

A Complex Mix of Confidence, Uncertainty, and Struggle: Korean Secondary Social Studies Teachers' Perspectives and Practice on Multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT: This study examines perspectives and practices regarding multiculturalism among 20 secondary social studies teachers in South Korea. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis, the study seeks to capture how teachers' understandings of multiculturalism (*Damunhwa* in Korean) and its practice are influenced by curriculum changes, interactions with *Damunhwa* students, school duties, and personal experiences. The study finds that teachers know curriculum changes clearly, have little understanding of *Damunhwa* students, and experience discrepancies between high intellectual recognition of multiculturalism and their own ingrained biases.

KEYWORDS: Social studies, South Korea, teacher perspectives and practice, multiculturalism, curriculum change

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South Korea (hereafter, Korea), which used to be ethnically and linguistically homogeneous, has been becoming more culturally diverse due to an influx of foreign workers and rising numbers of international marriages over the last two decades (Abelmann et al., 2014; Cha et al., 2013; Kim, 2020; Lee, 2018; Yeo, 2016). Multiculturalism (*Damunhwa*¹ in Korean) has become a dominant discourse and the term *Damunhwa* has been constructed mainly as separation of people from diverse backgrounds from mainstream Koreans, implying “Others” (Tanghe, 2016).

Multicultural educational policies and curriculum have been adopted in PK-12 for more than a decade. Teachers have seen *Damunhwa* students increasing

in classrooms and have employed curriculum changes in teaching and multicultural school programs and events. However, teachers have very few opportunities to critically examine meanings of multiculturalism and its practice, given that they are pushed to hastily implement curricula and programs in response to societal change and educational policies; and most teachers had few opportunities to learn about multiculturalism and multicultural education in their teacher education and professional development (Ha, 2015; Mo & Lim, 2013).

Studies show that teachers demonstrate ambiguous understandings of multiculturalism and its applications to education, and hold conflicting beliefs—such as ethnic nationalism—which are ingrained in society (Chang, 2015; Kim & So, 2018). As a result, teachers lack confidence in their ability to teach about multiculturalism and social issues related to an emerging multicultural society (Mo & Lim, 2011). To create inclusive and equitable classrooms, teachers need to critically examine their beliefs and to reflect on the meanings of multiculturalism and multicultural education (Banks, 2006; Jenks et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995). They also need to be conscious of the power dynamics of different racial and ethnic groups in society to disrupt dominant views and knowledge (Jenks et al., 2001). In doing so, teachers can create classrooms where inclusive and equitable instruction and curriculum make democratic discussions possible (Jenks et al., 2001). It is unlikely that this will be feasible if teachers fail to understand the meanings of multiculturalism and develop the needed knowledge and practical skills, especially for inclusive and equitable teaching practices in diverse classrooms.

Studies of Korean teachers' perspectives on multiculturalism, their existing beliefs, and the implications for their practice have mainly focused on preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers because over 70% of *Damunhwa* students are enrolled at these levels (Kim, 2014). However, as students from diverse backgrounds advance through the school system, examining the perspectives of middle and high school teachers and their practice in differentiated subjects becomes imperative. The PK-12 social studies curriculum prominently incorporates multiculturalism (e.g., creating new lesson units for multiculturalism) and related concepts (e.g., human rights of diverse groups, harmony of a democratic society, global citizenship), and challenges long-held notions such as the concept of pureblooded nationalism as a basis for Korean identity. A previous study (Ryu & Kim, 2014) showed that social studies teachers strongly support anti-racism and multicultural education compared to teachers of other subjects. This finding and ongoing curricular changes demonstrate the need for a detailed explication of secondary social studies teachers' perspectives on and professional and personal experiences with multiculturalism.

Utilizing qualitative research methods, the current study² investigates how secondary social studies teachers in South Korea understand multiculturalism and its practice, and how these understandings are complicated by curriculum changes, interactions with *Damunhwa* students, school duties, and personal experiences such as media exposure. Two main questions were pursued: 1) How do secondary social studies teachers perceive multiculturalism in their professional

and personal lives in the emerging multicultural society? and 2) How do they understand and/or employ multicultural practices in social studies? Discussions employ the lens of critical multicultural education to weigh the implications teachers' current perspectives and practices have for the creation of inclusive and equitable social studies classrooms.

Literature Review

This section provides background for and characteristics of education policies and curriculum changes, in response to Korea's emerging multiculturalism, that influence social studies teachers' perspectives and practices.

Educational Policy and Changes to the National Curriculum

Korean educational policies and the national curriculum have been revised to adjust to a multicultural society since the government initiated the Multicultural Family Support of Education Act in 2006 (Cha et al., 2013; Kim & So, 2018). Since the Act, central and local governments have provided Korean language and culture courses and counselling services for *Damunhwa* families (Lee, 2018; Lim, 2014). Schools have developed programs—e.g., counselling or cultural events—that teachers are expected to implement along with curriculum changes in their subject areas.

Multicultural programs in schools have a few prevalent characteristics. First, they focus mainly on helping minority students from diverse backgrounds—*Damunhwa* students—adjust to Korean society. Scholars argue that this approach reflects assimilationist approaches despite formal statements of cultural pluralism in government policy (Jo, 2013; Kim, 2013; Yeo, 2016). They further contend that assimilationism is grounded in conservative multiculturalism, which emphasizes elimination of differences among cultural groups and the adoption of dominant norms and values (Jenks et al., 2001). In this approach, multicultural education focuses on educating *Damunhwa* students about mainstream Korean culture, language, and history, ignoring their diverse backgrounds. Second, presentations of diverse cultures to majority Korean students accentuate traditional cultures as unchangeable and fixed (Jin, 2012; Jo, 2013), which limits students' understandings of the dynamic nature of cultures and yields no room to develop a new Korean culture that combines both mainstream and emerging diverse cultures in Korea. Third, multicultural programs and curriculum changes are implemented in a top-down manner under mandatory educational policies, which makes teachers rush to employ them with few opportunities to examine meanings of multiculturalism in education, multicultural practices, or their own perspectives (Chang, 2015; Kim, 2013; Mo & Lim, 2013). In this regard, the perspectives and practices of PK-6 teachers have been examined, but those of secondary teachers' have not. My study will bridge this gap.

Social Studies Curriculum Change

Prominent among major changes in the social studies curriculum, which occurred in 2007, 2009, and 2012³, the 2007 reform eliminated the term *Sunsoo Hyeoltong Minjok*—pure bloodlines as a basis for ethnic nationalism (Mo & Lim, 2011). Pure-blooded ethnic nationalism has been a main criterion of Korean identity and had been stressed in social studies curriculum for decades (Hwang, 2010; Watson, 2012). While the ideology remains prevalent in society, the official curriculum excluded the concept in response to societal change. Throughout the 2009 and 2012 revisions, themes related to multiculturalism and global perspectives were increased in the social studies curriculum. For instance, the topic “multiculturalism” became an independent unit and included richer content on diverse cultures (Kim, 2013). The history curriculum now has more content related to East and Southeast Asian countries, where many immigrants come from (Hwang, 2010), while general social studies and geography noticeably include notions of multicultural citizenship and the interconnections of cultural diversity. As a whole, the social studies curriculum has added more topics related to multiculturalism and citizenship in both multicultural and global societies in accordance with racial and ethnic demographic changes in Korea.

While the social studies curriculum has actively responded to demographic changes, it also maintains and contributes to fixed notions of culture that focus on traditions and essentialize characteristics of people from diverse backgrounds. This approach mirrors current multicultural programs in schools, as described previously. Current multicultural elements in the social studies curriculum add only a few themes about the culture and history of minority groups and lacks any actual employment of cultural pluralism (Mo & Lim, 2011). The curriculum needs to recognize the importance of transforming its approach to new, diverse cultures, treating them as essential elements of the majority culture; it must also provide multiple perspectives of people from diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017; Sleeter, 2012). Lastly, descriptions of multicultural citizenship in the current social studies curriculum are mainly rhetorical, lacking actual knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to address concrete examples and issues that may appear in multicultural societies (Banks, 2006; Cho, 2018; Choi, 2010; May & Sleeter, 2010).

Teachers' Perspectives and Practices

Numerous social and educational discourses have arisen from multiculturalism and ensuing policy changes, and teachers have been expected to implement multicultural programs and new curricula in various subject areas. However, the top-down employment of multicultural education policies leaves little room for teachers to deliberately examine meanings of multiculturalism and related educational practices. Studies show that, with few opportunities to learn about

multicultural education, teachers feel ill-prepared, demonstrate low levels of multicultural competency, and report ambiguous positions in relation to multicultural education (Cha et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2011). Moreover, teachers regard multicultural practices as mere additions to their workloads among the pressure of teaching for high-stakes tests (Chang, 2015). Studies of these phenomena—mainly utilizing survey methods—have focused on preschool, kindergarten, and elementary teachers' perspectives on multiculturalism and practices (Kim, 2014). As the number of *Damunhwa* students increases in secondary levels, more attention is being given to how secondary teachers understand multiculturalism and prepare to teach related topics in each subject area.

Theoretical Framework

Given the top-down manner of government policies with assimilationist approaches, the social studies curriculum's limited scope of topics, an absence of discussion of multicultural citizenship, and teachers' low confidence and ambiguous positions in relation to multicultural education, I utilize a critical lens to examine teachers' views and practices in an attempt to build equitable and inclusive secondary social studies classrooms.

Critical Multicultural Education and Pedagogical Premises as Investigative Lenses

According to Jenks et al. (2001), critical multiculturalism provides insights into how to equitably and inclusively establish curricula, multicultural programs, and relationships with students in the wider context of society. Unlike conservative multiculturalism—assimilation of minorities to the mainstream—and liberal multiculturalism—acceptance and tolerance of diverse cultures while maintaining the dominant culture—critical multiculturalism prioritizes challenging dominant values, norms, and knowledge in an effort to disrupt the status quo of power relations in society. The desired result is cultural pluralism, in which minoritized groups are regarded as equal members in society. Multicultural education grounded in critical multiculturalism emphasizes the inclusion of histories and narratives of diverse groups in curriculum and instruction; promotes students' critical perspectives on values, beliefs, and policies; and provides democratic discussions in classrooms.

Growing out of critical multicultural education are equitable pedagogies including culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017). Despite their differences, there are shared premises among these pedagogies: namely (a) a recognition of diverse cultures and students' lived experiences, (b) integration of these pedagogies into curriculum and instruction,

and (c) interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. The current study adopts these premises as well as elements of critical multicultural education to investigate teachers' perspectives and practice in an effort to build a more inclusive and equitable practice in increasingly diverse classrooms.

Methods

Utilizing qualitative methods allowed me to identify main patterns and themes of how teachers understand multiculturalism and its practices through their own meaning making processes (Merriam, 2009; Vygotsky, 1980).

Settings and Participants

The sites for this study are middle schools (grade 7-9) and high schools (grade 10-12) in one of Korea's major metropolitan areas, which has the highest number of *Damunhwa* students among the country's six metropolitan areas. The metropolitan city is comprised of 3.9% foreign residents—either holding naturalized Korean citizenship or foreigner status—and 2.2% of students are called *Damunhwa* students—at least one parent is from a non-Korean cultural background (KOSIS, 2019)⁴. Participants are 20 social studies teachers: nine middle, 11 high school and 18 female teachers—See Appendix for specific information about their teaching subjects and experiences, and their relationship with the researcher. Teachers play different roles in their schools from teaching a single subject to serving as a homeroom teacher or a department's head teacher. Only homeroom or head teachers can access personal information about *Damunhwa* students due to educational laws protecting students' privacy.

Data Collection Process

Teachers were selected through convenience and purposeful sampling strategies (Patton, 2002). I interviewed 18 teachers at their schools and two teachers remotely, interviewing each teacher one time for approximately 40-60 minutes; interviews were conducted in Korean and were audiotaped. I transcribed interviews in Korean and translated them to English. Interview questions were semi-structured, which means that I prepared basic questions and let the interview flow as the dialogue progressed (Merriam, 2009). Major questions were (a) When and where do you feel/experience *Damunhwa* in Korean society or in your daily life, both personally and professionally? (b) Have you had/do you have any *Damunhwa* students in your class or school? (c) Have you employed any multicultural practices in social studies?

Data Analysis

I utilized the comparative method of taking notes of key words for each interview and comparing them across interviews (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). I documented key words using multileveled coding methods: first, In Vivo coding using exact words from the interviews, then topic coding summarizing in a word the basic topic of a passage (Saldaña, 2015), followed by narrowing down to several main topics. I sought patterns and themes that were refined through multiple readings of interviews.

This study simultaneously incorporated critical discourse analysis (CDA) during data analysis, strongly focusing on subtle and nuanced discourses. CDA uncovers how ongoing meaning-making processes in teacher discourse shape and are shaped by power in the broader societal systems such as government policies, curriculum changes, the school system, and media discourses that mediate personal experiences (Bakhtin, 2010; Fairclough, 2015). To capture subtle nuances of teacher discourse, I selected CDA's methodological tools, such as grammatical features, and manners of speech and words (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014). The main grammatical feature was *relational modality*, which refers to the speaker's authority in relation to others and is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs like should (~해야 해요 He-ya-he-yo in Korean), can (~수 있어요 su-isseo-yo), or may (~일지도 몰라요 il-jee-do-molayo). Manners of speech are mainly tones of voice or facial expressions and words that interviewees choose. I took notes about these features during the entire coding process.

Positionality

Since a researcher is a tool for collecting and analyzing data, it is critical to be transparent in terms of my positionality in this research process (Merriam, 2009). I am a native Korean and worked as a middle and high school social studies teacher in South Korea for 13 years in the same school district as the participants. Four teachers in the study were my previous co-workers and others were introduced through my coworkers' personal and professional networks. My former coworkers viewed me as their close colleague and other interviewees regarded me a potential colleague in the future. All interviewees positioned me as a respected senior or a respectful junior depending on their age and teaching experience; this could affect their answers in interviews.

Findings

Interviews revealed the complex realities of teachers' perspectives on multiculturalism and its practice in the areas of curriculum changes, *Damunhwa* students, personal prejudice and bias, and teaching their subjects. Teachers

understood multiculturalism and its application to practice through several curriculum changes but had little chance to interact with *Damunhwa* students and examine their own prejudice and bias toward people from diverse backgrounds. This is attributable to a rush to employ revised curricula in schools and in teaching practice.

Confidence in the Curriculum Changes

Teachers' understandings of multiculturalism have been mainly shaped through curriculum changes. All interviewees demonstrated confidence in their capacity to recognize curriculum changes in the social studies national curriculum, in response to the recent shift to a multicultural society. Inyoung Hong⁵, a high school geography teacher for 20 years, promptly responded to questions about recent changes related to multiculturalism in her professional or personal life:

In the subject itself, in Korean geography, I talk about the increase of population movement, and Korea's multicultural society... I think that multicultural content has been prominently appearing in the curriculum within the last five years.

Her immediate response with a firm facial expression showed that she knew the curriculum changes in her subject well. This confidence signaled that her professional knowledge comprised a strong basis for her perceptions of multiculturalism.

Hyeonsoo Kim, who taught high school ethics for 25 years, explained clearly what had been included in the curriculum:

Currently, there is cultural diversity in the subject of life and ethics. There are three perspectives on multiculturalism in the topic. There's a melting pot model, a salad model, and there's a model that distinguishes the center and peripheral areas.

He displayed his substantial understanding of curriculum changes in ethics, especially with regards to theoretical approaches, using strong tones of voice and firm facial expressions. Grouped with similar responses from other teachers, curriculum changes in social studies were foremost among teachers' perceptions of changes regarding multiculturalism, which they grasped on an intellectual level because their curriculum delved into it deeply and specifically.

These findings build on previous studies that show that PK-6 teachers recognize and integrate diverse cultures into their curriculum and instruction mainly through top-down curriculum changes (Kim, 2013). This study shows that the same is true for social studies teachers at the middle- and high-school levels. Furthermore, social studies teachers' confidence in their grasp of the curriculum reinforces findings that they are more inclined to support multiculturalism than teachers of other subjects (Ryu & Kim, 2014). However, and as the next section shows, this study also demonstrates that an intellectual grasp of multiculturalism fails to recognize the importance of direct experience with *Damunhwa* students.

Lack of Firsthand Knowledge about *Damunhwa* Students

Seventeen out of 20 teachers also pointed to the trend of increasing numbers of *Damunhwa* students in schools as one aspect of emerging multiculturalism. However, unless they held positions as homeroom teachers or head teachers who could access students' background information⁶, personal information protection laws prevented their knowing whether *Damunhwa* students attended their schools. This being the case, these teachers realized they taught *Damunhwa* students only if they had different physical characteristics, spoke accented Korean, had unique names compared to the majority of Koreans, or by some coincidence.

Sunhwa Yoon, who was neither a homeroom teacher nor a department head teacher, happened to find out that her former student's mother was Japanese a year after she had the student in class. Knowing that she had a student whose mother was Japanese made her look back on her teaching about Japan, especially in her comments about Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula in 1910:

I looked back on talking about Japan and self-reflected, asking if I had made a mistake or not [such as making negative comments about Japan]... If I had known... how many *Damunhwa* students were in school [and in my class], I would have made an effort to study how to help those who might have difficulties.

Her low tone and hesitant facial expression, paired with the words "If I had known," demonstrated her frustration not knowing she had a student with a different cultural background. Her interview showed that awareness of students' diverse backgrounds may have motivated her to learn new methods of teaching in her diverse classroom. Tongbuloglu et al. (2016) arrived at similar results in their study regarding actual implementations of teachers' multicultural practices in Turkey.

By contrast, Yumin Park, as a homeroom teacher for a 7th grade class, could obtain specific information about and demonstrated specific understandings of her students—such as their parents' nationalities and their academic achievements. These two cases confirm the importance of teachers' access to and knowledge about students from diverse backgrounds to build multicultural practices attuned to diverse students' needs (Gay, 2002). However, it is also noteworthy that many *Damunhwa* students want to hide their backgrounds due to fear of being bullied (Tanghe, 2016). Eunjoo Kwak, who had been a middle school teacher for 10 years and had *Damunhwa* students in her homeroom class, said that "Students don't want to tell anyone that they're from a *Damunhwa* family, and my school doesn't want us to act like we know."

Thus, secondary social studies teachers who were not homeroom or head teachers possessed little specific knowledge about *Damunhwa* students, stemming from systemic barriers of unequal access to students' backgrounds combined with *Damunhwa* students' unwillingness to reveal their backgrounds. The circumstances constrained teachers' capacity to more effectively

accommodate the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, cultivate cultural competencies in both majority and minority students, integrate *Damunhwa* students' lived experiences into curriculum and instruction, and interact with them. This finding highlights the imperative need for meaningful interactions of these teachers with *Damunhwa* students to actualize the premises of the three equitable pedagogies mentioned earlier (Gay, 2002; Jenks et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Struggling with Personal Prejudice and Bias

Personal prejudice and bias toward people from diverse backgrounds comprise another component of teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism. Interviews revealed that teachers found perceived discrepancies between what they teach and how they felt regarding multiculturalism. Yumin Park, who taught moral education in a middle school for one year, showed that two contradictory values created an internal struggle. She explained how she approached students' use of a derogatory word indicating Chinese at the beginning of the Multiculturalism unit:

Like the word "J**" [a derogatory word for Chinese], I make [students] think about negative language, and talk about what it would be like for us to be in the same situation. Last year, I showed a video in which racial discrimination took place in a multicultural society and asked, "What if you go to another country and would be discriminated against like in this case?" Then, students understood and sympathized much more.

Her voice and manner of speaking demonstrated no signs of hesitation challenging students to consider their use of derogatory words stemming from bias toward Chinese. However, in further comments she also shared her feeling of struggle regarding the gap between what to teach about prejudice or bias toward people from diverse backgrounds and how she felt personally. She noted, "This is a little bad, but I don't have a positive feeling about people from poorer countries." She said that she had internalized, mostly through media portrayals, politically conservative beliefs that people from less-developed countries take jobs from Koreans. Noticeably, she evaluated this internalized bias as bad because she saw the discrepancy between what she taught in class and how she really felt. Another four teachers including Heemin Joo shared this positionality. Heemin Joo, who taught social studies for 17 years in middle schools and had *Damunhwa* students in her class in the past, shared how she formed her bias toward people from other countries:

I think the influence of the media is so powerful. Since the media is so explicit about crimes [committed] by foreigners, I feel objections unconsciously... One day, my husband asked me whether I would accept our daughter-in-law if our son wanted to marry a person from a diverse background. I'm, uh... I can't accept it emotionally. [Even though] I tell [my students] in class, "We're members of the same community."

Heemin Joo paused a few times when speaking and used the relational modality *can*, which showed her frustration toward her own discrepant attitudes. Her case also reveals that dominant discourses that circulate in media influence teachers' personal views on multiculturalism, which are complicated by their intellectual recognition of diverse cultures and people.

These social studies teachers have faced challenges between rapid changes to the curriculum and rare opportunities to examine their own prejudice and bias (Chang, 2015). Furthermore, these prejudices and biases were shaped by politically conservative perspectives that, through the power of media, cast people from other countries in a negative light, which limited their equitable teaching practice about diverse cultures and people (Jo, 2013; Mo & Lim, 2011). As critical multicultural education calls for students' critical perspectives on dominant views and values (Jenks, et al., 2001), the experience of teachers investigating their own biases and prejudices is an important first step to achieving critical multicultural practice in their classrooms.

Teaching Practices

Social studies teachers' perspectives on multiculturalism are complicated by curriculum changes in response to multiculturalism, an increasing number of *Damunhwa* students in and outside of schools, and their own personal bias about people from diverse backgrounds. These constructed perspectives naturally influence teaching practices. In this section, which is divided into two subsections—Maintaining Convention Practice and Navigating New Teaching Methods—analysis focuses on how teachers' descriptions of practice in response to new topics of multiculturalism echo or contradict findings in the three previous sections.

Maintaining Conventional Practice

All but two teachers in this study see multiculturalism as an addition to the lesson units already required by the national curriculum. For example, a high school teacher for 22 years, Sunhee Oh, explained:

I have to teach culture as one of the main units, which is very important as a standard of basic achievement. One of the topics in culture is to understand a multicultural society. Because it's one of the achievement criteria, I have to address it.

There are two aspects to interpreting the discourse in her interview. Her repeated use of "have to" and single use of "very important" implied a duty to teach topics added during curriculum changes that were dominant discourses determining teachers' perspectives and practices (Chang, 2015; Fairclough, 2015). Furthermore, her firm tone of voice signaled confidence in relation to changes in

the national curriculum due to multiculturalism. Teachers' widespread confidence in their knowledge about curriculum changes, as mentioned previously, echoed the way they saw their practice in relation to new topics of multiculturalism in social studies classrooms. It is notable that teachers saw developing new teaching methods or materials as unnecessary. Hyeonjee Ha, a middle school teacher for 30 years, said, "I don't have time to develop lessons or teaching materials especially for multicultural purposes. It is mentioned very briefly in the textbook, so it's in a very small portion of tests." Like Hyeonjee Ha, many other teachers mentioned that they did not have time to explore new teaching methods due to the constraints of teaching a wide scope of topics and the pressure to prepare students for standardized tests (Chang, 2015; Misco, 2016).

Ironically, a mixture of confidence about curriculum changes and reluctance to incorporate new teaching approaches presented new challenges for certain topics—namely, Islam and the histories of China and Japan—related to increasing numbers of *Damunhwa* students. While they recognize the rising importance of these issues, social studies teachers revealed feelings of uncertainty about how to teach these topics. Minyoung Lee, a high school geography teacher for 10 years, said that teaching about Islam worried her, something that never occurred before she had a Muslim student from Bangladesh⁷. She said, "This is my homework.... I know I will teach more foreign students in the future.... I was very self-conscious when I taught Islam because I was worried that I might make disparaging remarks about it." During the interview, her voice assumed a slow and anxious tone when talking about her Muslim student and she expressed concern about appropriate practices using the words "homework" and "worried." This showed that she self-censored her remarks and felt low confidence in teaching about Islam when a *Damunhwa* student was present. Comments like this illustrate that the presence of *Damunhwa* students can disrupt conventional ways of teaching, which forces teachers to question their competence (Mo & Lim, 2011).

All teachers but three, who were homeroom or head teachers, did not know they had *Damunhwa* students in class due to inaccessibility to students' records. A middle school social studies teacher for 10 years, Eunsoon Lim, said:

There's no particular material or method. In fact, I'm also careful about talking about multicultural families. It's because I'm *worried* that there might be some discomfort for students from *Damunhwa* families...many history textbooks talk about Japan negatively. There was a moment when I caught myself a little bit during my history class [talking about Japan]. Nowadays, I just briefly mention the Japanese invasion because there might be students whose parents are from Japan. Now, I can't talk about the Japanese the way I used to. It's the same with the relationship with China. We have complicated historical relationships with these two countries.

Eunsoon Lim's interview reveals the complexity of multicultural teaching, which reflects the interplay of intellectual recognition of curriculum changes, unexamined practices, and little direct knowledge about *Damunhwa* students. The words "careful" and "worried" demonstrate low confidence, echoing Minyoung Lee's perspectives. The words, "There was a moment when I caught myself,"

indicate her sudden recognition of possibly inappropriate approaches to teaching about Japan due to a new classroom context where *Damunhwa* students might be present (but she did not know if they were there). She realized during the lesson that unexamined, conventional teaching methods might not be relevant for *Damunhwa* students. This undermined her confidence to teach about Japan, as demonstrated by the words, "I can't talk about the Japanese the way I used to." The words, "there might be students" shows that social studies teachers who are not homeroom or head teachers cannot know about the definite presence of *Damunhwa* students and adapt their teaching accordingly.

Teachers' confidence in relation to multicultural curriculum changes contrasts sharply with the uncertainty they feel about teaching sensitive topics such as Islam and the histories of Japan and China when they rely on established teaching practices that are insensitive and inequitable (Cha et al., 2013; Mo & Lim, 2011). This finding highlights an imminent need among secondary social studies teachers to build new knowledge of and skills in how to teach sensitive topics in diverse classrooms.

Navigating New Teaching Methods

Through interviews, it was found that only two out of 20 teachers tried new teaching methods related to multiculturalism. Young-ra Kim, a 13-year middle school teacher, shared her experience of recognizing her bias toward people from diverse backgrounds and redesigning the Cultural Coexistence and Conflicts unit by having students write from multiple perspectives.

I've used Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* to think about a multicultural society. I told [students] about the discrimination against Shylock in Venice because of his Jewish background and asked, "How is Korea, now? Have you ever discriminated against people from different backgrounds? Let's rewrite the scenario from Shylock's perspective."

Her endeavor in practice was interconnected with an examination and deconstruction of her own bias.

In the past, when I was biased, I didn't know why and I just felt guilty; but as I studied, I found that I needed to check why I had that idea, and it was important to keep checking it and share it with others. It's not [a matter of] personal guilt. I think we need to check why we came to have that idea.

She tried to unlearn bias that had been formed through dominant discourses circulating in media or schooling, and actualized her transformative view through her teaching (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Jenks et al., 2001).

Yoora Hyeon, a high school ethics teacher for 30 years, was another who spoke about implementing new teaching methods. She had students write essays related to multiculturalism, as well as invited immigrant guest speakers to her class. She explained, "such activities help students improve their awareness of multiculturalism."

In interviews, 18 of 20 teachers maintained conventional practices that predated curriculum changes, while only two described trying new teaching methods when they reached new units on multiculturalism. This finding elaborates the big gap between implementing curriculum changes and actualizing new teaching methods. Accordingly, secondary social studies teachers, who were viewed as strong supporters for multiculturalism (Ryu & Kim, 2014), need to advance to actual equitable practice for a cultural pluralistic society (Jenks et al., 2001).

Discussion and Implications

This qualitative study captures the complexities of 20 secondary social studies teachers' understandings of multiculturalism and related teaching practices, an increasingly important area of research in previously homogenous societies like Korea where an influx of *Damunhwa* students is rising from elementary to secondary schools. While all teachers in this study showed confidence in understanding multiculturalism in terms of curriculum changes, they reported reluctance to adopt new teaching methods, preferring instead to integrate the new topic of multiculturalism into their existing focus on preparing for standardized tests.

Furthermore, the study illuminates teachers' hesitations to address topics such as Japanese and Chinese history or Islam, indicating a need to develop a critical capacity to examine curriculum content. Social studies teachers need to be aware of the ways curriculum and educational policies—especially in a society where assimilationist approaches prevail—maintain dominant norms and values, and explore how to establish more inclusive and equitable instruction in increasingly diverse classrooms (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2011; Jenks et al., 2001). They must have the capacity to examine their own assumptions and biases, which they internalized from living in the Korean historical and social context. By doing so, teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to lead student discussions about bias and prejudice towards people from diverse backgrounds by examining wider social structures that critical multicultural education emphasizes (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Guerra & Nelson, 2009; Jenks et al., 2001).

Moreover, participants had few interactions with students from diverse backgrounds due to small numbers of multicultural students at secondary levels and the personal information protection law. To build equitable pedagogical practices, teachers need to develop concrete experiences with students from diverse backgrounds, incorporate these experiences into lessons, and connect to multicultural families and communities at institutional and personal levels. In this way, teachers become more attuned to students' lives and identities and empower student agency in diverse classrooms (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nasir & Hand, 2006). As the case of Sunhwa Yoon's experience with her student from Japanese background shows, even though teachers intellectually recognize the importance of multicultural education, their actual implementation of multicultural

practices may be closely associated with an (un)awareness of diverse students' needs (Tonbuloglu et al., 2016). Therefore, I argue that it is critical that secondary social studies teachers (a) strive to interact with students from diverse backgrounds and (b) be given access to student records in order to realize a more equitable multicultural pedagogy, no matter the positions they have in schools.

In sum, this study extends Korean multicultural education scholarship to secondary teachers' perspectives and practices. Examining these perspectives and practices illuminates how multiculturalism can be integrated into an entire curriculum rather than teaching it through sporadic events, such as multicultural festivals or traditional celebrations (Banks, 2006). Given that Korean educational officials have chosen social studies as the subject that specializes in multiculturalism, the challenges reported by teachers in this study will likely be exacerbated in other subject areas, such as math, science, literature, foreign language, etc. The findings are informative for scholarship in social studies education since they shed light on specific topics where social studies teachers and preservice teachers imminently need to develop competent and equitable teaching practices.

Lastly, this study contributes to the contextualization of multicultural education in Asian countries that experience rapid demographic changes and employ national curricula. These countries need to adopt policies and programs that empower teachers to constantly reflect on the implications of multiculturalism for their practices.

Conclusion

This study explicates the complexity of 20 secondary social studies teachers' perspectives and practice regarding multiculturalism in an emerging multicultural society. While teachers were confident in their knowledge of topics related to multiculturalism, their understanding was limited to subjects of curriculum changes and discourses provided by the media. They had few concrete experiences with *Damunhwa* students in schools and in their personal lives, and they experienced discrepancies between what they taught about multiculturalism and how their own biases shaped their feelings toward people from diverse backgrounds. Based on these findings, it is critical for secondary social studies teachers to receive systemic support that enables them to interact with *Damunhwa* students and families, to deconstruct their own biases, and to critically examine conventional teaching methods in order to build more inclusive and equitable practices in classrooms.

Notes

1. In this paper, I use the term *Damunhwa* (multiculturalism), which is prevalent in Korean discourse. *Damunhwa* students are considered "Others" compared to

mainstream ethnic Koreans. I am aware that using *Damunhwa* in the study risks reinforcing constructed meanings of separation. It is my hope that, as I use this divisive language, I will simultaneously help to deconstruct its meaning.

2. This article is based on a larger study that comprised the author's doctoral dissertation, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

3. The most recent curriculum change took place in 2015 and has been adopted gradually, starting with Korean preschools in 2016. However, the new curriculum had not been fully implemented at the middle and high school levels when I interviewed participants in 2019.

4. According to the Korean Educational Statistics Service in 2019, the cultural or national backgrounds of parents of *Damunhwa* students was comprised of Vietnamese (30.6%), Chinese (22.5%), Filipinos (10.8%), Korean-Chinese (9.7%), Japanese (7.1%) and other (19.4%), which includes Cambodians, Uzbekistanis, Russians, Mongolians, and Thais.

It is not possible to break down students' backgrounds for each school due to inaccessibility to students' information as mentioned in the Settings and Participants section – see also note #6 below.

5. All names are pseudonyms.

6. Korean social studies teachers' positions are threefold: 1) Most have responsibilities as homeroom teachers, which give them access to their homeroom students' records. However, they are denied access to the records of students in other homerooms, even when they have them in class. 2) A few teachers become head teachers, who are granted access to all student records across homerooms and grades. 3) Some teachers are granted exemptions from homeroom duties because of special circumstances (e.g., personal health issues, special duty for a school project). These teachers cannot access any student records.

7. Korean and non-Korean Muslims are 0.2% of the total population (<https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2017/11/15/the-muslims-of-south-korea>).

Given that the majority of parents of *Damunhwa* students are Vietnamese and Chinese, students from Muslim families are still very rare. Only two interviewed teachers mentioned Muslim students: each had only one Muslim student in the past.

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Appendix

Participant Information

Name (pseudonym)	Years of Teaching	School level	Subject	Experience teaching and/or having students from diverse backgrounds in school	Extra-curricular activity in relation to multicultural and global education	Degree
Hyeonsoo Kim	25 (My old coworker)	High	Ethics	Yes. A few foreign students in school, but not in his class	UNESCO club	Master
Kahee Ju	14 (My old coworker)	Middle	History	Yes. In the past and currently one student in her school	Multicultural program as a school activity	Master
Inyoung Hong	20 (My old coworker)	High	Geography	None	Multicultural and Global Education Club	Master
Kyoungjin Hong	0.5	Middle	History	Yes, one in current class	No	Bachelor
Hoonjun Na	12	High	History	Had students in school but does not know who they were	No	N/A
Seojee Kim	19	High	Social studies	Yes. She found out during semester that a student was of mixed Japanese and Korean ancestry	Her school is employing 'Global citizenship education' program by the school district. Having guest speakers about other cultures, etc.	Bachelor
Younghee Na	30	Middle	History	Yes, she knows about the multicultural students in school due to her duty as a head teacher	No	Master
Soojee Lim	21 (My old Coworker)	High	Geography	Not specifically mentioned. She figured out that some students are multicultural in the course of her teaching	UNESCO club, global citizenship education activity in school	Bachelor
Sunhee Oh	22	High	Social studies	In the previous school, she knew there were some students in her school	No	Bachelor
Suhee Kim	15	High	History	Currently Vietnamese student in her class. Had one Korean-Chinese student in her homeroom class	N/A	N/A
Sunhwa Yoon	15	High	Geography	Yes. In her school. she figured out a few based on her school experience. Not in her class	Global multicultural club	Master

Eunsoon Lim	10	Middle	Social studies, History	she knows one student (Japanese mom)	No	Bachelor
Yoor Hyeon	30	High	Ethics	Worked in multicultural school. Currently doesn't know	inviting multicultural instructors. Having students do activities related to various cultures	Ph.D
Yumin Park	1	Middle	Moral education	Yes, in her current homeroom class	No	Bachelor
Eunjoo Kwak	10	Middle	Social studies	Yes, in the current school. She was a homeroom teacher last year when she had multicultural students in class	N/A	Bachelor
Heemin Joo	17	Middle	Social studies	Yes, in the past	No	Bachelor
Heesu Lim	32	High	Geography	Yes, in the current school but not in her class	In the past, club activity about human rights	Bachelor
Young-ra Kim	13	Middle	Social studies	Yes, two to three students in the past (One whose mom is American. One who is Arabic)	club activity for multiculturalism; taking students to ME conference	Master, working on Ph.D
Minyoung Lee	10 (private school)	High	Geography	Currently one student whose parents are from Bangladesh	Inviting multicultural instructors as an extracurricular activity	Bachelor
Hyeonje Ha	30	Middle	Social Studies	Yes. In the past and currently two to three students in her class; more in her school	No	Bachelor

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