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# Study on the Current Status of Multicultural Education in South Korea

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## Abstract

In recent days, Korean society has rapidly become multicultural society due to the sharp increase of immigrants. However, the cultural exclusiveness of Korean has caused the lack of understanding multicultural education, which has led to the misguided discussions and practices of multicultural education and therefore, raised significant problems. In addition, educational materials and information for multicultural education are not only insufficient, but also culturally biased, which is not intended.

This study aims to explore the tasks and alternative plans by understanding the current status of multicultural education. The literature research was employed as the study method. It was found that, 1) NPO is mainly charged with education for the foreign worker's families, 2) the official education institutes are insufficient and 3) the admission counseling by municipal and provincial offices of education does not practically guarantee the educational opportunities.

The contents of the multicultural education for international marriage families are limited in Korea and Korean traditional culture and there are only 10 model schools for multicultural education nationwide.

The number of children of saeteomins has not been exactly identified and the educations in Hanadul school while staying at Hana Center and alternative schools are all that are given to children of saeteomins. Children of saeteomins show low rate of enrollment to middle and high schools and higher rate of dropout than the other students.

To solve the issues mentioned above, alternative measures in the policy level were found as follows: 1) the expansion of multicultural education opportunities, 2) the diversification of multicultural education contents, 3) the cultivation of specialized personnel, and 4) the guarantee of equal opportunity of education.

Key Word : Multicultural Education, Multicultural Society, Foreigner Immigrant Family, International Married Family, Saeteomin(North Korean Defector)

## 1. Introduction

Since 1990's, as international marriages and the influx of foreign workers have continually

increased, South Korean society has become multi-racial and multicultural society. It is not difficult to run into foreigners in the street any more (Martiniello, M. 2002). The reasons o

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immigrate to South Korea are marriage, working, defecting from North Korea, etc. The immigrants are largely called as several names according to the reason and purposes of immigration; persons who are internationally married, foreign workers and saeteomin(North Korean defector).

Social integration has become a significant issue, for the Korean society, which has been proved to be multicultural. Education sector has gained the attention to play the role of designing long-term measures for multicultural society. Moreover, while the U.S.A has conducted multicultural education in the state of multicultural society, Korean Society has to conduct it during the rapidly changing period toward multicultural society and therefore, the multicultural education in the level of national policy should be carried out urgently(Kim Sun Mi. 2000).

Recent multicultural education, which has been put great emphasis on, has not been systemized yet and the study on the current status has been very limitedly produced, while the preliminary studies on general discussions about multicultural education are abundant. By the research on the actual condition of human rights of the influx and settlement process of foreign workers, the way for multicultural education has been paved in South Korea. However, this research was essentially not conducted in the aspect of educational process and didn't reflect the elements of education, which sequentially has made the follow-up research unrelated to the education.

Currently parents in multicultural families have a number of issues such as language to adapt to Korean society in both family and social life. In the meantime, children in multicultural families have hard time to adapt to school life, cannot get along with and are treated distantly by friends and are struggling with self-identity because of influent Korean, the cultural differences, academic underachievement, etc.(Oh

Eun Soon. 2007).

This study aims to identify the actual condition of multicultural education for children from multicultural family like international marriage family, foreign worker's family, saeteomin family, etc. and to explore the task and alternative plans for it.

## **2. The Concept and Types of Multicultural Society and the Unique Characteristics of Multicultural Society in South Korea**

### **1) The Concept and Types of Multicultural Society**

First of all, to understand the concept of multicultural society, it is needed to look over that of culture. Even though culture is the term that is commonly used in daily life, it is difficult to define it, because it changes depending on the historical and environmental conditions of each country.

Kim Seon Eung(2006) classified culture into holistic and idealistic perspective. The culture in the holistic perspective is composed of specific objects and facts that can be observed from the outside. On the contrary, the culture in the idealistic perspective is intangible and abstract, which means that it cannot be perceived and measured, and cannot be perceived even by persons who directly participate in the culture. It cannot be judged which one is right or wrong between them. This study employed holistic perspective of culture that includes life styles of human beings, conventional behaviors, the products of acts, necessities and institutions.

Culture is shared, learned and accumulated. It is also changeable and relative. Multicultural society has come into being in results of the contacts of cultures with these characteristics. Therefore, the multicultural education is the developmental process that integrates changeable cultures, educates next generations and finally

helps them stabilized in the multicultural society.

Multicultural society is largely divided into two types; first, the case of nation-states such as UK, Germany and France that became multicultural society followed by the influx of foreign workers and their culture and religions because of the globalization of capital and labor; second, the case of countries such as Canada and the U.S.A that were established by immigrants and, therefore, were composed of multi-race and multi-culture in the beginning. The countries from the latter case are accustomed with multi-culture, but still have the significant problems of social integration. South Korea falls into the former case.

**2) The Unique Characteristics of Multicultural Society in South Korea**

First, comparing with other OECD member states, the increase rate of foreigners residing in South Korea is very high. The foreign population had increased from 210,000 in 2000 to 900,000 in 2008 and average increase rate is 19.9%, which is much higher than 5.9% of average increase rate of 19 OECD member states(See Table 1). The annual average of increase rate of native Korean population was only 0.42% during the same period, which shows how fast the foreign population has increased.

**Table 1 Foreign Population and Increase Rate by Nations**

(Unit: 1000 persons)

	2000	2008	Increase rate from 2000 to 2008
Total	19,062.9	30,139.7	5.89
Korea	210.2	895.8	19.86
Spain	1,370.7	5,598.7	19.23
Italy	1,379.7	3,891.3	13.84
Greece	304.6	733.6	11.61
Czech Republic	201.0	437.6	10.22
Portugal	207.6	443.1	9.94
Slovak Republic	28.8	52.5	7.81
United Kingdom	2,342.0	4,196.0	6.66

Source: OECD Statistics, Demography and Population, 2010.

Second, the rate of the influx of foreigners residing under the condition of unspecialized employment and training employment is

noticeable, which occupies 92.6% of total foreign population(See Table 2).

**Table 2 Foreign Population by Vocational Qualification**

(Unit: persons)

	Specialized employment	Unspecialized employment	Total
2005	24,785	173,549	173,461
2006	29,011	231,773	231,684
2007	33,502	442,677	442,584
2008	37,304	511,249	511,156
2009	40,698	511,160	511,067

Source: The Ministry of Justice, Yearbook of Immigration Policy, 2009

Third, recently crime rate of foreigners who are staying in South Korea has rapidly increased. The crimes by foreigners has been doubled from 9,042 cases in 2005 to 23,344 in 2009, which is higher than the increase rate of foreign population(See Table 3).

**Table 3 The Status of Crime by Foreigners Who Are Staying in South Korea**

(Unit: case, %)

	Crimes by Foreigners		Crime Rate by Foreigners
	Number of Cases	Increase Rate	
2005	9,042	-0.7	1.21
2006	12,657	40.0	1.39
2007	14,524	14.8	1.36
2008	20,623	42.0	1.78
2009	23,344	13.2	2.00

Source: National Police Agency, Yearbook of Immigration Policy, 2009

Fourth, the stability of multicultural family has become a significant issue. Among the multicultural families, the rate of child abuse in early childhood appeared to be high. Moreover, the divorce rate is very high - the divorce rate within 4 years after marriage is 79% - and the major reason of divorce is also mental and physical abuse(See Table 4).

**Table 4 The Rate of Child Abuse of Multicultural Families and Homogeneous Families by Age**

	Multicultural Families(%)	Homogeneous Families(%)
Under 1 year old	8.29	2.45
1-3 years old	23.76	8.57
4-6 years old	18.23	12.49
7-9 years old	23.20	21.97
10-12 years old	17.13	26.05
13-15 years old	7.18	21.95
16-18 years old	2.21	6.53

Source: The Ministry for Health and Welfare, National Survey on Multicultural Families 2009, National Report of Child Abuse 2009, The Results of National Survey on Marriage and Fertility Dynamics 2009

Fifth, the members of multicultural families are not given the benefits of information technology and education. The utilization rate of internet by marriage immigrants is 62.2%, which is lower than the average rate of Korean and, therefore, proves that they are not given the benefits of information technology. The children from multicultural families have low level of Korean fluency before entering school and it results in 83% of enrollment rate to elementary, middle and high schools, which is lower than average rate of Korean and shows that they are also not given the benefit of education, too(See Table 5).

**Table 5 Rate and Purposes of Utilization of Internet of Marriage Immigrants by Age**

		Marriage Immigrants(%)	Average of Korean (%)
Rate of Utilization of Internet	30 and under 30 years old	70.5	96.8
	31-39 years old	71.1	98.8
	40 -49 years old	45.1	84.3
	50 and over years old	20.8	35.1
Purposes of Utilization of Internet	To acquire information	52.7	89.4
	E-mail	47.7	85.2
	Chatting	39.6	51.0
	Recreation	36.6	88.4
	Education and learning	38.4	52.5
	Shopping	30.4	62.3
	Banking	12.9	36.9
	Community activities, etc.	7.0	43.8

Source: The Ministry for Health and Welfare, National Survey on Multicultural Families 2009; Korea Internet Security Agency, Survey on the Internet Use, 2009

### 3. The Definition and Actual Condition of Multicultural Education in South Korea

#### 1) The Definition of Multicultural Education

Each scholar has his or her own definition of multicultural education depending on his or her perspective for it. Suleiman understood multicultural education in the practical perspective. He suggested that multicultural education is academic educational program to establish diverse learning environments related to academic, social and linguistic needs of students.

Nieto argued that multicultural education is not only the basic education, but also comprehensive school innovation process in the political and social context, which may be called as more active and more extensive concept.

Bennett(2007) adopted pluralism to define multicultural education. He approached multicultural education with teaching-learning method based on democratic value and belief and argued that it can be created in diverse culture and inter-independent world.

Kang Jung Yung(2008) defined multicultural education as the holistic efforts that attempt to

change curriculum in order to give equal opportunities to students with the background of diverse culture, races, gender and social class and as the understanding of human behaviors that are differently come out depending on race, ethics, language, religion, politics, employment, social class, experience, mental and physical ability, gender, age, etc. based on the argument of Bennett.

Seol Kyu Joo (2004) classified multicultural education according to three perspectives: phenomenon, strategy and normative. Phenomenal multicultural education is to lead the culture that exists but has been suppressed, because it is non-mainstream and minority, to the field of public education according to social environment. Strategic multicultural education is more active and positive; it prevents the damage and pains caused by cultural shock and conflicts and increases the adaptability and competitiveness by confronting A with A' and B with B'. Normative multicultural education is different from strategic multicultural education in the aspect that it pursues economical, moral, cultural and democratic values as well as is active and positive.

For this study, multicultural education is defined as the comprehensive education to provide all participants with diverse learning opportunities and to accept cultural diversity to the various educational and social institutions.

**2) The Actual Condition of Multicultural Education in South Korea**

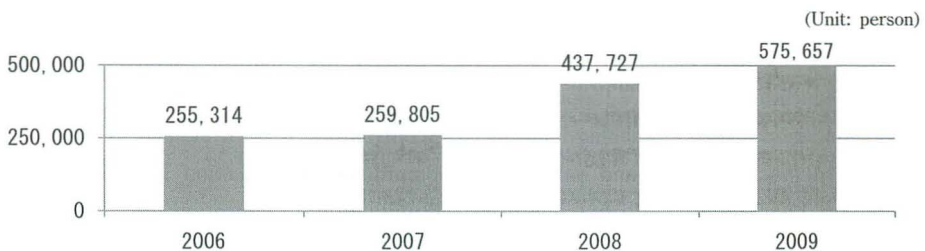
In South Korea, education for international understanding has been adopted as the educational concept for the globalized era since 1980. However, it was just a move to overcome the ethnocentrism by understanding other cultures and didn't include the concepts of justice and equality of multicultural education(Choi Chung Ok. 2009). In 1990's, multicultural education has begun to be discussed about in order to prepare for the issues induced by the increase of immigrants (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2006). Currently the major subjects of multicultural education are internationally married persons, the children of foreign workers and saeteomin. As they have different historical background, each subject was discussed separately.

**A. Foreign workers and their children**

Foreign workers who have come to South Korea with 'Korean Dream' have been noticed first as the immigrants to Korean society. 255,314 foreign workers were registered in

2006(See Figure 1). However, it was found that only 1,209 children of foreign workers are enrolled for schools in South Korea(Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2007a). The education for foreign workers has been carried out by local NGOs and education for their children have been also conducted by local centers for foreign workers. For example, Seondong Global Migrant Center in Seoul has run Global School, after-school program that helps children of foreign workers adapt to Korean society and their schools and Ansan Foreign Workers Centers in Gyeonggi province has conducted Kosian House to help the life and education of children of foreign workers (Kim Jung Won. 2009).

In 2006, Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education installed special classes for children of foreign workers into Wonil Elementary School and Sihwa Elementary School that are situated in areas with the largest number of unlawful foreign workers and have conducted 1<sup>st</sup> research in 2006 and 2nd research in 2007. As the public concerns for education for children of foreign workers have increased, the agenda for the expansion of educational opportunities for children of foreign workers was included into Education Welfare Five-Year Plan of Participatory Government. Municipal and provincial offices of education in Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Incheon, Ulsan, Jeonnam, Gyeongbuk, Gyeongnam, etc. have administered admission counseling centers for children for foreign workers(Kim Jung Won. 2009).



**Figure 1 The Number of Foreigners in South Korea**

Source: The Ministry of Justice, Yearbook of Immigration Policy, 2006

## B. Internationally married persons and their children

As the low fertility has continued for the last five or six years, internationally married persons, especially women have become significant subjects of policy. The international marriage occupied 1.2% of total marriage in 1990, but has increased to 13.6% in 2005(Ministry of

Gender Equality & Family Republic of, 2006). In April, 2007, 13,445 students from international marriage families are enrolled to schools; 11,444 in elementary schools, 1,588 in middle schools and 413 in high schools. Since 30,727 children who were under school-age were from international marriage in April, 2006, it is expected that enrollment rate of them would increase(See Table 6).

**Table 6 The Number of Enrollment of Children from Internationally Marriage**

Year	Elementary School		Middle School		High School		Total	
	Number	Increase or Decrease(%)	Number	Increase or Decrease(%)	Number	Increase or Decrease(%)	Number	Increase or Decrease(%)
2005	5,332		583		206		6,121	
2006	6,795	2.7	924	58.5	279	35.4	7,998	30.6
2007	11,444	68.4	1,588	71.9	413	48.0	13,445	68.1

*Source: The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2007a*

The education for internationally married persons and their children has been focused on children under school-age and women, because, among internationally married couples, the rate that mothers are foreigners is 88.0% and mothers are usually charged with education for children. In addition, the municipal and provincial offices of education are also actively concerned about them.

For example, the Jeonbuk Office of Education already constructed a task force for the education for international marriage family that can speak Chinese, English, Japanese and Vietnamese to carry out Onunrian Plan, which is a plan to help international marriage families(Kosian Education Plan) in November, 2005 and established the Korean Society of Education for International Understanding that is mostly composed of teachers and professionals within Jeonbuk province. According to a plan to help international marriage families(Kosian Education Plan), the onnurian classes were installed into all elementary schools in Jeonbuk area and have conducted Korean classes for parents and their children in multicultural

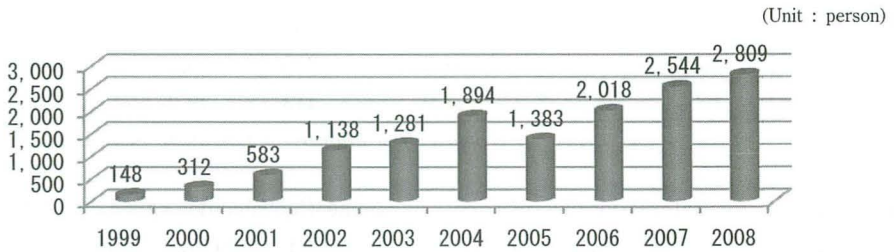
families(Jeollabukdo Office of Education, 2006a; 2006b). In addition, municipal and provincial offices of education have actively implemented multicultural education programs and activities such as workshops for parents in multicultural family, distribution of guidance materials for their children, Korean culture experience activities, and developments and implementations of Korea class. For the most representative example, Seoul Office of Education published two books in order to solve and prevent the discrimination of children from multicultural families, distributed them to 568 elementary schools in Seoul and designated Bokwang Elementary School at Itaewon as the model school for multicultural education to help understanding multicultural families. In 2007, the project of model school for multicultural education has been greatly expanded to each municipal and provincial offices of education; the number of school to research the scopes of multicultural education and the detailed subjects have been expanded and administered in 10 elementary, middle and high schools in Seoul, Incheon, Daejeon, Gyeonggi, Chungnam, Jeonbuk,



Jeonnam, Gyeongnam, Busan and Gwangju. In addition, Korean National Commission for UNESCO has administered Cross-Cultural Awareness Program while operating national networks and supporting staff training and orientation for local partners, including entering into the agreement on the authentication and activity of local partners for Cross-Cultural Awareness Program with Chungbuk Office of Education on May 11, 2007,

**C. Saeteomin and their children**

As the separation between South and North Korea has continued, the gap of economical growth between them became distinct. The North Korean defectors who immigrate into South Korea to escape from the famine caused by economic collapse of North Korea are called as saeteomin. Since 1995 when great flood had extremely deteriorated the difficulty of obtaining food, the number of saeteomins has increased to 20,000 in 2010; 148 in 1999 and 2,809 in 2008(See Figure 2).



**Figure 2 The Number of Saeteomin in South Korea**

Source: Korea Statistics, *The Number of Entry of North Korean Defector to South Korea, 2008*

In this context, the concern about children of saeteomins has grown. In April, 2007, 1,015 children of saeteomins are in school-age. 602 of 1,015 are attending schools. The enrollment rate in middle and highschools is especially low and dropout rate is also higher than the other students(Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, May 1, 2007). Officially the number of children of saeteomin is lower than that of international marriage families, but some human right organizations assume that they may be tens of thousands.

Children of saeteomins are provided with first education in South Korea in Hanadul School, while they stay at Hana Center - center for helping North Korean defectors resettle in South Korea - for three months. However, the education for children of saeteomins who show serious maladjustment and deviant behaviors in

schools of South Korea has been implemented usually by alternative schools that understand their unique backgrounds and adapted them to school programs. Alternative schools are providing education for children of saeteomins using various types of shared living communities and social welfare centers that are situated in densely populated areas with saeteomins are supporting them with after-school programs.

**4. Conclusion**

Official educational institutions are very insufficient for foreign workers' families. Even though the admission counseling has been carried out by municipal and provincial offices of education and seems helpful, it does not practically guarantee educational opportunity, which has invoked problems. Therefore, official

educational institutions have to be expanded and the educational opportunities for children from foreign workers' families have to be given as those of children from general Korean families.

As for the case of international marriage families, it can be said that the educational programs of Jeonbuk municipal and provincial offices of education are outstanding; they have supported the international marriage families in the municipal and provincial level such that they organized task force for multicultural education and installed onnuri class in every elementary school in Jeonbuk. However, the major contents of multicultural education are largely limited to Korean and Korean traditional culture for foreigners and it might be caused by the lack of specialized personnel in multicultural education. Moreover, even though the number of model schools for multicultural education has greatly increased in 2007, there are only 10 schools nationwide and needed to be expanded.

It has reported that the number of children of saeteomins might be unofficially tens of thousands, which is quite different from the official figure and therefore, requires the research to identify how many they are exactly. All of multicultural educations for children of saeteomins are only three-month education in Hanadul school and educations in alternative schools, which is very insufficient. Even though children of saeteomins show low rate of enrollment to schools and high rate of dropouts, there is almost no alternative policy for them. Moreover, specialized personnel for multicultural education are not sufficient, too.

The lack of specialized personnel has induced misunderstandings in the discussions and practices for multicultural education. For example, there are the cases that confuse multicultural education with ethnic education or consider them as identical. It may be because the discussions on multicultural education focus only on foreigners who are staying in South Korea or only on the

relations with them.

To solve issues mentioned above, it is necessary to raise specialized personnel for multicultural education and to educate people for civil awareness that enables to improve mutual understanding and to get rid of prejudice and fixed ideas for other cultures. The future multicultural education has to be carried out in the critical perspective that prevents students from learning cultural prejudice. In other words, multicultural education must be directed to help students have critical attitude and mind and not unconsciously accept the information from media and others

Moreover, the success of multicultural education needs the system to share the responsibility for and support it by connecting central and local offices of education and society. Theories and models through systemic research for establishing unique multicultural education system for South Korea and programs structures that fit with goals and context should be developed.

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