

An Examination of Community
Support Programs for Bicultural
Heritage Children in South Korea
— A Case Study of Family Centres in Gyeonggi
Province

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I. Introduction

Over recent years, the population of bicultural families and their children in South Korea have been steadily increasing (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2025). This demographic change has meant that bilingual education for immigrant and bicultural children has been in the spotlight for over a decade, drawing attention from both academia and the government in Korea.

While these stakeholders show increasing interests and acknowledge the importance of bilingual education for building a more successful multicultural society, the Korean community and the government have continued to prioritise the improvement of Korean language competence for immigrant and bicultural children rather than heritage language (HL) competence. This is because those stakeholders address the immediate challenges faced by these individuals in adjusting to Korean mainstream society. This perception is based on the belief that bicultural children need a stronger proficiency in the Korean language to effectively integrate into their community. Additionally, it is believed that a higher proficiency in the Korean language will also enhance their academic performance (Jeong & Shin, 2019; Won, 2014). Therefore, communities and the government have

predominantly offered support and resources to enhance Korean language competence for both migrant parents and bicultural heritage children.

However, it is not appropriate to weigh HL education against Korean language education since their HL holds equal importance for immigrant and bicultural heritage children. The development and maintenance of their HL can also have significantly positive effects for these children within the mainstream community, including a better understanding of their family backgrounds, fostering affirmative attitudes towards community integration, offering more opportunities and improved academic performance (Cummins, 1992; Kim, 2023). Thus, it is imperative not to underestimate the significance of maintaining HL for bicultural heritage children, given their distinctive family structure characterised by one parent of Korean origin and the other from a different cultural background within the context of a multiculturalising Korean society.

From this perspective, this study examines the current status of support programs and considers the future prospects for HL education among bicultural heritage children in South Korea. This is achieved through an in-depth examination and analysis of the content available on web pages associated with Family Centres, formerly known as Multicultural Family Support Centres.

The primary focus of this study is to identify the available HL support for bicultural children within their respective communities, and determine whether these are consistently provided by all Family Centres. The research questions for this study are presented below.

1. What HL support are available for bicultural children in the community?
2. How similar or different are the HL support programs offered across Family Centres?

II. Literature Review

1. Family centre

Multicultural Family Support Centres, or Family Centres, have been committed to promoting the smooth settlement and family life of multicultural families residing in Korea since 2006, and are of two primary types: general and integrated. The general centres conduct multicultural family support projects, while the integrated centres serve as comprehensive agencies promoting the well-being of healthy and multicultural families. The integrated centres engage in multicultural family support projects and offer services aligned with relevant legislation (Doosan Encyclopedia, 2023).

Family Centres offers a comprehensive array of services, including family and child education, counselling, interpretation and translation, information dissemination, and support for skill development. These services are designed to empower multicultural families, enabling their active participation in Korean society from an early stage. Their establishment is grounded in the goal of facilitating successful adaptation and fostering social and economic self-sufficiency (Doosan Encyclopedia, 2023).

This study uses the umbrella term 'Family Centre' to refer to establishments of this kind because most Multicultural Family Support Centres have been integrated with the Korean Institute for Healthy Family and are now known simply as Family Centre. It was felt that the simpler term offers a biased way to refer to the different types of facility.

2. Heritage language education in Korea

HL education has received increasing attention in the realm of linguistics and education. As societies become more diverse, the edu-

cation and continued practice of HL carry substantial importance for immigrant and bicultural children to maintain their healthy identities culturally and fostering multilingualism (Cummins, 2001; Park & Sarkar, 2007; TIRYAKIOL, 2023).

Bilingual education in Korea has been in practice since 2009, involving the training of instructors to support students from multicultural backgrounds. As noted by Won (2014), this initiative not only facilitates the adjustment of bicultural children to school life but also aims to preserve their ethnic heritage languages and cultures. It fosters a sense of identity, enabling individuals to bridge the gap between their ethnic heritage country and the host society, thereby contributing to harmonious coexistence (Mo, Lee, Hong, & Lim, 2015; Won, 2014). However, the bilingual education in Korea is still not so well developed or provided for those bicultural and immigrant children for their HL development and maintenance (Park, 2023).

For bicultural heritage children in Korea, achieving proficiency in the dominant language of the host society, such as Korean in a Korean-dominant environment, still is considered more imperative than the development of the HL (Jeong & Shin, 2019; Park, 2023). In contrast to multicultural countries like Canada, Australia, and China, Korean HL education seems to align more closely with the American approach. This emphasis on the dominant language mirrors its American counterpart, highlighting the national language as the primary language for immigrant families and children.

The importance and necessity of maintaining HL are acknowledged among migrant families worldwide (Cummins, 1992; Hong & Oh, 2017; Kim, 2023). Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the significance and necessity of HL maintenance for immigrant and bicultural children globally, the practical implementation of HL education remains a complex challenge. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the effort to maintain cultural identity and motivation for consistent investment in HL education, given the multifaceted exposures to diverse cultural and linguistic environments

(TIRYAKIOL, 2023).

Additionally, it is important to define the terminology between bilingual- and heritage language education. Bicultural heritage children in Korea can be described as early bilinguals who are exposed to two different language environments from birth, inheriting this linguistic diversity from their parents' distinct cultural backgrounds. This is because language acquisition is intricately linked to exposure time, with the language predominantly exposed becoming the child's first language. The other language may function not only as a second language but potentially as another first language, depending on exposure time. From this perspective, the terminology 'heritage language education' is utilised in this study, as the family background of bicultural heritage children is linguistically and culturally distinct from that of common families. Additionally, this term is deemed more appropriate for describing the language education provided to bicultural heritage children, in contrast to the widely used term 'bilingual education', which tends to focus more on second- or foreign language education within Korean society.

Hence, it is necessary to consider these distinct family backgrounds when designing and providing appropriate educational support and resources. In this respect, this study aims to identify what support and resources are available and appropriate to develop and maintain HL for bicultural heritage children in South Korea.

3. Relevant statistics

As noted earlier, the population of marriage migrants and their children from bicultural family backgrounds in Korea continues to increase. To provide a comprehensive overview of this trend, key statistics are presented below to support the subsequent analysis and offer insights into the empirical foundation of this study. As shown in Table 1, marriage migrants are distributed across all 17 administrative provinces in Korea. The largest proportion resides in Gyeonggi Prov-

ince (31.99%), followed by Seoul (17.57%), Incheon (7.41%), Gyeongnam (5.80%), and Chungnam (5.26%). The remaining provinces each account for less than 5% of the total population. Table 1 provides a detailed comparison of how marriage migrants, bicultural families, and their children are distributed across the different administrative regions.

Table 1. Proportion of marriage migrants, bicultural families and children by administrative districts (%)

| Administrative provinces ^a | Marriage migrants (Number of) | Bicultural families ^b (Number of) | Bicultural children (Number of) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Gyeonggi | 31.99(57,405) | 30.29(50,354) | 26.97(77,377) |
| Seoul | 17.57(31,555) | 15.89(26,414) | 12.53(35,954) |
| Incheon | 7.41(13,301) | 7.10(11,795) | 6.41(18,398) |
| Gyeongnam | 5.80(10,405) | 5.86(9,742) | 7.39(21,212) |
| Chungnam | 5.26(9,441) | 5.55(9,218) | 5.92(16,991) |
| Gyeongbuk | 4.39(7,877) | 4.85(8,058) | 6.00(17,231) |
| Busan | 4.07(7,295) | 4.35(7,228) | 4.50(12,904) |
| Jeonnam | 3.67(6,584) | 5.86(9,742) | 5.67(16,275) |
| Jeonbuk | 3.26(5,856) | 3.79(6,297) | 4.76(13,656) |
| Chungbuk | 3.23(5,793) | 3.55(5,899) | 3.87(11,113) |
| Daegu | 3.09(5,552) | 3.07(5,109) | 3.52(10,089) |
| Gangwon | 2.22(3,987) | 2.76(4,596) | 2.99(8,579) |
| Gwangju | 2.07(3,708) | 2.11(3,504) | 2.59(7,429) |
| Daejeon | 1.93(3,463) | 2.15(3,577) | 2.33(6,643) |
| Ulsan | 1.87(3,353) | 2.01(3,341) | 2.14(6,137) |
| Jeju | 1.69(3,032) | 1.78(2,965) | 1.82(5,234) |
| Sejong | 0.51(918) | 0.56(931) | 0.59(1,698) |
| In total | 100(179,525) | 100(166,200) | 100(286,920) |

(Statistics Korea and the Korean Ministry of the Interior and Safety, 2025)

Note. ^a. The order of presentation of the administrative provinces in Table 1 is decided by the number of marriage migrants. ^b. The term 'bicultural families' indicates that the family structure is formed by a partnership between a Korean citizen (excluding naturalised immigrants) and a foreigner.

Similar to the distribution of marriage migrants across provinces, the proportion of bicultural children follows a broadly parallel pattern. Gyeonggi Province has the largest share of bicultural children (26.97%), followed by Seoul (12.53%), Gyeongnam (7.39%), Incheon (6.41%), Gyeongbuk (6.00%), Chungnam (5.92%) and Jeonnam (5.67%). The remaining provinces each account for less than 5% of the total. Within this demographic context, the present study focuses exclusively on Gyeonggi Province, as it hosts the largest proportion of marriage migrants and bicultural children in South Korea.

Korean Chinese and Chinese individuals together constitute just over 40% of the total marriage-migrant population in Gyeonggi Province, with 24.03% originating from China and 16.08% from China of Korean descent. They are followed by Vietnamese migrants (17.25%), Japanese (8.89%), Filipino (6.05%), and Thai migrants (5.85%). The remaining groups, including those from Cambodia (1.76%), Mongolia (1.79%), Uzbekistan (1.48%), and Taiwan (1.08%), each comprise less than 2% of the total. Additionally, marriage migrants from other regions—including the United States, Europe, Canada, Oceania, and Africa—collectively account for 11.27%, a smaller proportion compared with those from China and Vietnam. The proportions of marriage migrants from the top countries of origin in Gyeonggi Province are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The Highest Proportions of Marriage Migrants in Gyeonggi Province by Countries or Regions of Origin (%)

| Countries/Regions | Proportion (Population) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| China | 24.03(13,822) |
| Vietnam | 17.25(9,921) |
| China(of Korean descents) | 16.08(9,248) |
| Japan | 8.89(5,110) |
| Philippines | 6.05(3,479) |
| Thailand | 5.85(3,365) |
| United States | 3.11(1,789) |

| | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Mongolia | 1.79(1,032) |
| Cambodia | 1.76(1,010) |
| Uzbekistan | 1.48(853) |
| Russia | 1.36(784) |
| Taiwan | 1.08(619) |
| Other countries | 11.27(6,483) |
| In total | 100(57,515) |

(Statistics Korea, 2025)

Overall, the majority of marriage migrants are concentrated in three metropolitan provinces—Gyeonggi, Seoul, and Incheon. In addition, most marriage migrants originate from Asian countries, as shown in Table 2. These statistics highlight the diverse demographic composition of marriage migrants and bicultural children, underscoring the need for HL support that accommodates a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, even though China, China of Korean descent, and Vietnam together account for the largest proportions. To respond effectively to this demographic landscape, expanding HL support programs in regions with significant marriage migrant populations will be essential. At the same time, it is important to recognise that all children have the right to access HL education within the mainstream community (Mo, et al., 2015), including those whose HL represents a minority compared with the major groups from China, Vietnam, and Japan. Accordingly, comprehensive HL programs should be made available for bicultural children across diverse linguistic backgrounds to support HL development and promote positive, healthy identity formation. In line with these considerations, the present study examines the HL support and programs currently available within the communities of Gyeonggi Province, where the largest proportion of marriage migrants and bicultural children reside.

III. The current study

The Korean government and local communities host 230 Family Centres, strategically positioned across all the administrative provinces and dedicated to serving the needs of marriage migrants, immigrant and bicultural families and their children. While government project-based programs form the core offering, these centres also demonstrate flexibility by creating customised programs catering to the unique requirements of their local communities. They play a pivotal role in facilitating integration and support for marriage migrants and bicultural families within Korean society.

As discussed above, this study focuses on Gyeonggi province among the 17 administrative provinces in Korea because the largest proportion of marriage migrants and bicultural families reside there. Gyeonggi comprises 31 administrative districts, including 28 local cities and three county towns. Notably, each of these administrative districts is equipped with a Family Centre, where a range of support services are provided. Table 3 shows the numbers of Family Centres in each administrative province.

Table 3. Number of Family Centres by administrative provinces in Korea

| | Administrative provinces | Number of centres | | Administrative provinces | Number of centres |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Gyeonggi | 31 | 10 | Chungbuk | 12 |
| 2 | Seoul | 26 | 11 | Incheon | 9 |
| 3 | Gyeongbuk | 24 | 12 | Daegu | 8 |
| 4 | Jeonnam | 22 | 13 | Daejeon | 5 |
| 5 | Gyeongnam | 19 | 14 | Gwangju | 5 |
| 6 | Gangwon | 18 | 15 | Ulsan | 5 |
| 7 | Chungnam | 15 | 16 | Jeju | 2 |
| 8 | Busan | 14 | 17 | Sejong | 1 |
| 9 | Jeonbuk | 14 | In total | | 230 |

(Family Centre¹ & Statistics Korea, 2025)

The selection of Gyeonggi Province was not based solely on population size. As the region with the largest number of marriage migrants and bicultural children, Gyeonggi represents a policy-intensive context in which multilingual needs and community-based educational responses are most actively negotiated. The province contains both large metropolitan cities and smaller municipalities, allowing for examination of HL provision across diverse administrative and socio-demographic settings within a single regional framework. In this sense, Gyeonggi Province functions as a representative and analytically meaningful case for exploring regional variation in community-level HL education support in South Korea.

To enhance methodological transparency, this study clearly defined its unit of analysis as the program information available on the official webpages of each Family Centre in Gyeonggi Province. Specifically, each centre's website was systematically examined by accessing the program search function, which allows users to review both ongoing and completed programs. The search period was restricted to programs conducted between 1 January and 31 October 2025.

All program listings within this timeframe were reviewed page by page to identify language-related programs. As Family Centres commonly use the term bilingual education, the analysis included programs categorized as bilingual or language-related; however, only programs that involved direct language instruction were selected for analysis. Programs focusing on cultural activities, parenting education, or general bilingual environment creation without explicit language-teaching components were excluded. No restrictions were imposed on specific languages or age groups. The identified programs were then systematically organised in a spreadsheet according to administrative district, type of language program, and mode of delivery. This process enabled descriptive comparison across centres with respect to the availability and scope of language

1 <https://www.liveinkorea.kr/portal/KOR/main/main.do>

education programs.

In this study, the term HL education is used analytically to refer to programs that support the maintenance and development of a child's familial or ancestral language. While Family Centres predominantly label such initiatives as bilingual education, the present analysis examines whether these programs functionally address HL maintenance for bicultural children, rather than relying on the terminology used by individual centres.

This study employs a comprehensive web-based descriptive analysis to explore the websites of Family Centres in Gyeonggi province, particularly HL classes for bicultural children. This method is a systematic approach used to analyse and describe digital content, including website materials and online sources.

To collect and analyse the data, an overview of the dataset was first provided, followed by a systematic categorisation according to each city and county town in Gyeonggi province. This involved identifying and organising the content based on predefined criteria and themes. This study focused on reviewing the webpages of the 31 Family Centres within Gyeonggi province, exploring HL support activities and programs for the year 2025 up to October.

IV. Findings

1. Descriptive statistics

Gyeonggi Province comprises 28 cities and three county towns, with the majority of marriage migrants concentrated in nine cities—Ansan, Suwon, Hwaseong, Bucheon, Siheung, Goyang, Pyeongtaek, Yongin and Seongnam—in descending order of population size. Together, these nine cities account for approximately 60% of the total marriage migrant population in the province. By contrast, the remain-

ing cities and three county towns each have proportions of less than 5%. The proportion of marriage migrants in each city and county town is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Proportion of Marriage Migrants in Gyeonggi Province by Each City or County Town (%)

| Cities / County towns | Proportion (Population) | Cities / Counties | Proportion (Population) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Ansan | 7.81(3,746) | Yangju | 2.01(964) |
| Suwon | 7.63(3,657) | Anseong | 1.88(903) |
| Hwaseong | 7.45(3,573) | Gunpo | 1.83(877) |
| Bucheon | 6.66(3,191) | Pocheon | 1.80(863) |
| Siheung | 6.30(3,022) | Gwangmyeong | 1.71(820) |
| Goyang | 6.16(2,953) | Hanam | 1.64(787) |
| Pyeongtaek | 5.97(2,862) | Icheon | 1.63(779) |
| Yongin | 5.75(2,755) | Dongducheon | 0.92(439) |
| Seongnam | 5.21(2,498) | Yeoju | 0.91(434) |
| Namyangju | 4.21(2,017) | Guri | 0.90(430) |
| Gimpo | 3.97(1,903) | Yangpyeong(gun) | 0.83(397) |
| Paju | 3.62(1,737) | Uiwang | 0.70(334) |
| Gwangju | 3.46(1,659) | Gapyeong(gun) | 0.66(315) |
| Uijeongbu | 2.75(1,318) | Yeoncheon(gun) | 0.33(160) |
| Osan | 2.61(1,249) | Gwacheon | 0.21(102) |
| Anyang | 2.48(1,191) | In total | 100(54,467) |

(Statistics Korea and the Korean Ministry of the Interior and Safety, 2023)

As shown in Table 4, Gyeonggi Province consists of 31 administrative districts, each operating a Family Centre within its respective city or county town. Although the distribution of marriage migrants is wide-ranging and uneven, every district maintains a Family Centre embedded in the local community. Accordingly, this study reviewed the webpages of all 31 Family Centres to examine the types and availability of HL support programs currently offered across the

province.

2. HL support by Family centres

The Danuri portal, operated by the Korean Institute for Healthy Family and supported by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, provides essential information about daily life in Korea as well as updates on multicultural communities. The website is available in 13 languages, enabling marriage migrants—including recent arrivals and those still adjusting to a Korean-dominant society—to access information about living in Korea and learning the Korean language and culture. However, it is important to note that if HL support were to be promoted and disseminated solely through Family Centre webpages, some migrant parents might still be unable to obtain these resources for themselves or their children due to limited digital literacy or restricted access to technological facilities.

The examination of HL program development across the 31 Family Centres revealed that 24 centres offered HL classes for bicultural heritage children, with programs generally targeting age groups ranging from preschool to high school students. In contrast, seven centres did not appear to provide any form of bilingual education within their facilities. The HL classes identified across the centres were delivered through two primary modalities: traditional in-person instruction and virtual online classes. However, the availability and accessibility of these classes varied considerably depending on the specific HLs offered and the operational circumstances of each centre. A detailed overview of HL provision by centre is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. HL classes provided by each Family Centre

| Cities / County towns | Heritage language classes | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| | | | | |
| Icheon | Chinese | Vietnamese | Japanese | Khmer |
| Anyang | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Japanese |
| Hanam | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Japanese |
| Hwaseong | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Japanese |
| Pyeongtaek | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Japanese |
| Goyang | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Russian |
| Uijeongbu | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Russian |
| Ansan | Chinese | | Vietnamese | Khmer |
| Suwon | Chinese | | Vietnamese | English |
| Gunpo | Chinese | | Japanese | English |
| Gwangmyeong | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Gwangju | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Dongducheon | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Osan | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Yongin | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Pocheon | Chinese | | Vietnamese | |
| Bucheon | Chinese | | Japanese | |
| Gwacheon | Chinese | | Japanese | |
| Anseong | Vietnamese | | Russian | |
| Namyangju | Chinese | | | |
| Siheung | Chinese | | | |
| Guri | Vietnamese | | | |
| Paju | Mongolian | | | |
| Seongnam | Mongolian | | | |
| Gapyeong | - | | | |
| Gimpo | - | | | |
| Uiwang | - | | | |
| Yangju | - | | | |
| Yangpyeong | - | | | |
| Yeosu | - | | | |
| Yeoncheon | - | | | |

Note. The list of cities and county towns is presented in order of the number of HL classes, followed by alphabetical order.

As shown in Table 5, the centres predominantly offer HL classes in Chinese and Vietnamese, with Japanese available in a smaller number of locations. In contrast, Russian, Khmer, Mongolian and English are offered only in a limited number of centres. Across the province, ten centres provide more than three HL classes, although the specific HLs differ according to each community's linguistic composition. The remaining centres typically offer only one or two HL classes, and several provide no HL instruction at all.

Within this broader landscape, the Icheon centre provides the most comprehensive HL program among all Family Centres examined. Unlike centres that typically offer only one or two HLs, the Icheon centre delivers four HL classes—Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese and Khmer—addressing the diverse linguistic needs of local bicultural families. This expanded offering includes support for smaller migrant communities, such as Cambodian families, who often have limited access to HL classes elsewhere in Gyeonggi Province. The breadth of HL provision in Icheon therefore reflects a stronger institutional commitment to meeting varied HL needs compared with other centres in the province.

Among the less commonly taught HLs, Icheon and Ansan offer Khmer classes, while Paju and Seongnam provide Mongolian language support. Additionally, the centres in Goyang, Uijeongbu, and Anseong offer Russian HL classes, although these programs are similarly limited in scale and serve relatively small groups of bicultural children. In Seongnam specifically, the Mongolian HL class was delivered four times over the course of one month (approximately once per week). Several other centres—including Gwangmyeong, Gwangju, Dongducheon, Osan, Yongin and Pocheon—offer only Chinese and Vietnamese classes. This pattern likely reflects the demographic characteristics of these cities, where marriage-migrant populations are smaller in size and linguistically concentrated within these two dominant groups. Consequently, HL provision in such locations tends to remain limited in scope and focused on meeting essential

community needs rather than delivering broader or more specialised HL instruction. Beyond HL instruction, several centres—including Suwon and Gunpo—also provide English classes as part of their bilingual education programs for bicultural and immigrant children who do not have Chinese, Vietnamese or Japanese heritage backgrounds. These classes typically serve children from the Philippines, Thailand and other minority-language backgrounds, and may include Korean children when enrolment numbers are low.

Complementing these language-focused offerings, many centres implement a range of bilingual family-support initiatives collectively referred to as the Bilingual Family Environment Creation Project. The prominence of this project provides important context for understanding how HL support is currently conceptualised within Family Centres. These initiatives are primarily designed to enrich bilingual home environments and strengthen family interaction, with a particular focus on supporting bicultural and immigrant parents.

Specifically, the programs offer parents strategies for using HLs at home, guidance on fostering effective bilingual communication, and practical techniques for creating a supportive multilingual family environment. Several centres also provide bilingual teacher-training sessions for marriage migrant parents, which function as mechanisms for community integration and, in some cases, as pathways to enhanced future employment opportunities. Participation in these programs may contribute to parental empowerment and family well-being; however, they are not structured as sustained or systematic language-learning programs for children. As a result, while the project plays a visible role in shaping bilingual practices at the family level, it offers limited direct support for children's ongoing HL development.

In addition, many Family Centres organise heritage-cultural events and facilitate self-help groups among migrant parents. Self-help groups bring together individuals who face similar challenges and engage in voluntary, non-professional peer support, addressing needs not typically met in formal institutional settings (Dictionary of

Psychology Terms, 2014). These cultural events and peer-support activities are generally one-off sessions designed to foster multicultural understanding and strengthen parent–child and family relationships. Notably, most centres demonstrate strong support for cultural events dedicated specifically to bicultural heritage children. However, while these activities contribute to cultural identity formation and family cohesion, they do not substitute for systematic HL instruction.

Taken together, the overall level of HL provision within communities remains limited. Most centres offer only one- or two-hour HL classes per week—insufficient for nurturing and sustaining children’s HL proficiency. In comparison, Canada’s HL support model provides approximately 25 hours of weekly HL activities (Won, 2014), illustrating the significant gap in support available to bicultural and immigrant children in Korea. These findings suggest an urgent need for Family Centres to expand HL programs by diversifying the HLs offered and by differentiating classes according to children’s developmental stages and proficiency levels. At the same time, this study highlights the wide range of programs supporting parents’ bilingual practices and family communication. This observation aligns with Mo et al. (2015), who emphasised the importance of strengthening family-based bilingual environments, though it contrasts with the recommendations in Oh (2018), who argued for greater institutional emphasis on child-centred HL instruction.

3. Focus on Korean language at the expense of HL

Marriage migrant parents consistently emphasise their desire for their children to acquire and maintain their HLs, recognising HL development as essential for sustaining bicultural identities and fostering emotional connections with their cultural origins. Prior studies further highlight that HL maintenance is viewed not only as a family-level cultural practice but also as a resource that can strengthen transnational ties between migrants’ home countries and Korea (Kim

& Lee, 2016; Mo et al., 2015; Won, 2014). Despite these aspirations, many parents report difficulties maintaining the HL within the home environment. These challenges are closely connected to the broader societal orientation toward prioritising Korean language proficiency as the primary educational and social goal for bicultural children.

Reflecting this societal priority, Family Centres across Korea provide extensive Korean language programs aimed at supporting marriage migrants, immigrants, and bicultural children. These programs vary across centres but share several common features. For adult learners, particularly marriage migrants and immigrant parents, all centres offer TOPIK preparation courses, as well as Korean language classes across graded levels. These classes cover pronunciation, grammar, speaking, listening, and workplace communication, and some centres incorporate elements of Korean popular culture—such as K-dramas, K-movies, and K-pop—to make the learning environment more accessible. However, the information available on webpages is often limited, making it difficult for potential learners to understand the specific content, structure, or expectations of each course.

For bicultural and immigrant children, Korean language programs are designed to support their integration into Korean society and, particularly, the school environment. Family Centres increasingly offer tailored classes for children who have lived abroad and require additional support to adapt to Korean school curricula. For children from language-minority backgrounds, acquiring sufficient proficiency in the dominant language is essential not only for academic achievement but also for preventing social isolation. This aligns with Jeong and Shin's (2019) argument that children from multicultural backgrounds require level-differentiated Korean language instruction to address their diverse linguistic starting points. In this sense, Korean language education plays a crucial role in promoting academic progress and reducing performance gaps between bicultural children and their monolingual Korean peers (Mo et al., 2015; Won, 2014).

While the importance of Korean proficiency is undeniable, the

predominance of Korean language education in Family Centres often results in HL support being overshadowed or structurally deprived. When children receive extensive Korean language input but have limited opportunities to access or develop their HL, their bilingual development becomes unbalanced, reducing their ability to maintain meaningful connections with their cultural heritage. Balanced bilingualism, by contrast, supports healthier identity formation, strengthens emotional bonds within bicultural families, and enhances children's long-term linguistic and psychological well-being. For this reason, HL education should not be treated as secondary but rather as a complementary component that coexists with Korean language learning.

Consequently, both Korean and HL education play indispensable and mutually reinforcing roles in the lives of bicultural and immigrant children. Korean proficiency facilitates academic success and social integration, while HL proficiency fosters cultural continuity, emotional security, and resilient identity formation. A more holistic approach—one that recognises the equal value of both languages—is essential for supporting the diverse linguistic and cultural realities of bicultural families in Korea.

V. Discussion & Conclusion

This study identified clear differences in the availability and scope of HL programs across Family Centres in Gyeonggi Province. From a HL perspective, bilingual education that does not explicitly prioritise sustained HL development risks marginalising children's linguistic needs, particularly in contexts where the dominant societal language quickly becomes dominant. As the analysis was limited to program information available on centre webpages, it did not examine institutional decision-making processes directly.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that regional variation in HL provision cannot be explained solely by the presence or absence of demand. Differences in local conditions, such as population size, resource availability, and the operational capacity of individual centres, may help to account for the uneven distribution of language education programs across regions. From this perspective, the findings reinforce the need to prioritise HL education over broader notions of bilingual education, particularly for bicultural heritage children whose opportunities for sustained HL development are limited outside the home.

Previous studies on heritage and bilingual language education in Korea have emphasised the importance of sustained and systematic support for children's language development, while noting that much of the existing discussion has remained at the level of policy discourse and institutional recognition rather than program-level implementation (e.g. Won, 2014; Kim, 2023; Park & Choi, 2024). In comparison, the findings of the current study provide a more concrete account of how such discussions are reflected in practice at the community level. While earlier research has largely addressed the need for HL support in normative or policy-oriented terms, this study demonstrates that the actual availability and scope of language education programs vary considerably across local Family Centres.

When considered alongside the demographic trends outlined earlier in this study, the analysis suggests that the provision of HL programs across Family Centres does not consistently align with the distribution and concentration of bicultural populations.

HL-related programs tend to be planned and implemented at the centre level, resulting in considerable variation in program focus and scope. In many cases, greater emphasis appears to be placed on activities involving migrant parents and family-based bilingual support, while fewer programs offer structured language instruction delivered by trained educators. This pattern indicates a prevailing focus on family-level cultural and linguistic maintenance rather than the systematic

development of child-centred HL education.

While the bilingual family environment project plays a central role in supporting bilingual practices within families, its strong emphasis on parental guidance and home environments helps explain this orientation toward family-level support. In this sense, the project highlights the institutional priorities that shape the scope and form of HL provision observed in this study.

Among the centres examined, HL programs were operated by 24 out of 31 centres and were largely concentrated on Chinese and Vietnamese, reflecting the linguistic backgrounds of major marriage-migrant groups in Gyeonggi Province. In addition, HL programs were predominantly targeted at school-aged children, with relatively limited provision for preschool-aged learners. This finding resonates with earlier research that has noted a similar emphasis on older children despite the recognised importance of early bilingual development. Although previous studies have reported strong parental motivation to participate in language-related programs (Paola et al., 2023; Kim, 2023), the irregular scheduling and limited continuity of HL provision suggest that bicultural children may not always have consistent opportunities to develop or maintain their HLs.

In this context, bilingual education initiatives within Family Centres need to move beyond general family-based support and place greater emphasis on structured, child-centred HL instruction delivered by trained educators. This shift would require reframing existing bilingual programs to place HL development at their core, rather than treating HL use as a secondary outcome of family-oriented support activities. Such a shift would enable Family Centres to play a more substantive role in supporting the long-term linguistic development of bicultural children.

In conclusion, these findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how HL education support for bicultural children is currently implemented at the community level in South Korea. Rather than arguing simply for an increase in the number of programs, this study

highlights how the current configuration of bilingual and HL-related initiatives reflects broader institutional priorities and constraints within community-based support systems. By providing a detailed, program-level overview of HL support within Family Centres, this study extends existing policy-oriented discussions by illustrating how HL education is implemented and constrained in everyday community contexts. These findings point to the need to expand both the accessibility and linguistic diversity of HL programs and to provide developmentally appropriate support for younger children. Strengthening HL education within Korea's increasingly multicultural context will require coordinated and systematic efforts involving Family Centres, local communities, and governmental bodies. In this regard, the study offers practical insights for stakeholders seeking to enhance the cultural and linguistic well-being of bicultural heritage children.

One limitation of this study lies in its restricted scope. Although there are 230 Family Centres across South Korea, the analysis focused solely on 31 centres in Gyeonggi Province due to time and resource constraints. While direct communication with program coordinators could have yielded more detailed insights, the present study was intentionally designed as a web-based descriptive analysis to examine publicly accessible representations of HL provision, which themselves play an important role in shaping parental access and institutional visibility. Future research could address these limitations by examining a larger number of Family Centres across different provinces and incorporating direct communication with program coordinators to obtain more accurate and up-to-date information.

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한국의 이중문화 계승어 아동을 위한 지역사회 지원 프로그램에 대한 고찰

— 경기도 가족센터 사례를 중심으로

김지영

본 연구는 한국의 이중문화 가정 자녀를 대상으로 한 계승어(heritage language, HL) 교육 지원 프로그램의 현황과 향후 발전 가능성을 탐색하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 한국에서 이중문화 가정의 수가 지속적으로 증가함에 따라(여성가족부, 2025), 계승어 능력의 유지와 발달은 아동의 문화적·언어적 정체성 형성, 자아존중감 증진, 그리고 한국 사회 적응을 지원하는 데 점점 더 중요한 요소로 자리매김하고 있다. 본 연구는 웹 기반 기술적·내용 분석을 활용하여, 결혼이민자 인구가 가장 많은 경기도 내 31개 가족센터의 웹 페이지에서 정보를 수집·분석하였다. 연구 결과, 31개 센터 중 24개 센터가 HL 지원 프로그램을 운영하고 있었으며, 나머지 7개 센터에서는 관련 서비스가 제공되지 않는 것으로 나타났다. 또한 현재 제공되는 HL 프로그램은 주로 중국어와 베트남어에 집중되어 있으며, 이는 해당 지역의 주요 결혼이민자 집단의 언어적 배경을 반영하는 것이다. 결론적으로, 본 연구는 외국인 부모의 HL과 문화를 학습하고 유지할 수 있는 기회가 이중문화 아동에게 여전히 제한적임을 확인함으로써 HL 교육의 질적 향상을 도모하고자 한다. 특히 비교적 지원이 적은 언어권의 HL을 사용하는 아동들은 추가적인 제약을 겪을 가능성이 있어, 보다 다양한 HL 교육 접근성과 언어적 다양성 확대의 필요성이 강조된다. 궁극적으로 본 연구의 결과는 지역사회 및 정부 차원의 이해관계자들이 HL 교육의 효과를 극대화하기 위한 방향을 모색하는 데 유의미한 통찰을 제공할 것이다.

핵심어 다문화가정, 이중문화가정, 계승어, 계승어 교육, 가족센터

ABSTRACT

An Examination of Community Support Programs for Bicultural Heritage Children in South Korea

— A Case Study of Family Centres in Gyeonggi Province

Kim, Jiyoung

This study examines the current status and future prospects of support programs that facilitate heritage language (HL) education among bicultural children in South Korea. As the number of bicultural families continues to rise (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2025), maintaining HL proficiency has become increasingly vital for fostering cultural and linguistic identity, promoting self-esteem, and supporting children's adaptation to Korean society. To explore HL maintenance efforts, this study employs a web-based descriptive and content analysis approach, collecting and analysing information from the webpages of 31 Family Centres located in Gyeonggi Province, the region with the largest population of marriage migrants. The findings indicate that 24 out of the 31 centres offered HL support programs, while the remaining seven centres did not provide any related services. In addition, the HL programs currently offered are predominantly focused on Chinese and Vietnamese, reflecting the linguistic backgrounds of the major marriage migrant groups in the region. In conclusion, the study aims to contribute to the enhancement of HL education for bicultural children by identifying the limited opportunities available for them to learn and maintain the HL and culture of their foreign-born parent. These findings suggest that children whose HL belongs to less commonly supported language groups may face further constraints, highlighting the need to expand both the accessibility and linguistic diversity of HL education within South Korea's rapidly diversifying multicultural context. Ultimately, the study offers valuable insights for community and governmental stakeholders seeking to maximise the benefits of HL education.

KEYWORDS Multicultural family, bicultural family, heritage language, heritage language education, family centres