and policies. On the other hand, from a historical viewpoint, institutions are analyzed as historical products, and their current effects are analyzed over a long period, allowing the simultaneous analysis of both macro-context (e.g., policy change) and historical processes.

Most institutionalists expect that institutional changes are basically difficult due to factors such as conflict of interests resulting from changes in rules, the tendency to form expectations around institutions, the possible up-front costs, and preference for the current institutional structure (Steinmo, 2008). Taking all these stability factors into consideration, 'punctuated equilibrium' has been the dominant explanation for change (Steinmo et al., 1992). According to their ideas, institutions tend to be basically stable (at equilibrium) until they meet an external or exogenous shock. This explanation has been criticized for seeing institutional change as purely a product of fate by eliminating human subjectivity through external shock theory. Another explanation for institutional change is bringing ideas which mean 'creative solutions to collective action problems' (Steinmo, 2008, p. 131). Integrating ideas into the historical institutionalist approach addresses its weakness of the explanation of the actors being 'hostages of the institutions that they inhabit' by placing institutions both a constraining and/or facilitating role and the object of political contestation (Steinmo, 2008, p. 133).

There is no standardized or universal definition of institutions in historical institutionalism (Immergut, 1998), but institutions are generally viewed as a framework for rules or interactions (Kim, 2020; Steinmo, 2008). Kim (2020) defined an institution as a structural framework constructed by the interaction of perceptions and actions of the state and society in solving policy problems while studying the medical insurance benefits system using a historical institutionalist approach. In this study, the institution was defined as a 'structural framework formed by combining the perceptions and actions of the government and the people.' The institution affects the components of the NEST program, such as qualification, role/status, size/method of placement, and operation of the professional agency. Based on this definition, the current study constructed a research analysis framework in which structural factors directly or through institutional factors affect the state of the NEST program.

## Results

The results as shown in the following figure were derived as a result of analyzing the factors affecting the NEST program using the historical institutional approach. The factors influencing the state of the NEST program were structural and institutional ones. The structural factors consisted of the policy environment, such as the administration's direction and education policy at the time, and the English education policy which directly triggered the change in the NEST program. Institutional factors included English education policy direction, teacher qualification system, the relationship between stakeholders, and professional operating institutions. It was found that the attributes of the NEST program consisted of NESTs' qualifications, status and role, deployment size and method, and professional operating agency. The following presents the research results for each factor.

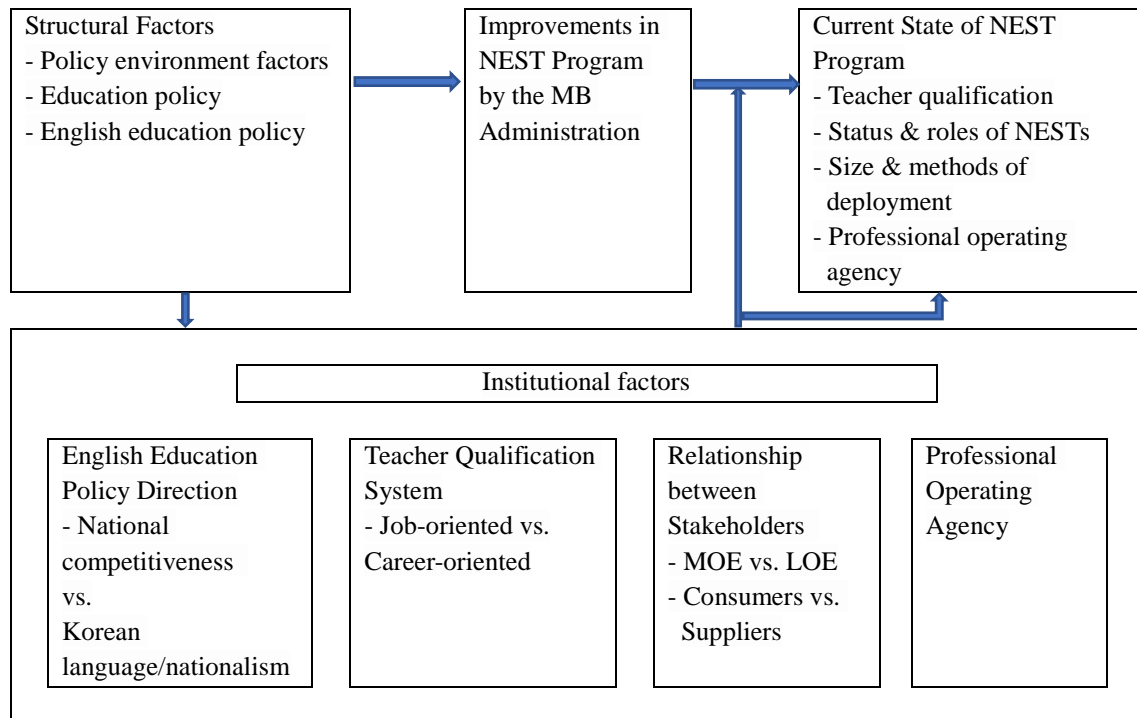


Figure 1. Analytical framework.

## Structural Factors

### Policy environment factors

The Lee Myung Bak Administration established five national indicators: a government that sets and serves an “advanced leading country” as a national vision, a vibrant market economy, active welfare, talent power, and a mature global nation (The 17<sup>th</sup> Presidential Acquisition Committee, 2008). The conservative Lee Myung Bak Administration resulted from a growthist policy aimed at overcoming the proclaimed “national fatigue” accumulated during the 10-year progressive government’s reign, the deepening gap between the rich and the poor after the IMF economic crisis, and structural instability (Cho, 2008). Reflecting on these points, the Lee Myung Bak Administration was also evaluated as a practical administration.

The Lee Myung Bak Administration’s education policy has set three strategic goals under the “talent-oriented” indicators: strengthening consumer-centered educational competitiveness, fostering core talents, building science in Korea, and making lifelong learning a part of life. The Lee Myung Bak Administration’s differentiated education policy is “strengthening educational competitiveness” for “building a leading advanced country” (The 17th Presidential Acquisition Committee, 2008). In this respect, the Lee Myung Bak Administration’s education policy is characterized by neo-conservativist educational reform (Ahn, 2008; Ahn & Ha, 2015). Based on the autonomy, competition, and diversity of education, the Lee Myung Bak Administration promoted strengthening English public education, English immersion education, 300 high school diversification projects, the autonomy of college entrance exams, and establishing international middle schools (Choi, 2010). Although the curriculum was reorganized in connection with the autonomy of unit schools, it is also criticized for further strengthening English and math education in line with the 2014 CSAT system reform plan centered on English and mathematics (Choi, 2010).

This period was also when the confrontation between the left (i.e., progressive) and right (i.e., conservative) parties over Korea’s education policy continued. In addition to the presidential election, left and right, conservative and progressive debates took place in the election of the superintendent of education. The right-wing education camp insisted on the theory of liberal education reform, and the left-

wing education camp insisted on the theory of egalitarian education reform centered on teachers. The Lee Myung Bak Administration, a conservative administration, expanded educational welfare along with neoliberal policies. The government promoted expanding support for early childhood education, such as free education for 5-year-olds, easing the educational gap between regions, and easing the burden of university tuition by improving the customized national scholarship system. Although the Lee Myung Bak Administration's educational welfare is recognized as insufficient, it is noteworthy that it has pushed to improve educational equity by breaking away from poor learning through financial support and expansion of educational programs (Ahn, 2008, p.137-138).

### **Education policy and English education policy factors**

In the early days of the Lee Myung Bak Administration's inauguration, English education policy was at the center of controversy. In the 2008 English Public Education Completion Plan, the Presidential Acquisition Committee proposed exceptional English education policies such as hiring 23,000 new English teachers introducing an English-only assistant teacher system using English-speaking college students, housewives, and overseas Koreans. This proposal sparked various debates. Concerns included the increase of the private education market through strengthening English education and the introduction of the National English Ability Test (NEAT), deepening educational opportunity inequality, and negative impacts on students' language identity. After collecting various opinions, the 'Measures to Improve the Quality of English Education and Resolve the Gap' was announced in December 2008. The goal of the English education policy was to improve English communication skills and narrow the English education gap (Ministry of Education, 2008a).

A detailed plan was prepared to achieve these objectives of the English education policy. First, English teachers' competency strengthening policy, including the expansion of NEST and the increase of teacher development programs, was implemented to substantiate the school's English school. Second, the improvement of English classes, including the increase of English teaching hours in elementary schools and the expansion of classes by level in middle and high schools, were promoted. Third, the government-invited English volunteer scholarship program (TaLK) and remote video lectures for native speakers were also implemented to bridge the educational gap (Lee, 2010). In addition, the English test was planned to be changed to NEAT in which listening, speaking, reading, and writing tests were included. It aimed to change school English education, and the curriculum was revised to prepare a basic framework. It was planned to replace the CSAT if public confidence was recognized by developing the test. However, its introduction was development halted due to concern about increasing private education (Chae, 2015).

The English education policy of the Lee Myung Bak Administration was influenced by the previous administration's English education policy. The Roh Moo Hyeon Administration's English education policy influenced the Lee Myung Bak Administration to strengthen English public education. English education was conducted for all 3rd-6th grade elementary students during this period. The proportion of teachers who could teach in English was increased, and the revitalization of English classes conducted in English was promoted. In addition, the English experience program was expanded, and special after-school skills and aptitude education were activated. In particular, they recognized that English communication ability is an essential competency in the 21st-century globalization and information age. The Comprehensive Plan for the Promotion of English Education (2006-2010) was announced to improve students' English communication ability. A NEST was planned to be assigned to all middle schools by 2010 and was also recommended to be assigned to elementary and high schools (Ministry of Education, 2006). During this time, the number of NESTs increased rapidly, their training was strengthened, and the operating entity was transferred to metropolitan/provincial offices of education.

Among them, the NEST program started from the English education policy of the Kim Young Sam Administration. The educational reform plan was prepared by the Kim Young Sam Administration to innovatively change the framework of education in terms of meaning and content (Ahn & Ha, 2015). The educational reform plan was evaluated as a comprehensive reform plan that attempted structural reform of

the education system at the national strategic level in response to the transition of civilized history. Furthermore, it is seen as a practical plan implemented by many with solid leadership, a promotion system, and financial support.

The globalization policy of the Kim Young Sam Administration also influenced the promotion of English education policy. NEST program in Korea, called EPIK (English Program in Korea), was selected in the Comprehensive Plan for Promotion of International Education in 1994. Globalization of education policy was included in the 5.31 Education Reform Plan. To this end, the plan to teach English from the third grade of elementary school from 1997 and expand the number of itinerant teachers so that the choice of a second foreign language is practically possible in high school was introduced. After a fierce debate over the implementation of elementary English education, in October 1996, it was decided to start English education from the third grade of elementary school.

The implementation of elementary English education was later reflected in the curriculum in communication-oriented English education. It was an opportunity to establish English education as the center of communication in Korean English education. After the syllabus period, the first to the third curriculum shifted from grammar-centered to learning each language function. In the fourth curriculum, conversation and listening emphasized everyday English-speaking ability, and grammar was used. Emphasis was placed on the development of language skills. In the fifth and sixth curricula, the teaching method that can develop fluency rather than the accuracy of language was emphasized, and the student-centered teaching and learning method was emphasized (Kwon & Kim, 2010). Since then, communication-oriented English education has taken place in the English curriculum.

## **NEST Program Change**

### **NEST program improvement plan**

The Lee Myung Bak Administration also strengthened English education using NEST. ‘Measures to improve the management of native English assistant teachers’ (Ministry of Education, 2008b) was prepared. It was attempted to expand the scope of NEST recruitment countries. The target countries for the recruitment of the NEST program were limited to seven countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa. This resulted in difficulty securing excellent talent and the cost increasing due to excessive competition for recruitment. To solve this problem, the target countries were expanded to the official English language countries. However, it was limited to countries that had concluded trade negotiations, including concessions on NESTs among the official language countries for quality control.

In addition, since the role of native speaker assistant teachers is limited to the role of assisting incumbent English teachers, a plan to convert excellent native speakers into high-grade instructors was promoted to improve classroom diversity using excellent talent. In other words, if specific qualifications set by the Superintendent of Education like EPIK High Level 1 or higher were met, independent teaching was possible just like Korean instructors. Although a high proportion of parents (62.1%) was in favor of this plan, teachers (52.8%) and education experts (49.7%) held relatively unfavorable views. This resulted in the decision not to adopt it, rather carefully considering it as a mid-to-long-term project. Instead, an action plan to improve the quality of the EPIK program, its Korean version, was established. First, the NEST operating agency was expanded to establish a regular selection system, appeal and follow-up management systems were reorganized, and a stable recruitment system through overseas networks was established. In addition, considering that it is not easy to adapt to the field and learn effective teaching methods with the 1–2-week training, the training period was extended while diversifying the program and improving the quality through consignment operations. The NEST program improvement measures promoted during this period did not include NESTs deployment size and method, unlike the Roh Moo Hyeon Administration’s English education policy. Local offices of education operated it according to the plan proposed by the Ministry of Education.

## Comparison of Changes Before and After Policy Improvement

### Teacher qualification

The qualifications of NESTs selected and placed through EPIK are determined through consultation with provincial education offices (NIIED, 2019). The basic qualifications for NESTs are citizens of seven countries where English is their native language, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, and South Africa, or Koreans who have obtained permanent residency in these countries. In addition to those who possessed an equivalent or higher academic background, those who were Indian nationals who concluded a trade agreement with Korea and possessed English teacher qualifications were also included. Each local office of education is determined based on these conditions.

The discussion that it is necessary to expand the qualifications for NESTs from seven countries where English is the native language to countries where English is the official language started to expand the selection of NESTs to strengthen English public education (Min, 2008). As a result of the survey, it was found that students and parents had a positive attitude, while teachers and education experts had a relatively less positive response (Min, 2008). Among the official language countries, Korea and, as a result, India, which requested permission as a NEST supplier during the CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) signing process, was selected as the target country, and those with English teacher qualifications as Indian nationals were granted qualifications. In 2010, for the first time after the qualification was granted, three Indian teachers were assigned to the Jeonbuk Office of Education, a rural area, and one to the Gyeongbuk Office of Education. Only one was assigned to a school, and two were assigned to an English experience center and an education research institute. The two were not assigned to the school because of concerns about pronunciation. It has not been expanded since.

### Status and the roles of NESTs

NESTs, assigned to local offices of education, are responsible for supporting English education at schools or English education support offices. According to the 2014 NEST Manual of the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, NEST placement schools establish a plan for the role of NESTs. They include allotment of regular classes and after-school classes, assignment of partner teachers, participation in school English teacher training, and English-only classrooms. English education support offices establish workshops with NESTs and partner teachers, participation in elementary and middle school student English experience camps, and their role during vacations.

The role of NESTs, which was introduced as an assistant teacher in English teacher training and classroom instruction, has been maintained without much change over 26 years. Efforts to change the status of NESTs went in two directions. It was a plan to assign a role as a sole instructor proposed in 2008 and a plan to completely replace a Korean English teacher with a special preparation suggested in a study by Kim (2010). Both approaches failed. The Ministry of Education (2008b) suggested as a mid-to-long-term task of using NESTs as instructors if they meet specific qualifications determined by the superintendent. It was predicted that NESTs' quality and role would be enhanced by introducing an instructor system that allows independent teaching like Korean instructors among (Ministry of Education, 2008b). For this plan, parents held positive views (62.1%), while teachers (52.8%) and education experts (49.7%) reported relatively lower positive attitudes (Min, 2008). This proposal is not being implemented.

### Size and methods of NESTs placement

In 1995, 59 NESTs from two to nine were assigned to each province. It was introduced as a pilot program to change the English class from grammar-centered to conversation-centered to improve English communication skills as globalization became the mainstay of government policy. NESTs gradually increased to 274 in 1998 and to 176 in 1999 when the won-dollar exchange rate rose due to the



International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis. Then, NESTs increased to 541 in 2003, 866 in 2004, and 1017 in 2005. As the Lee Myung Bak Administration took office and promoted the policy to strengthen English public education, NESTs increased from 2,937 in 2007 to 4,332 in 2008, 7,997 in 2009, and 8,546 in 2010. Analyzing the number of deployments by period, the annual average was 331 in the introduction period (1995-2003), 5,336 people in the development period (2003-2013), and 5,530 people in the adjustment period (2013-2017). During the Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008-2013), when the English public education reinforcement policy was actively pursued during the development period, an average of 7,772 people were deployed.

The problem raised in the initial stage of hiring NESTs that could not be placed in all schools and trying to place them in as many schools as possible was the issue of equity. Kim, Ji, Kim and Jeong (2012) analyzed the fairness of the distribution of NESTs between regions and between schools. They confirmed that they were placed unfairly according to the autonomy of the financial capacity of local governments. In order to solve this problem, it was proposed to support poor areas at the central government level selectively. However, it was not easy to accept as the NEST program was transferred to the provinces after 2009, and it was the responsibility of the local education superintendents. An alternative to this problem was to adjust the size and method of placement for each district of education. The size of NESTs was maintained, expanded, and reduced according to the policy priorities of the education office. The placement priority was also changed from the one-person allocation method to a method of intensive support by giving priority to each school. In addition, English conversational instructors were also considered and placed as English assistants, so it was converted into a low-cost and high-efficiency workforce policy. In addition, it is evaluated that the demand-tailored placement method is being implemented by concurrently using the preferential placement method for vulnerable areas.

### **Professional operating agency**

The Ministry of Education established the “Five-Year Comprehensive Measures for Revitalizing English Education (2006-2010)” (Ministry of Education, 2005), which included a plan to deploy NESTs to all middle schools by 2010 and to expand it to elementary and high schools. As proposed in this plan, the program operating agency was transferred from Korea National University of Education to the National Institute of International Education from July 2007.

Subsequently, the Lee Myung Bak Administration expanded the professional operating agency to meet the new NEST policy. First of all, in July 2008, the organization of the International Education Promotion Agency, which was a central institution for overseas Korean education, was reorganized into the National Education Center to support English public education, and the EPIK support team was reinforced. In addition, the EPIK team of the NIIE strengthened its role as a professional operating agency for the NEST program (NIIED, 2019) Training on NEST is conducted to understand the Korean English curriculum and improve teaching skills, adapt to Korean life, and recognize NEST roles. The EPIK team provides systematic training with higher quality training than other NEST recruitment routes such as individual local offices of education, local governments, schools, and private recruitment companies. The problem of NEST quality raised by the rapid increase in recruitment size is being solved. By strengthening the role of specialized organizations and systematizing selection and training (NIIED, 2019).

### **Institutional Factors**

#### **English education policy direction: National competitiveness improvement vs. Korean education and nationalism**

The policy that directly influenced the introduction of the NEST program was early English education. With the introduction of early English education, pros and cons took place fiercely. In this process, early English education in elementary schools was introduced. It reflected the argument that English education

should be strengthened to enhance national competitiveness instead of emphasizing Korean language education and disagreement from a nationalist point of view. The NEST program was introduced to foster elementary school English teachers and English education through assistant teachers (Ahn & Ha, 2015).

President Kim Young Sam showed a strong will to realize national policy ideologies such as democratization, globalization, informatization, and knowledge society as education policy. This was reflected in a robust English education policy (Ahn & Ha, 2015). In particular, the NEST program was selected as one of the methods to introduce regular English education subjects for third graders or higher in elementary school. Politicians, education experts, parents, and media with strong nationalist tendencies and Korean language academia argued that early English education would hinder the use of Korean language and negatively affect the understanding of Korean culture and raised concern about lack of preparation and the increase of private education. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education and the Education Reform Committee, the local offices of education and the front-line education community, supporters centered on parents, and pro-globalization citizens insisted on the inevitability of early education in English, world's official language.

The NEST program was introduced after intense debates about English education in elementary schools. After undergoing the experience that the ideology of national competitiveness was emphasized over the ideology of nationalism in the debate on English education policy, the problem of nationalism ideology appeared periodically in the process of promoting English education policy. However, it is evaluated that it did not develop into a major debate. Subsequent discussions on English education policy focused on the choice of means to achieve the practical goal of being communication-oriented. This trend was reflected in the curriculum. The 7th curriculum, a communication-oriented curriculum, was reflected in the implementation beyond the 5th and 6th curriculum, which emphasized education for fluency rather than language accuracy and student-centered teaching methods. This trend continued in the 2009 curriculum.

The Roh Moo Hyun Administration's education policy (Ahn & Ha, 2015), which is evaluated as adding equity and publicity to education reform, expanded English education in elementary schools to all grades and promoted communication-oriented English classes. During this period, measures to reduce private education through substantial school education were promoted, and English experience programs were expanded to absorb extracurricular demand into schools in the short term. The basis of English education policy was included in the "Five-Year Comprehensive Measures for Revitalizing English Education" (2006-2010), which recognized English communication skills as an essential competency in the 21st century and improved students' English communication skills. The ideology of English education to strengthen national competitiveness was reflected.

The Lee Myung Bak Administration also inherited this English education stance, which is evaluated as full of neo-conservatism educational reform (Ahn & Ha, 2015). It promoted English education policy to improve English communication skills and close the English education gap (Ministry of Education, 2008a). The Park Geun Hye Administration suspended the development of NEAT, which was promoted to improve communication skills through school education. It converted the CSAT English test into an absolute evaluation (Kim & Kim, 2018), reducing interest in communication-oriented school English education (Lee, 2016). However, practical English education continued to be promoted.

In summary, the policy stance focusing on English education to strengthen national competitiveness also influenced the NEST program. Even during the rapid increase in NEST deployment to strengthen English communication skills, the issue of NEST's educational capabilities, qualifications, and equity in deployment was significant. However, the imperialist debate was not subject to social debate beyond the issue of progressive civic groups, teacher organizations, or scholars

## **Teacher qualification system**

In principle, the appointment of elementary and secondary teachers in Korea is adopted from among those with teacher certificates, and the job-oriented teacher system is operated in that they maintain their career as teachers after entering the company. Under this system, students are admitted at a young age through teacher

certificates and selection tests, and after entering the company, they are assigned to schools to work according to internal regulations. France, Japan, Korea, and Spain operate a career-oriented teacher system. Lack of incentives for professional development due to retirement age guarantees is pointed out as a problem of this system, and to improve this, reinforcement of links between teachers' initial education, selection, and professional development and external recruitment opportunities are proposed (KEDI, 2004). On the other hand, the job-oriented system provides applicants of a wide range of ages from various occupations. The system is adopted by Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK, where personnel selection and management are decentralized into schools or regional offices of education.

The NEST program serves to supplement the classes of Korean English teachers by selecting native speakers who do not have teacher certificates as a way to supplement their English proficiency, which is a competency necessary for English education. The efforts for change related to the status of NESTs proceeded in two ways. It was a plan to grant the role of an individual instructor proposed in 2008 and to completely replace it with a Korean English teacher after specific preparations proposed in the study of Kim (2008). Neither plan was implemented.

First, the purpose of the plan to assign a role as an individual instructor was proposed to utilize high-cost NESTs efficiently. However, as shown in the study (Min, 2008), the negative perception of English teachers and education experts seemed to have acted as an obstacle to the introduction of the system. This perception appears to have been influenced by the Korean teacher qualification system, which qualifies through strict procedures. Similarly, the English conversation instructor system was introduced for English education. The English-only teacher system, in which those with no teacher certificates could be English teachers if they were verified, faced strong opposition. They teach individually, but their status is not teachers but instructors. The possibility of introducing an individual instructor system for NESTs appeared to be low in a situation in which interest in English public education has decreased.

What was proposed as another way was to replace NESTs with Korean English teachers with English proficiency. To this end, efforts were made to strengthen the capabilities of Korean English teachers by introducing the TEE system. The Busan Office of Education also attempted to replace the role of NESTs through a separate training course for Korean English teachers. Despite the alternative efforts by Korean English teachers to strengthen their capabilities, there is still a demand for NESTs, which has not been achieved to replace them. One of the reasons is that the NESTs program has been stably established and the problems surrounding the operation have not been highlighted, and an operation plan suitable for regional characteristics has been prepared through changes in the deployment method.

## **Relationship between stakeholders**

***The role of the Ministry of Education and the local offices of education.*** In the policy process, policies are decided through mutual coordination with several political stakeholders, and not only formal but also informal stakeholders influence policy decisions and policy execution through participation (Ahn, 1997; Nam, 2008). Park & Ha (2013) defined stakeholders who influenced the NEST policy as educational organizations such as the Ministry of Education, the local offices of education, and the KTU and the Teachers' Association.

Since 1995, the Ministry of Education has actively promoted the NEST program and announced the NEST expansion policy whenever the new government was launched. In particular, the Lee Myung Bak Administration actively promoted the policy by expanding the NEST and management system as one of the measures to strengthen English public education. Sixteen metropolitan and provincial offices of education also supported the English education policy of the Ministry of Education and actively participated in the expansion and utilization of NEST. However, in response to various complaints about the NEST program, various policy alternatives have been prepared for each provincial office of education, including expanding English conversation instructors (Seoul), gradual reduction (Incheon), maintaining NEST and deploying NEST alternative elementary school teachers (Busan), and video classes (Gwangju).

While supporting the NEST program of the Ministry of Education, the local offices of education

prepared alternatives for each education office in response to various issues raised such as NEST quality issues, equity issues, and English education effects (Park, 2011). This results from the expansion of autonomy in policy decisions by local offices of education under the local education autonomy system and the transfer of budget management to them since 2010. As a result, differences between regions in education policy began to occur. Difference between the NESTs deployment scale and deployment method among the offices of education occurred in NEST program since then.

**Stakeholders' position: Consumers and suppliers.** It was found that the parent group was optimistic about the NEST program, while the educational expert group, including teachers, evaluated it low (Hwang et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2011). As a result of a study by Kim (2010), by group, the parent group was the most positive about the system's effectiveness, while the evaluation of English education experts was the lowest. By school level, elementary schools were the highest in the parent group, followed by middle and high schools. Meanwhile, it was surveyed that the English teacher group evaluated positively in middle school, high school, and elementary school. Lee et al. (2011) and Hwang et al. (2016) also found that English teachers did not evaluate the placement and utilization of English assistants promoted by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. They also showed below-average satisfaction with the settlement of the policy in the field but responded positively to the need to maintain it.

The Korean Federation of Teachers' Associations positively evaluated the policy direction for the public education of English but requested a review of the NEST system in that it requires good discussion on recruitment management. The Gyeonggi Branch of the Korean Teachers' Union criticized the Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education's expansion of English education and raised the question of qualifications for expanding NEST recruitment due to the increase in demand from schools and private institutes. It was found that civic groups such as parents' groups expressed a passive stance reflecting progressive and conservative tendencies (Park, 2011).

### **Professional operating agency**

It is evaluated that the professional operating agency played an essential role in developing the NEST program. The NEST program was established as one of the main ways to innovate English education according to the innovation plan for English public education. The decision to transfer the operating agency to the NIIE was a critical juncture of the NEST program. After the transfer, the Lee Myung Bak Administration promoted the English public education reinforcement policy, expanded the organization, and strengthened its role, which served as an opportunity to transform the EPIK team of the NIIE from a recruitment agency to a professional agency. Although the EPIK team did not integrate the entire recruitment process, the policy coordination function was strengthened through an MOU with the provincial and provincial education offices, and the policy direction of the Ministry of Education was shared through this process. As a result, homogenization of the NEST program operated in local offices of education was possible, and the quality management problem raised about the operation of the NEST program could be resolved. As the adjustment period entered, the size of NEST recruitment decreased, but it is expected to play an important role in maintaining the NEST business by continuing to play the role of these specialized institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the current state of the NEST program in Korea, which has been operational for 26 years, and predict future direction through analyzing how it has historically changed while interacting with the environment. The historical institutionalist approach was applied to determine how the NEST program as been developed in the historical context and environmental

influences and how it will develop in the future. The analysis period was focused on before and after the Lee Myung Bak Administration. It implemented the policy to strengthen English public education, which was an opportunity for the NEST program to undergo significant changes.

The NEST program, introduced in 1995, served as an opportunity to undergo significant changes in the wake of the policy to strengthen English public education. The expansion of the NEST program was promoted without much controversy. According to the program reinforcement plan, there were changes in NESTs' nationalities to include India among official language countries, which failed expansion. In addition, the plan to use NESTs that meet the strengthened qualification standards as an independent instructor was considered to be introduced, failing in adopting it as a policy. With the implementation of the reinforcement plan, the NESTs deployment size has expanded significantly, increasing from 2,937 in 2007 to 4,332 in 2008, and maintaining a stable level of 4,813 in 2019 after peaking at 9,320 in 2011. There was a change in the deployment method. In a situation where it was difficult to deploy NESTs in all schools, there was a difference between offices of education on how to deploy them. The Roh Moo Hyun Administration proposed to prioritize middle schools. However, the Lee Myung Bak Administration entrusted the decision of deployment method to the local offices of education. As a result, Differences in size and method of deployment occurred in regions. There were differences in the priority placement of middle schools and the priority placement of elementary schools. The change in the role of the operating agency was made. NIIE, designated as a specialized English education institution, expanded, and strengthened its role in the Lee Myung Bak Administration. The EPIK team of the NIIE established itself as a professional operating agency. In the process of promoting the NEST program, it played a role in implementing the policies of the Ministry of Education through the policy coordination function with the provincial and provincial offices of education.

The study found that the factors that influenced the change in the NEST program were structural and institutional factors. First, the structural factors included the policy environment, such as the administration's direction, education policy, and English education policy. When the NEST program went through a significant change, the Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008-2013), which advocated an advanced first-class country, set the direction of the administration to strengthen national competitiveness through growthism and pragmatism. This direction of the administration was also reflected in education policy. The educational policy was promoted as a goal to realize a talent power. The educational welfare policy was also implemented to meet the social needs. This policy environment was also reflected in the English education policy, aiming to improve English communication skills and narrow the gap in English education. Second, institutional factors were found to have contributed to maintaining the existing method of NEST programs. They included the perception of English education policy direction, the teacher qualification system, the relationship between stakeholders, and the operation of professional operating agency. First of all, the policy stance of communication-oriented English education to strengthen national competitiveness established in the debate over the introduction of English education in elementary schools also affected strengthening the NEST program. The failure of NESTs to grant the independent instructor status, which was proposed for the efficient operation of NESTs, resulted from the influence of the solid framework of the career-oriented teacher qualification system. In addition, in the relationship between parents and teachers, the demand of parents who expect English education to improve through the NEST program was prioritized over the critical position of teachers. This served as an important factor in maintaining the NEST program for 26 years. In the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the local offices of education, the local education autonomy system has acted as a factor that has caused differences between local offices of education by strengthening the influence of NESTs deployment size and deployment method. Professional operating agency that manages program according to the Ministry of Education's policy direction are evaluated to play an important role in maintaining the direction of the Ministry of Education's NEST program and coordinating the positions between local offices of education.

How is the NEST program expected to change? The analysis of the NEST program from the historical institutionalist approach indicates that structural and institutional factors influenced the change and

maintenance of the system. When applying the historical institutionalist approach, the NEST programs are expected to develop in two directions: maintenance and change. First, it is possible to think about the possibility that the program will follow the current system with few changes due to institutional factors affecting the direction of maintaining the basic structure of the NEST program. In this case, there are differences in budget size, placement size, and placement method depending on the political orientation of the superintendent of education, but this is a scenario in which the NEST program as an assistant teacher is maintained. Although the English education environment is changing, such as absolute evaluation of CSAT English, lower interest in English education, and improvement of English teacher competency, the system is likely to be maintained in the same way for the time being. However, in this case, the NEST operation method is expected to continue to improve the quality of English education, such as strengthening cooperative classes with Korean teachers and strengthening the role of NEST in educational activities other than regular classes.

Second, the scenario, in which NEST programs are rapidly changing, such as the abolition of NEST programs or transition to single teachers, can also be considered. According to historical institutionalist approach, once formed, the institution lasts for a considerable period depending on path dependence, but changes are experienced when a sudden external shock is applied (Ha, 2011). COVID-19 shows that infectious diseases are demanding changes in school English education. English education using various technologies is being conducted in the process of conducting remote classes in response to these demands (Lee & Yin, 2021). Rapid environmental changes combined with infectious disease situations and technological advances will likely affect NEST programs among English education policies. First, the recruitment and selection process will be difficult due to the epidemic situation. Using advanced technology as an alternative means to overcome this will lead to the preparation of technical alternatives to replace NESTs and improvement of teaching and learning methods. Even before the COVID-19 epidemic, discussions on English education using AI were held in connection with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, there was a limit to its application to the actual classroom environment. In the future, preparations also need to be taken into account that historical turning points may come. They are structural factors, not changes in English education policies, such as technological development that enables English education using artificial intelligence, budget reduction, and difficulties in recruitment due to infectious diseases.

The introduction and operation of the NEST program differs from country to country. As found in this study, various factors influenced the NEST program in Korea, and it was confirmed that the historical institutionalist approach was a useful method to identify the relevant factors. It is expected that similarities and differences can be discovered by identifying and comparing differences in NEST program operation between countries. This study is expected to be useful not only in examining the past, but also in predicting the future direction of English education. In this regard, a comparative study of NEST programs in Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan is required in the future by applying historical institutionalism.

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