Teaching English—
A Major Opportunity for Entrepreneurship

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English Education, Survival, and Globalization

English proficiency and technology competence have become key factors in determining access to international power, and in Korea the dominance of English and technology has played a great role as an essential element or incentive in many aspects of daily life, for example, entrance to and graduation from the proper university or selection in the right job market. Those who can access these two elements can obtain and secure their position educationally and, ultimately, socially (M. Kim, 2004). English Language Teaching (ELT) and studying English are more than just teaching a subject or learning a foreign language; rather, they are a major educational factor for the survival of businesses in Korea. As a consequence, as government policies and strategies have constantly changed over the past 40 years to meet international standards of English education, and entrepreneurs in the English education industry have continued to grow.

The current president of Korea, Lee Myung-bak, shortly after his inauguration in January 2008, issued a decree asking all levels of schools in Korea, from elementary schools to universities, to teach more classes in English. More Koreans needed to be trained not only in reading or writing English but in comprehending the spoken word and speaking the language so that Korea’s economic and political development continues. Prior to assuming the presidency, Lee’s transition team announced that it would implement a nationwide English-immersion program in order to provide
students with the language tools necessary to be successful in a highly
globalized world. Under this program, all classes would have to be taught
in English by 2010. However, Lee abandoned the program after facing
strong opposition from parents, teachers, and education specialists.

President Lee’s new direction for English language education is par-
tially based on Korea’s export-centered economic strategy emphasizing
globalization, but it was also partially due to the past decades of ineffective
methods of ELT in Korean schools, which was referred to as the “grammar-
translation approach.” The practice has been criticized for creating a lack
of practical skills of hearing and speaking English that are needed in daily
conversation and even more today in global business practices. As a result,
this ineffective practice of ELT in schools has given rise to the growth of
private institutes, which sometimes even manipulate government politics
and policies in ELT, taking advantage of the age-old Korean “fever for
education.”

In this chapter, I hope to show first how the history of English language
education in Korea is closely connected to Korea’s social and political
history; then the growth of entrepreneurships in the English education
industry in Korea; and finally, how Y. B. Min, who is known as an educator,
social entrepreneur, and philanthropist, became known as a person who
gave birth to the private English education industry, and created a conglom-
erate and got wealthy through his tireless entrepreneurial practices. His story
shows that it takes a creative individual with fixed determination and an
indomitable will to develop and promote constructive ideas that society
needs to tackle in English education and to expand human capabilities.

From the beginning of the Korean economic modernization process, the
government strategy has been an export-centered economy based on Korea’s

Table 7.1  Total dollar amount the Korean Government allocates to education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Government budget</th>
<th>Ministry of education science &amp; technology development budget</th>
<th>Total public educational expenditures</th>
<th>Ratio to GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Billion Won</td>
<td>11,173</td>
<td>2,275</td>
<td>4,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>10 Billion</td>
<td>2 Billion</td>
<td>4 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Billion Won</td>
<td>22,689</td>
<td>5,062</td>
<td>8,524</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>20 Billion</td>
<td>4 Billion</td>
<td>7 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Billion Won</td>
<td>93,937</td>
<td>19,172</td>
<td>31,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>81 Billion</td>
<td>17 Billion</td>
<td>27 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Billion Won</td>
<td>174,985</td>
<td>35,897</td>
<td>55,541</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>52 Billion</td>
<td>31 Billion</td>
<td>48 Billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The current exchange rate as of March 2010.