

## **English Language Influence on THE - Reuters 2010 University Rankings; The Evidence: A South Korean Model in a Global Context**

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### **Abstract:**

There appears to be a direct as well as an indirect link between the scholastic presence of the English language at any particular university and its respective Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters 2010 World University Ranking, one of numerous world university rankings. Due to the author's familiarity and to some extent intimate relationship with THE – Reuters World University Rankings, its statistics are exclusively employed to emphasize the intended function of this paper. The claim is made using data sets from THE - Reuters rankings by way of a Korean model in a global tertiary educational context. Effectively, since it is the objective of a growing number of universities worldwide to improve their THE - Reuters World Rankings, it is thus the purpose of this paper to quantitatively depict the growing necessity of English language use in the context of delivering lectures at the tertiary level, so as to make a documented attempt with regard to persuading non-complying universities to offer additional English mediated lectures.

### **Introduction:**

The influence of the English language is unmistakably clear with regard to not only the rankings of South Korean universities but also with respect to the rankings of universities worldwide. The percentage of courses taught in English has an apparent influence on the rankings of the particular universities in Korea as well as those scattered worldwide. While numerous other factors are also in play, in determining individual university rankings, the most significant indicators in the Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters World University Ranking Methodology are directly and indirectly linked to the scholastic presence of the English language at the respective universities.

### **The Determining Factors:**

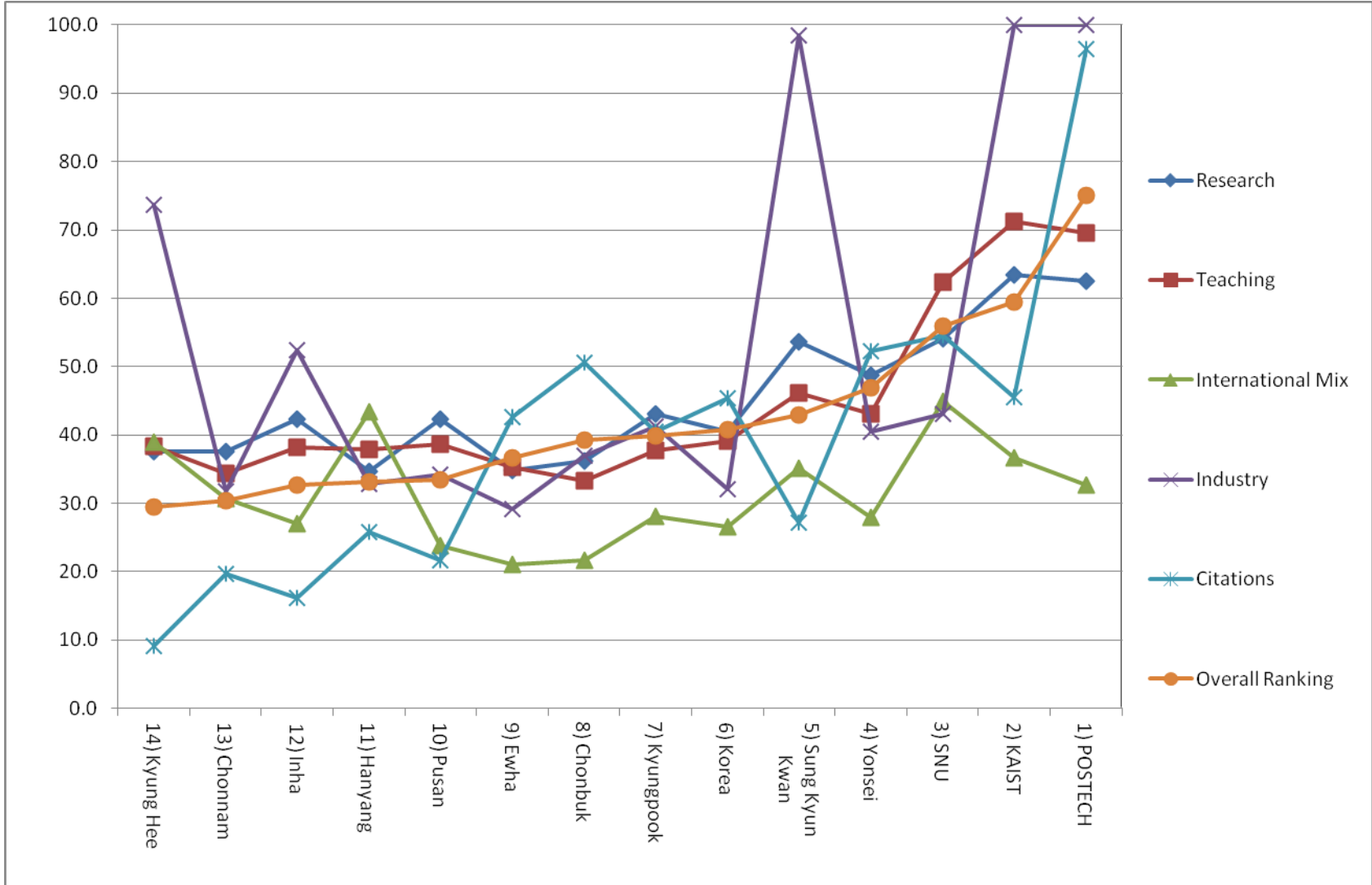
The top 10 universities are from the US and the UK according to the Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters 2010 World Rankings (THE; Reuters, 2010). Incidentally, the official language in both countries is English. As a matter of fact, of the top 20 universities according to THE 2010 world rankings, the only university from a non English speaking country is the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, where Albert Einstein acquired his diploma in 1901. Aside from the lone Swiss university only universities from the United States, England and Canada made the top 20 list. In the case of Canada it is an Anglophone university, meaning that all universities in the top 20 list are primarily from English speaking regions, moreover, making the link between the English language and the individual ranking of a university plainly evident.

**Table 1: 2010 Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters: World University Rankings (Top Korean Universities)**

University Name	Research – Volume, Income, Reputation	Teaching – The Learning Environment	International Mix – Staff & Students	Industry Income - Innovation	Citations – Research Influence	Overall Ranking Score	Korean Ranking	World Ranking
Pohang University of Science and Technology	62.5	69.5	32.6	100.0	96.5	75.1	1	28
Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology	63.4	71.3	36.7	100.0	45.5	59.5	2	79
Seoul National University	54.1	62.3	44.9	43.0	54.6	56.0	3	109
Yonsei University	48.7	43.0	28.0	40.4	52.2	46.9	4	190
Sung Kyun Kwan University	53.7	46.1	35.1	98.4	27.1	42.9	5	230
Korea University	40.5	39.1	26.5	32.1	45.4	40.8	6	258
Kyungpook National University	43.1	37.7	28.1	41.2	40.4	39.8	7	271
Chonbuk National University	36.2	33.3	21.6	36.9	50.5	39.2	8	273
Ewha Women’s University	34.8	35.3	21.1	29.2	42.6	36.7	9	296
Pusan National University	42.3	38.6	23.8	34.2	21.7	33.4	10	325
Hanyang University	34.6	37.8	43.4	32.8	25.8	33.1	11	328
Inha University	42.3	38.2	27.0	52.4	16.2	32.7	12	330
Chonnam National University	37.6	34.4	30.7	31.7	19.6	30.3	13	365
Kyung Hee University	37.6	38.3	38.9	73.6	9.1	29.5	14	370

(THE iPhone App, 2010)

Figure 1: Top South Korean Universities by THE - Reuters 2010 Methodology Indicators



2011 Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters: World University Rankings (Top Korean Universities)

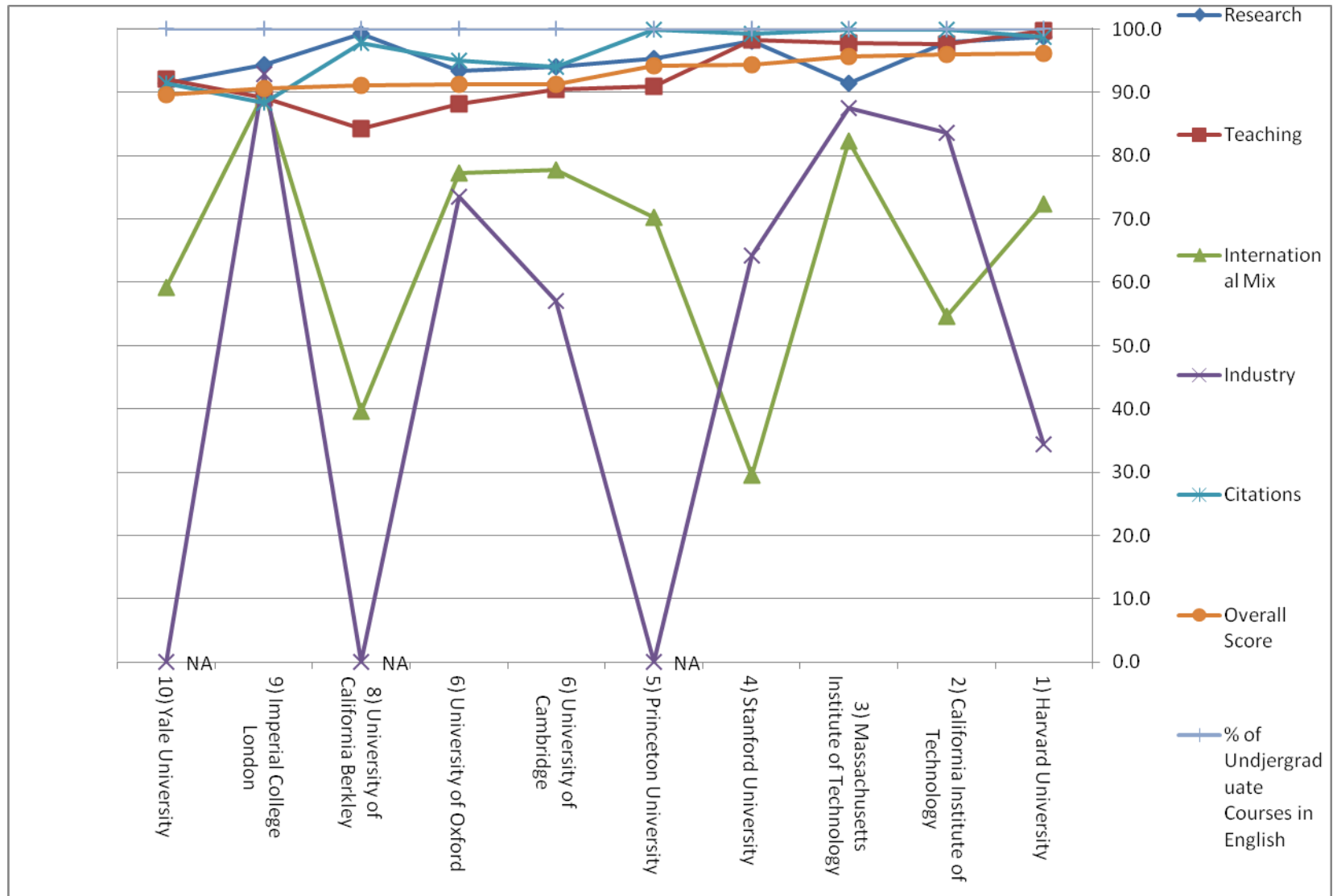
Fundamentally, the general trend tends to show that the more courses taught in English at a particular South Korean university, the higher its international ranking (See Table 1 & Figure 3). In point and fact, of the top '10 universities in the world according to THE – Reuters 2010 (Table 2)', as is plainly evident in Figure 2, all non foreign language courses are taught in the medium of English. This may definitively show the overwhelming power of the English language in terms of world university rankings.

**Table 2: 2010 Times Higher Education - Thomson Reuters: World University Rankings (Top 10 World Universities)**

University Name	Research – Volume, Income, Reputation	Teaching – The Learning Environment	International Mix – Staff & Students	Industry Income - Innovation	Citations - Research Influence	Overall Ranking Score	National Ranking	World Ranking
Harvard University	98.7	99.7	72.4	34.5	98.8	96.1	USA (1)	1
California Institute of Technology	98.0	97.7	54.6	83.7	99.9	96	USA (2)	2
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	91.4	97.8	82.3	87.5	99.9	95.6	USA (3)	3
Stanford University	98.1	98.3	29.5	64.3	99.2	94.3	USA (4)	4
Princeton University	95.4	90.9	70.3	NA	99.9	94.2	USA (5)	5
University of Cambridge	94.1	90.5	77.7	57.0	94.0	91.2	UK (1)	6
University of Oxford	93.4	88.2	77.2	73.5	95.1	91.2	UK (2)	6
University of California Berkley	99.3	84.2	39.6	NA	97.8	91.1	USA (6)	8
Imperial College London	94.4	89.2	90.0	92.9	88.3	90.6	UK (3)	9
Yale University	91.5	92.1	59.2	NA	91.5	89.7	USA (6)	10

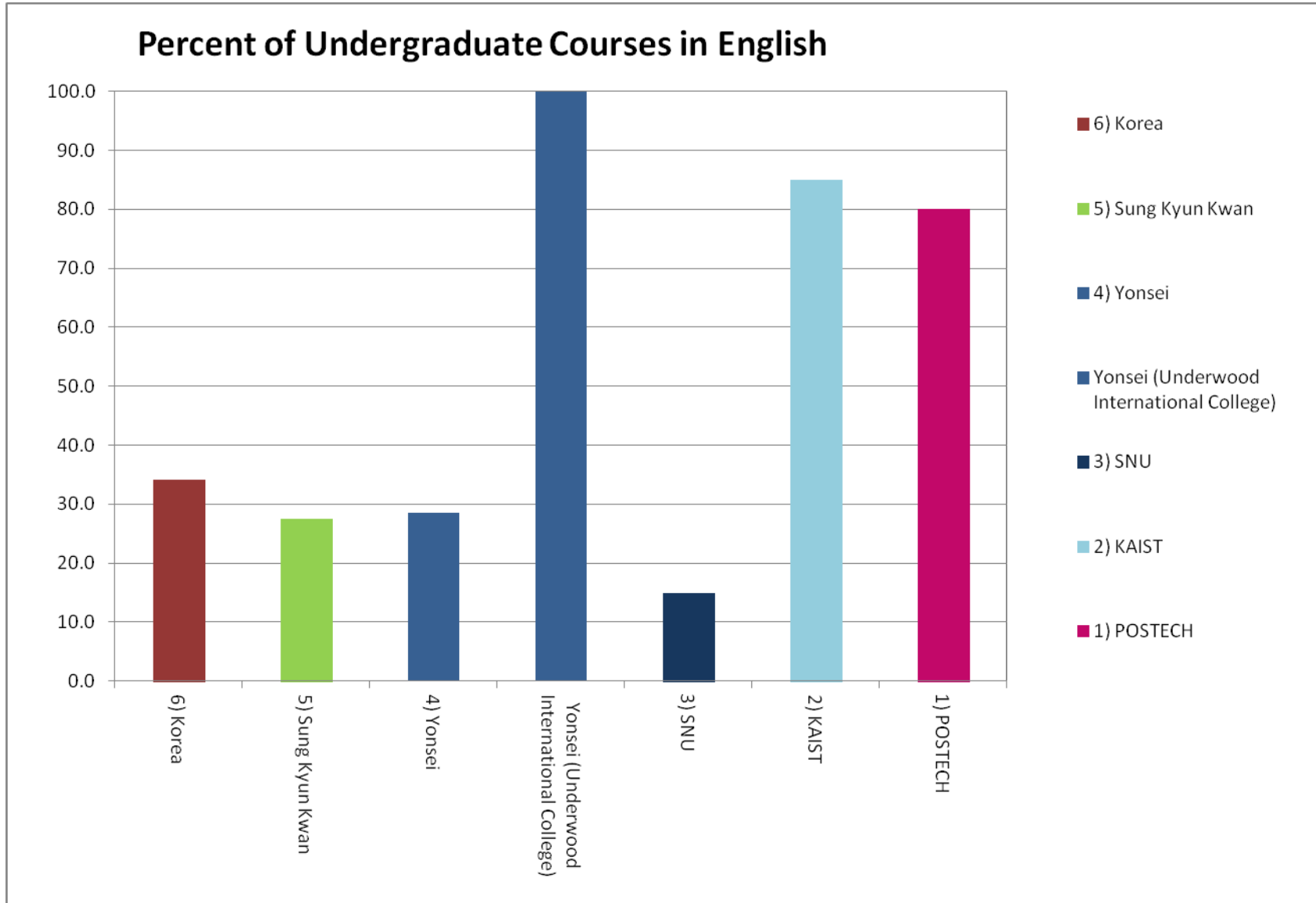
(THE iPhone App, 2010)

**Figure 2: Top World Universities by THE - Reuters 2010 Methodology Indicators**



Times Higher Education – Thomson Reuters 2010: Top 10 World University Rankings (Top 10 Universities)

**Figure 3**      **Percent of Undergraduate Courses offered in English at Top South Korean Universities**



Information supplied by each university

It is worthy to note the numbers in Figure 3, showing the percentage of English mediated classes at the undergraduate level at the above indicated top South Korean universities. The data was collected by contacting each university via phone and email. While the universities, indicated in Figure 3, gave the percent of the classes taught in English without hesitation, the ones further down the list declined to do give such information over the phone and showed a significant degree of hostility toward my research assistant Lee Eunmi who called to collect the newly updated 2011 data. (Kyung Eunyoung was highly instrumental in acquiring the Korea University figures.) This level of unfriendliness may not be a coincidence, since most Korean universities are well aware that their individual rankings and the number of courses offered by them in English has a direct as well as an indirect link to their respective international rankings.

Seoul National University was for some time in the lead right up until and including 2009, in as far as THE international rankings are concerned. In 2010, however, things took a drastic change when both POSTECH and KAIST overtook SNU, with Yonsei and Sung Kyun Kwan Universities also closing the gap. It is true, that the methodology of THE changed from 2009 to 2010, yet it's also the time POSTECH promised to offer 100% of its undergraduate classes in English. POSTECH has yet to reach its goal, but with the numbers in Figure 3 showing that 85% and 80% of undergraduate courses offered at KAIST and POSTECH respectively are offered in the medium of English, with SNU offering a mere 15% of undergraduate classes in English. It is therefore no wonder that POSTECH and KAIST leaped in front of SNU. SNU held some of its ground by reputation alone, coming in at number 55 according to the THE 2011 Reputational survey (THE Reputation, 2011) and placing 64th worldwide according to the 'Reputational surveys' in the areas of research and teaching (THE iPhone App, 2010). Although the average number of undergraduate courses taught in English at Yonsei account for approximately 28%, its Underwood International College offers 100% of courses (not including 'Korean as a second language' classes) in the medium of English. This certainly gives Yonsei a much needed boost as it can attract foreign students with much more confidence. The admissions office at Sung Kyun Kwan University did not offer an exact figure, only that it lingers between 25-30%. The 27.5% average was therefore put into place as a working substitute. This is also the year, Sung Kyun Kwan University bumped Korea University back a position in the THE rankings in as far as Korean universities are concerned. While Korea University has for the past few years been committed to teaching a high number of classes in English, the current president relied heavily on his message to cut back on the overall number of English mediated classes, to gain support from Korean professors who are often reluctant to teach courses in English, during his election campaign. This may have hurt Korea University in its quest to retain its international rank in the Times Higher Education 2011 world university rankings.

All things considered, scoring points with Korean students and professors in reducing or even promising to reduce the number of English mediated courses offered at a given Korean university is likely, in the long run, to have adverse effects on that particular university's international ranking.

Nevertheless, what should not be overlooked is that KAIST, POSTECH and Sung Kyun Kwan have the highest industry income figures among all Korean universities (Figure 1), with POSTECH at 7<sup>th</sup>, KAIST at 15<sup>th</sup> and Sung Kyun Kwan University at 33<sup>rd</sup> place overall (THE iPhone App, 2010). This is largely due to their high profile financial backers, with POSTECH backed by the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO), Sung Kyun Kwan University by the Samsung Group and KAIST by the Korean government. In effect, POSTECH was founded by POSCO and receives significant funding and research investment from the company. Sung Kyun Kwan was essentially acquired by the Samsung Group in 1996 and the group has significant stakes in the university with many of its executives enrolled in the university's renowned MBA program. KAIST, a national university, is highly instrumental in carrying out a substantial amount of government funded research projects. All of which points to the importance of generous research funding, nevertheless, as we shall see, the significance of the scholastic utilization of the English language at the respective universities remains to play a consequential role in elevating their individual THE rankings.

All things considered, the ranking of a university is in particular important to especially its alumni whose salaries will largely depend on the attained rank. Take Table 3 for example. Essentially, the table shows an observable relationship between the depicted universities' international rankings and the number of billionaires among their alumni. This connection indicates how university rankings and the salaries of graduates are indeed very much intertwined, being especially of concern in light of the fact that lower ranked universities produce far fewer billionaires with the average salaries of graduates diminishing the lower their universities place in the ranks. As a matter of fact, 11 of the 13 universities that have the most billionaires among their graduates are all within the top 20 group of universities according to THE 2010.

### **Direct and Indirect relationships between the English language and THE World University Rankings**

What is important to note is the weighing scheme for the THE - Reuters 2010 Methodology as is shown in Table 4. The Citations impact (32.5%), Ratio of International to domestic students/staff (5%), Reputational survey - research/teaching (34.5%); that is, a total of 72% of the entire weighing scheme is either directly or indirectly linked to the use of the English language at a particular university.

The international ratios of faculty as well as students are the most directly linked indicators, since courses taught in English not only attract foreign students but also give foreign professors better opportunities to lecture at the respective universities.



**Table 3: Billionaires by Top University**

University Name	Harvard	Stanford	University of Pennsylvania	Yale	Columbia	Princeton	New York U	U of Chicago	MIT	U of California Berkley	UCLA	Cornell	Northwestern
# of Billionaires	50	30	27	19	15	13	10	10	9	9	9	9	9
THE Rank	1	4	19	10	18	5	60	12	3	8	11	14	25

Forbes, 2008)

**Table 4**

Times Higher Education – Thomson Reuters: World University Rankings 2010 Weighing Scheme for Ranking Scores		
Main Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Weighing - Total: 100%
Research - volume, income and reputation	Reputational survey - research	19.5
	Research income (scaled)	5.25
	Papers per academic and research staff	4.5
	Public research income/total research income	0.75
Teaching - the learning environment	Reputational survey - teaching	15
	PhD awards per academic	6
	Undergraduates admitted per academic	4.5
	Income per academic	2.25
	PhD awards/bachelor's awards	2.25
International mix - staff and students	Ratio of international to domestic staff	3
	Ratio of international to domestic students	2
Industry income -innovation	research income from industry (per academic staff)	2.5
Citations - research influence	Citation impact (normalized average citations per paper)	32.5

(Times Higher Education – Thomson Reuters 2010 Methodology)

It is highly problematic to argue that a university offering 100% of its courses in the local language (other than English) of the nation it is located in, would be on a path to globalization regardless of the quality of education at the particular institution. To exemplify this point, Sunggi Baik, president of the Pohang University of Science and Technology, ranked 28<sup>th</sup> by THE - Reuters 2010, said in an interview with David McNeill of The Chronicle of Higher Education, that "We lose something, of course, but English is the global language. We have a responsibility to train our students in a language that will be understood anywhere in the world" (McNeill, 2011).

In effect, the gains in offering an ever increasing number of courses in English by universities allows them to become highly versatile and internationally interchangeable institutions that can spawn graduates of a breed who can effortlessly transcend national borders and international boundaries with the standardised knowledge acquired in a truly universal language. As the Microsoft Windows software allowed people across the globe to exchange compatible file formats with one another, courses taught in a universal language build alumni who are universally compatible and interchangeable worldwide regardless of the country of their origin and their mother tongue.

The downside, which in essence would at best be temporary (to be explained later on), is the students' complaints that professors can't be understood due to the evident shortcomings in their combined English communicative ability. What is more, the students themselves are having difficulties in getting the most out of the lectures they attend since many have not had the chance to take part in non-EFL English mediated classes prior to entering university. On the extreme, it could be viewed that "linguistic domination leads to mental control" (Tsuda, 2008). At Korea University, the complaints in my classes are mounting and the majority of students would prefer a fewer number of English mediated classes. What is more, 84% (134 out of 160) students surveyed at Korea University claim that lectures taught in English are ineffective in improving their English communicative skills (Kim, 2011). In point of fact, at KAIST, 4 students committed suicide in the first quarter of 2011 as a result of the pressures they faced in having to attend lectures mediated in English. However, since KAIST is ranked 204 overall in terms of the 'Citations impact' of its faculty (see below), it is highly conceivable that KAIST professors have measurably substandard English writing potential and in view of this, lesser communicative potential when compared to that of POSTECH professors who are ranked 15th overall in the way of their collective 'Citation impact'. Nonetheless, In terms of the reputational survey in teaching, KAIST likely ranked as high as it did - 93rd overall (THE Reputation, 2011), due to its globalized attitude in being able to provide foreign students lectures which are sensible to their needs, just by offering 85% of its undergraduate courses in the medium of English. This is despite the consequences of the overall communicative competence of the KAIST faculty.

Nonetheless, bringing top rank status to a university in one's own homeland should be a major priority for everyone. After all, only the financially well off can afford to send their children to study at higher ranked universities in the United States, the United Kingdom or Canada, and "the general trend of student flows [are] from developing countries to industrialized nations ... with the US being the largest beneficiary followed by the UK and Australia" according to the American Council of Education 2002 (Pandit, 2005). Incidentally, the highest ranked universities are offering most if not all their courses in English at any rate, so then why not bring the top notch university brands to one's home soil by allowing local universities to reach world class status. In any event, whether students are attending top notch universities, domestically or abroad, it is highly likely that the English language will play a considerable role during the course of their studies. Effectively, the argument that students have a hard time understanding lectures in English should not be used as an excuse in reducing the number of classes in English should a university's goal be to reach world class status. What is more, if students wish to study in their native tongues (other than English), they can simply enrol in lower ranked institutions that often do not require their students to attend classes in the medium of English. Should the universities of their initial choices offer the majority of their courses in a language other than English, they would expectedly be lower ranked institutions to begin with. Consequently, students who are or wish to be enrolled in higher ranked postsecondary institutions should openly welcome the practice of having to take a substantial number of courses mediated in English.

Indirectly speaking, and perhaps taking years or even decades to manifest, in raising national citation figures, the English language must play a prominent part at universities since an overwhelming majority of scholastic articles published worldwide are published in the medium of English, effectively bringing the focus on the citation impact of THE 2010 methodology (Table 4). In actual fact, POSTECH placed 15th overall on the citation ranking, while SNU placed 173rd, Yonsei at 189, Chonbuk N.U. at 197, KAIST at 204, Korea U. at 223, Ewha W.U. at 243, Kyungpook N.U. at 252, Sung Kyun Kwan U. at 310, Hanyang U. at 323, Pusan N.U. at 334, Chonnam N.U. at 342, Inha U. at 356 and Kyung Hee U. at 386 in the same category (THE iPhone App, 2010). Perhaps, this should be a testament to all universities worldwide, since those professors who are competent enough to teach a high number of classes in the English language are likely to be more proficient as authors of academic articles, as is made evident in especially the case of POSTECH (see above). In terms of POSTECH's international ranking at 15th place overall in the way of citations per faculty paper, with the 'Citation impact' weighing in at 32.5% of the THE 2010 rankings methodology (Table 4), there should be no doubt that superior English writing competence ultimately translates to high citation figures per faculty at any given university. After all, "academia is left with almost no choice but to publish in English in order to obtain international recognition" (Genc, 2010:142).

Evidently, one must nurture written and spoken English communicative talent before it begins to pay off in terms of the citations impact and it isn't by chance that American academics, with first class English communicative competence, have the highest research output in the world. Chinese academics, with China's population well past one billion, are at number

two position. Although far fewer in number but much more capable in terms of English communicative potential, scholars in Great Britain are in not so distant third with higher citation figures than the Chinese. Essentially, smaller countries must rely on the quality and not the quantity of their academics' average English communicative competence, as is made evident by the Chinese and British example.

Once the widespread development of English communicative talent is realized on a national scale, at not only post secondary but also at primary and secondary levels of education, the newly acquired talent pool would undoubtedly have a much easier time at taking part in as well as receiving English mediated lectures at the university level. All things considered, the ability to produce quality research papers composed in the English language gains much needed citation numbers for one's university.

## **Conclusion**

With the ever increasing prominence of the English language at the university level directly and indirectly translating to a proportionate rise in a university's international ranking, the English language should be kept in a position of priority within systems of education, regardless of the temporary setbacks, as tragic as they may on occasion be, as was the case with the four KAIST students committing suicide.

Eventually, the hurdles would be overcome and become inconsequential. On the whole, the gains would be truly worldly for especially those local students who haven't the financial means in entering top notch universities abroad. What is more, students and alumni from around the world could undoubtedly become interchangeable in every conceivable sense.

All things considered, universities must not let the real gains out of their sights since the foregone conclusion dictates that the English language is an undeniably valuable commodity whatever the national language of the country the respective university happens to be located in.

Forthrightly, adopting the English language at universities worldwide may be the only way to offer equal opportunities for students on domestic levels so that they may have unbiased access to truly world class universities in their own homelands.

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