

A Comparison of Foreign Language Education Policies in Japanese and South Korean Universities and Its Implications

Keyu Que

Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi Xi'an 710062

Abstract: As China's close neighbors, Japan and South Korea share many similarities with China. This paper first reviews the developments of foreign language education policies in Japan and South Korea. Secondly, it explores the similarities of foreign language education policies in universities in Japan and South Korea and finally summarizes the advantages of foreign language education policies in Japan and South Korea and its enlightenment to foreign language education policies and planning in China.

Keywords: Higher Education; Global Perspective; Language Policy

1. Introduction

With the proposal and implementation of the "Belt and Road", China has higher requirements for the foreign language ability of talents in the new era. Foreign language education policy refers to the scientific decision-making and planning that is closely related to the development of foreign language education. It is an inseparable part of the language policy of a country and the main way to constitute the national foreign language capability (Lu, Lei, Yun, et al., 2012). Similar to China in foreign language education, both Japan and South Korea have incorporated English as a compulsory first foreign language into their national education system. Two countries have formulated different language education policies in different stages, which have played a certain role in promoting foreign language education.

The goal of college foreign language teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive application ability of foreign language (Wang, 2018). The geographical location and education system of Japan and Korea is close to that of China. Chinese scholars have been studying foreign language education in universities of the two countries for a long time. Some studies focused on the motivation of foreign language education policy reform in Japan (Qian, 2014), some explored the foreign language education policies of South Korean universities in combination with the "Belt and Road" strategy (Cui & Wang, 2018), some studied the implications of Japanese foreign language education policies for China (Mou, 2016; Ai & Zheng, 2018). However, there are few in-depth studies on the comparison of foreign language education policies of Japan and South Korea. This paper firstly reviews the foreign language education policies of Japan and South Korea from the historical perspective, and then discusses the similarities in the foreign language education of the two countries. On this basis, it summarizes the advantages of the foreign language education of the two countries and its enlightenment to the foreign language education policies of Chinese universities.

2. A review of foreign language education policies in Japanese and South Korea

2.1 The development of foreign language education policy in Japanese Universities

Japan has a long history of foreign language education, starting from the Kofun period (300-600 AD), Japan began to learn Chinese Confucian culture, culminating in the Nara period (710-784). During the Edo Period (1603-1868), in order to learn from Western science and technology, *Lanshu* emerged. In 1809, the Tokugawa shogunate required Japanese to learn English from the Dutch. The Meiji Era (1868-1911) started the new chapter of foreign language education in Japanese universities. In 1872, *The School System* decreed that the University of Tokyo should be used as a gateway to learn from Europe and the US to cultivate high-level talents. In 1873, the Japanese government ordered English to be the language of instruction at the University of Tokyo in order to let students acquire Western knowledge. Since then, foreign languages, especially English, have begun to take root in Japanese universities.

During World War II, under the influence of militarism, the Japanese were extremely resistant to English, and English learning came to a standstill. After World War II, the foreign language education system was rebuilt under the dual influence of social demand and new curriculum reform. In order to increase the number of Japanese students and attract foreign students, many universities in Japan have opened all-English courses. In order to train practical English talents as soon as possible and adjust English courses in public universities

in a timely manner, the STEP test hosted by the Society for Testing English Proficiency has been implemented nationwide. In the 1980s, the Japanese government began to promote ALT and JET program to attract excellent foreign teachers.

In the 21st century, the Japanese government believes that in the process of globalization, universities should pay attention to the cultivation of foreign language communication skills, especially English. While improving students' listening and speaking ability, universities must make efforts to improve students' ability to discuss and publish in foreign languages (Zhang, 2019). In order to improve the English application ability of college students and objectively evaluate the English learning level of Japanese college students, the Japanese government encourages college students to take the TOEIC test.

2.2 The Development of Foreign Language Education Policy in Korean Universities

In the 1st century AD, Chinese was introduced to the Korea, and deeply influenced by Chinese Confucian culture, Korea considered Chinese as its official language for much of its history.

In 1883, German Mollendorff opened the "Tongwen Hall" to teach English. In 1886, the Korean government opened the Yu Young Public School and hired Americans to teach English. In 1910, Korea became a colony of Japan, and Japanese became the official language of Korea. In the 1950s, South Korea carried out the first educational curriculum reform, requiring that foreign languages be learned from junior high school, high school students can choose one or two foreign languages, and college students must learn English. Following the two educational curriculum reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, the English curriculum in Korean universities began to become more vivid, and students' autonomy was emphasized. At the same time, Korean universities began to offer other languages in addition to English, such as German, Chinese, and Italian, as public foreign language courses for college students. Since 1980, the EPIK program has brought in more than 200 English teachers from the United States to teach at Korean high schools and universities (Shen, 2012).

Facing the 21st century, the South Korean government has further promoted multilingual education in colleges and universities, requiring college students to master at least one foreign language other than English on the premise of proficiency in English. It is widely believed in Korean universities that through language learning, students can gain a deeper understanding of local civilization and enhance cultural identity, thus promoting the development of globalization (Cui, 2019).

3. The Similarities of Foreign Language Education Policies in Japanese and South Korean Universities

First of all, the two countries have linked foreign language education with national defense and security since modern times. In the early 19th century, for national defense reasons, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered that English should be learned from the Dutch. The Japanese government is well aware that in order to learn advanced Western technology, it must first learn the Western language. In modern Korea, under the influence of the "Civilization Movement", a top-down foreign language learning movement began. In order to cultivate outstanding talents proficient in foreign languages, South Korea has carried out several educational curriculum reforms to ensure the smooth and efficient operation of English teaching activities in colleges and universities.

Secondly, the two countries adhere to the concept of multilingual foreign language education in college foreign language education. In the Meiji era, Japanese higher education established the foreign language education curriculum model of "The first foreign language is English, and the second foreign language must be learned" (Ai & Zheng, 2018). In the late 20th century, Korea also decided on the policy of "dual foreign languages" in college foreign language education. In recent years, with the increasing international recognition of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, universities in Japan and South Korea have added many foreign languages, such as French, Thai and Turkish.

Finally, both countries attach great importance to the introduction of foreign language teachers in the process of foreign language education. Japan's ALT and JEPT projects have contributed significantly to Japan's economic development. Korea also actively attracts foreign teachers to teach foreign languages in universities through the EPIK program, and universities actively cooperate with foreign teachers to ensure the high standard of living and teaching.

4. Implications

First, attach importance to multilingual foreign language teaching in universities. Foreign language education in Chinese universities has generally been dominated by English, and only a small number of students majoring in English or other languages have the opportunity to learn Japanese, Korean and other languages as a second foreign language. Chinese universities should learn from the multi-language teaching concept of Japanese and Korean universities, adapt to the development of globalization, actively introduce foreign language teachers in minority languages, and expand public foreign languages in universities according to the national strategic needs.

Second, actively introduce excellent foreign teachers to universities. As a non-native English speaking country, foreign teachers play an important role in college students' English learning. China should learn from the measures taken by Japan and South Korea in the process of introducing foreign teachers, formulate more clear rules for the introduction of foreign teachers to regulate the employment of foreign teachers, and adopt different programs to actively attract excellent foreign teachers.

Third, improve college students' foreign language application ability. Foreign language teaching should combine input and output. Chinese universities can refer to the measures taken by Japanese and South Korean universities in improving students' foreign language application ability: reform the public foreign language teaching model and use activities to increase students' learning enthusiasm.

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Author introduction: Keyu Que (December, 1999), female, Han nationality, master's degree, Shaanxi Normal University, research direction: English education.