

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Diversity and the Multilingual Turn in Korean Language Education

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I. Introduction

Diversity¹ has become a defining feature of contemporary social life, permeating nearly all domains, including education in general and language teaching in particular. Korean language classrooms are no exception, especially as the global popularity of learning Korean has surged in recent years. This trend has brought a marked increase in learners with diverse sociocultural, linguistic, and ethno-racial backgrounds. As the multilingual and multicultural nature of language classrooms becomes more prominent, diversity operates at multiple levels of classroom dynamics, giving rise to increasingly complex language practices (Scarino, 2022).

In response to this expanding heterogeneity, Korean language education requires a fundamental shift in both the nature and aims of language teaching and learning—from a narrow focus on developing proficiency in Korean to more multilingual and intercultural orientations. Such a shift involves reconceptualizing language not simply as a linguistic code but as a tool for exchanging meaning through an

1 In this study diversity is defined as “characteristics that can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realised, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences” (OECD, 2010).

understanding of meaning-making processes (Kramsch, 2006) across multiple languages and cultural contexts. Accordingly, the goals of language learning expand from the acquisition of discrete linguistic skills to the development of learners' capacities for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication (Leung & Scarino, 2016).

This pedagogical transformation also necessitates a corresponding shift in teacher quality, frequently identified as one of the most critical determinants of teaching effectiveness (Hattie, 2009; McBer, 2000; Sammons & Bakum, 2011), given its strong influence on student performance (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The significance of teacher quality is even more pronounced in diverse classrooms, where the presence of students with varied backgrounds renders teaching more complex and multifaceted.

Among the multiple dimensions of teacher quality, this study foregrounds teachers' attitudes toward student diversity. Ladson-Billings emphasizes the importance of teachers' beliefs about their students, arguing that it is problematic when teachers working with diverse learners view effective teaching primarily as a matter of "what to do," when the more fundamental issue lies in "how we think." She contends that teachers' attitudes toward their students inevitably manifest in pedagogical practices and that culturally responsive pedagogies require transforming how teachers think about those who differ from themselves, not merely modifying how they teach (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Against this backdrop, this study examines how Korean language educators perceive increasing diversity in their classrooms, the attitudes they hold, and the ways they respond to student diversity. It highlights how teachers' life experiences and personal understandings of diversity shape their interpretations of the contemporary realities of heterogeneous classrooms. It also explores how they navigate student diversity in their instructional practices and identifies the qualities they believe are essential for teachers working in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts. In doing so, the study underscores

the importance of attending to teachers' personal interpretations of diversity and of fostering self-awareness as a foundational element for engaging productively with diverse student populations.

II. Theoretical backgrounds

A substantial body of research has examined mainstream teachers' attitudes toward language diversity, particularly in relation to language-minority students. In the U.S. context, Clair (1995) found that teachers' beliefs about language-minority learners were frequently grounded in misinformation. Similarly, Williams, Whitehead, & Miller (1972), in their study of public-school teachers, identified a strong relationship between teachers' attitudes toward students' linguistic backgrounds and their academic expectations. Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning (1997), drawing on data from teachers in three U.S. states—Arizona, Utah, and Virginia—reported that the region of employment, prior experience with language-minority children, the attainment of a graduate degree, and formal professional training were all associated with more positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity. Notably, they found that teachers in Arizona held the most positive attitudes, followed by those in Utah and Virginia.

Research on teachers' perceptions of student language diversity has also been carried out in a range of international contexts (e.g., Rowan, Kline, & Mayer, 2017, for Australia; Ağırdağ, Jordens, & Van Houtte, 2014, for Belgium; Young, 2014, for France; Gkaintartzi, Kiliari, & Tsokalidou, 2015, for Greece; Gu et al., 2019, for Hong Kong; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2017, for Ireland; Du Plessis & Louw, 2008, for South Africa). These studies similarly highlight how teachers' attitudes are shaped by sociopolitical contexts, school environments, and levels of professional preparation.

In South Korea, comparatively fewer studies have addressed is-

sues of language diversity. Lew and Choi (2022), examining the beliefs of nine early childhood educators, found a prevalent monolingual, Korean-centered ideology and a deficit-oriented stance toward multilingualism. Their research concludes that “schools for young children operate under a deficit orientation and promote a monolingual ideology that disadvantages immigrant children and robs them of their full potential to become multilingual and multiliterate” (Lew and Choi, 2022: 1206). They further report that teachers lacked training for working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners and that schools provided minimal institutional support or resources. These findings align with Noh’s (2015) study of Korean middle-school teachers, who tended to view linguistically and culturally diverse students as lacking academic language proficiency and as being passive in class, even when students demonstrated intermediate to advanced proficiency in Korean.

In contrast, Park, Chu, & Martin (2016), investigating primary and secondary science teachers in South Korea, found generally positive attitudes toward culturally and linguistically diverse students, although some deficit perspectives persisted—particularly regarding students’ academic capabilities and integration into the school community. Teachers expressed notably less positive attitudes toward the parents of diverse students. The study also identified several factors associated with more positive teacher attitudes: younger age, teaching in primary school, prior experience teaching diverse students, studying a language other than Korean, opportunities for overseas travel or residence, and participation in professional development focused on diversity.

Kim & Rundgren, examining thirteen South Korean teachers working with students from multicultural backgrounds across three schools, reported that teachers perceived these students as “struggl[ing] academically, experienc[ing] emotional difficulties, suffer[ing] economic hardship, and generally lack[ing] parental support and nurturing” (Kim & Rundgren, 2019: 1339). However, the

study found that teachers' professional knowledge and instructional strategies were insufficient to respond effectively to such challenges. Moreover, teachers' interpretations of the causes of students' struggles were often ambivalent: some attributed difficulties solely to students' personal traits or parental neglect, overlooking the potential impact of multicultural backgrounds. The study also demonstrated that school culture played a crucial role in shaping inclusive learning environments and supporting teachers' inclusive practices, underscoring its importance in promoting educational equity.

Collectively, while some studies document unfavorable attitudes among mainstream teachers—particularly in contexts where teachers lack adequate linguistic preparation—others reveal more positive orientations toward student diversity. Across these studies, a consistent theme emerges: teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity, coupled with appropriate training and institutional resources, constitute critical components of effective teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. Nevertheless, despite the extensive global literature on language diversity in education, research focused specifically on the Korean as a second/ foreign language context remains limited.

III. Research Methodology and Participants

Four Korean language teachers working across diverse instructional contexts participated in this study. All participants were female. Immigrant female teachers in North America are likely to have experienced discrimination and cultural maladjustment as social minorities, and this 'history of life' would have been the basis for forming a more empathetic and inclusive attitude toward student diversity. The fact that the study's participants were four female teachers implies that the research results cannot be generalized to all Korean teachers. Their high cross-cultural sensitivity may be a special manifestation due to

their personal background, and different results may appear in teachers in the educational field in Korea or in other regions.

Purposeful sampling was employed to ensure representation of multiple teaching settings, including university-level Korean language courses, high school credit courses, community-based language programs, and after-school instructional contexts. Participants were recruited through personal and professional networks. This sampling method has a limitation in that it does not reflect the diversity of teacher groups. In order to compensate for the limitations of sampling, it is necessary to pay attention to the ‘transferability of qualitative research’. Unlike the generalization of quantitative research, the value of this study is to capture the ‘in-depth semantic structure’ in which teachers respond to diversity in the special context of North America.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in Korean via online videoconferencing platforms, audio- and video-recorded with participants’ consent, and subsequently translated into English. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Following data collection, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. The analytic process involved generating initial codes, identifying patterns of meaning across the data, grouping these patterns into themes and subthemes, and examining the relationships among the codes and themes relevant to the research questions. Brief profiles of the four participating teachers are presented below.

Jiwon,² in her early forties at the time of the interview, had six years of Korean language teaching experience. She began her career teaching first-year Korean at a community college in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). After three years, she moved on to teach undergraduate Korean courses at two universities in the GTA while pursuing a Ph.D. in second language acquisition. She has taught Korean

2 All names are pseudonyms.

at all proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced. Jiwon is a first-generation immigrant who came to Canada for graduate studies.

Seohee, in her late twenties, first began teaching Korean in 2003 at a student-run language exchange club that she and her peers established at a university in New York State. A 1.5-generation immigrant to the United States at age 15, she initially entered Korean language teaching informally and without formal training. Her experiences in the language exchange club sparked an interest in teaching Korean, leading her to complete a semester-long course on Korean as a second or foreign language. She subsequently taught non-credit Korean classes for adult learners at a community center in the same state. Her students have ranged in age from 13 to their mid-50s, with the majority in their late twenties to early thirties. She also taught a high school summer course during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Minseo has taught Korean to students from junior kindergarten to grade 12 in the GTA for over thirty years. She has long served as an instructor for the Toronto District School Board's International Languages Program, offering Korean as an after-school course delivered 2.5 hours per week. Additionally, she has taught Korean at a Korean school affiliated with a local Korean church. Trained as an elementary education major in Korea, she continued to teach Korean after immigrating to Canada. However, she has never held a full-time teaching position in the Korean language field and, at one time, worked at four schools simultaneously due to the scarcity of full-time opportunities.

Eunbi, in her early thirties, taught Korean for seven years in New Jersey. Although professionally employed as a mathematics and science teacher, she simultaneously taught Korean as a high school credit course for students in grades 10 to 12. She initially joined the program as an assistant teacher to gain additional teaching experience, which subsequently motivated her to pursue formal training in Korean language education. The credit course met for 3.5 hours once per week. Eunbi also taught a two-hour weekly Korean class at a community center. She is a 1.5-generation immigrant who moved to

the United States at age 13.

IV. Research findings

This section presents the research findings, organized into several subsections. The first subsection outlines the increasing diversity that participants have observed in their classrooms and the factors they believe contribute to this shift. The second subsection examines the attitudes that the teachers hold toward student diversity. The subsequent two subsections describe the challenges teachers face when instructing culturally and linguistically diverse learners and the strategies they employ to address these challenges. The final subsection discusses participants' views on the qualities and professional roles necessary for teachers working with diverse student populations.

1. Increasing Diversity in Korean Language Classrooms

All four teachers reported a noticeable increase in the diversity of their students over the course of their teaching careers, and in some cases, compared to their own experiences as learners. Among the participants, Minseo, who has the longest teaching career, described a significant demographic shift. When she began teaching thirty years ago, her classes consisted almost exclusively of students with Korean heritage. In contrast, her current classes include mixed-heritage students, as well as students with Chinese, Arabic, Filipino, and white backgrounds.

Jiwon also observed increased diversity in her students' cultural and ethnic/racial backgrounds, as well as in gender distribution. Whereas she previously taught mostly study-abroad students from China, her classes now include learners from the Philippines, Malaysia, Nigeria, India, various Arabic-speaking countries, and even Lux-

embourg, in addition to local white students. She also noted a shift from predominantly female enrollment to a more gender-balanced student body.

Similarly, Eunbi described her current student population as too diverse to identify any single dominant group. When she first began teaching seven years earlier, most of her students were from Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, or China. Reflecting on her own high school years, she recalled that Korean language courses at her school were previously filled almost entirely with Korean-heritage students. She also reported diversity in students' motivations, prior learning experiences, and proficiency levels. Whereas interest in K-pop or K-dramas once served as the primary motivation for enrollment, she now sees more students drawn to Korean language, culture, and history for broader reasons.

Although Seohee noted that her earlier teaching context—a language exchange club—had been more diverse than her current community-based Korean classes, she nevertheless reported increased diversity over time. Her student population has expanded from primarily East Asian learners to include South Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Filipino, Malaysian), Middle Eastern, and Black students.

Across all four interviews, the participants identified the Korean Wave (Hallyu)—the global popularity of Korean pop culture—as the primary factor contributing to this growing diversity. Seohee commented that K-pop fandom, once limited to relatively small groups, has now become widespread. In the past, even cultural events were insufficient to generate sustained interest, whereas now learners proactively seek Korean language and culture courses without additional promotional efforts. Similarly, Minseo attributed the growing diversity to Korea's rising global stature, stating, "As Korea's status rises in the world, more people are becoming interested in learning Korean."

According to a 2024 survey of overseas Korean Wave,³ the favor-

3 Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Apr-08 2025 Press Releases

ability of Korean language was very high at 75.4% after experiencing Korean culture, and the Korean language was ranked as the item with the highest “willingness to recommend” (78.5%) among Korean Wave contents. The report by the Modern Language Association (Lusin, Peterson, Sulewski, & Zafer, 2023). also proves that despite the overall decline in the number of major foreign language students in the U.S. between 2016 and 2021, the number of Korean language students alone showed a phenomenal growth of 38.3%. These figures are strong evidence that the “rapid diversification of learner backgrounds” experienced by teachers is consistent with actual data.

2. Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Student Diversity

All four teachers expressed generally positive attitudes toward the increasing diversity within their student populations. Their positive perceptions were grounded in two primary considerations. First, the teachers believed that diversity enriches the classroom by introducing multiple perspectives and creating expanded learning opportunities for all learners. For example, Jiwon emphasized that diversity is beneficial because students bring unique experiences and viewpoints, which foster more active classroom engagement. She illustrated this with an incident related to teaching the loanword 아르바이트 [aleu-baitue] (from German arbeiten), meaning “part-time job” in Korean. She recounted:

“When I was teaching the word part-time job in class 1000 recently, I don’t know why, but Koreans use 아르바이트 for a part-time job, and the word is from German. So, I asked a student from Luxembourg who can speak German if the word is German. Then he said yes, but it means just work, not part-time. When something is presented in this way, various perspectives can be brought into the classroom. So, I think diversity is good in that sense.”

Jiwon regularly encourages students to share personal experiences or cultural practices. For instance, after explaining that Koreans typically do not say anything when someone sneezes, she asked students what expressions are used in their cultures. Her students, in turn, shared culturally specific practices. She similarly used Lunar New Year as a topic to prompt cross-cultural comparisons. According to her, incorporating discussions about not only Korean culture but also students' own cultures often increases motivation and generates lively classroom discussions.

Eunbi likewise emphasized that exposure to multiple cultures enables students to learn about their own cultural practices by comparing and contrasting them with those of others. She noted that some students initially assumed Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures were identical but, through classroom discussions, came to recognize important differences. Seohee similarly appreciated having students from diverse backgrounds, stating that such diversity provided her with opportunities to learn about other cultures. In particular, she explained that she gained insights into how to approach students from various cultural backgrounds and how to avoid misunderstandings arising from cultural differences.

The second reason teachers valued increased diversity concerned its positive influence on both students and teachers of Korean background. Both Minseo and Eunbi noted that the enthusiasm of non-Korean students for learning Korean often motivated Korean-heritage students. When Korean-background students observed peers with no Korean heritage actively engaging in Korean language learning, their own attitudes toward Korean tended to become more positive and their motivation increased. Minseo shared an anecdote about a student of Chinese background whose Korean proficiency surpassed that of the Korean-background students in the class. Observing this dynamic, the Korean-background students felt challenged and worked harder to improve their Korean. She expressed strong appreciation for having Chinese students in her classes, stating that the presence

of non-Korean learners demonstrated that Korea had become “powerful” enough to attract others to learn its language. As she put it, “a language is closely linked to the power of a nation.”

Eunbi also remarked that non-Korean students’ interest in learning Korean language and culture made her feel proud of her heritage.

3. Challenges Associated With Teaching Diverse Learners

Although all participants expressed positive attitudes toward the growing diversity in their Korean language classrooms, they also emphasized that such diversity introduces new pedagogical challenges. As their student populations diversify, teachers perceive a heightened need for more extensive lesson preparation and ongoing professional growth. Eunbi explained, “Teaching is more of a challenge.... Now we need to learn more about children’s interests, and teachers need to study more. I always try to find ways to improve myself.” She framed diversity as a “good challenge,” noting that it pushes her to learn things she “did not know before.”

Minseo, while not viewing diversity negatively, described increased preparation time and linguistic challenges, particularly the need to use English in class:

“I must use English because some of my students don’t understand Korean at all. There are even some Korean kids who can’t understand Korean.... I wish I could speak English more fluently... It would be great for me to be perfectly bilingual.... On the other hand, it’s not good to use this much English when I teach Korean. Mixing both English and Korean must not be good. I feel many conflicts like this.”

When she began teaching 30 years ago, her students were exclusively Korean Canadian and had some listening comprehension, enabling her to teach entirely in Korean. The linguistic diversity of her current classes, however, requires the use of English. Among the

four teachers, she was the only one who expressed discomfort with her English proficiency—an experience common among many first-generation Korean immigrants in North America. Unlike the other participants, who were younger when they arrived and received part of their education in North America, Minseo had neither postgraduate training nor early exposure to English, which may explain her concerns.

Her belief that mixing languages is pedagogically unsound reflects the traditional “target-language-only” ideology, similar to English-only policies in ESL classrooms (Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). This perspective has been widely critiqued (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012; Wright, 2004), and substantial evidence shows the benefits of students’ L1 use in L2 instruction (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins, 2007; Horst, White, & Bell, 2010; Lucas & Katz, 1994; Mori, 2014). Research suggests that limited formal training may correlate with negative attitudes toward L1 use (Karathanos, 2009; Skilton-Sylvester, 2003), providing context for Minseo’s stance.

In contrast, Jiwon—with postgraduate training in second language acquisition—articulated a more flexible view. She rejects any “Korean-only” policy, emphasizing communication:

“Some teachers use only Korean.... I don’t necessarily do that. When I can’t communicate, I clarify in English. There is no such thing as a Korean-only policy in my classroom.... I think it is okay to use Chinese among Chinese students.... Beginner students can even write in their native language.”

Her belief that L1 is “a resource” aligns with Hornberger’s (1990) language-as-resource orientation. Jiwon’s own experiences as a non-native English speaker and as a linguistic minority in North America also shape her stance. She said, “I came as an international student... I wanted my voice to be heard.” Her choice to specialize in second language writing reflects her belief that L2 writing has inherent mean-

ing and value, and this understanding informs her openness to students' L1 use.

Eunbi's experience contrasts with Jiwon's; she noted that she "never had to think about diversity" until she became a teacher responsible for diverse learners. As a well-adjusted 1.5-generation immigrant who succeeded academically and professionally, diversity had not been salient in her personal life. Only after facing diversity-related challenges in classrooms did she develop positive attitudes toward diversity as a constructive challenge. Jiwon and Eunbi's cases both illustrate how teachers' life histories influence their understandings of diversity.

Diversity also introduces interpersonal and sociocultural complexities in classroom interaction. Seohee and Jiwon, who teach upper-level courses that rely heavily on discussion, identified certain topics as potentially problematic. Seohee described several "taboo" topics, including religion, politics, gender, and race. She shared an episode involving a white student who mentioned having a Korean husband, which shocked a Japanese classmate encountering an openly gay peer for the first time:

"The Japanese student was very shocked.... After class, I asked the white student if he was okay. He said he was used to it."

Because her class is online due to COVID-19, students join from multiple countries, which has increased diversity and the likelihood of sensitive encounters. She also noted tensions such as political disagreements between Chinese and Japanese students, conflicts during domestic election seasons, and religious disputes. She further observed subtle racial discrimination, such as Asian students preferring not to work with Hispanic classmates.

Eunbi echoed these concerns, noting that although she had not witnessed overt racial issues in her Korean class, she observed racial jokes and microaggressions in her other courses—remarks framed as

humor but potentially offensive to recipients.

4. Pedagogical Strategies for Addressing Classroom Diversity

All participants described various strategies they employ to address issues arising from student diversity in their classrooms. Three major approaches emerged from the interview data.

The first strategy is the avoidance of taboo or potentially divisive topics at the political dimension. Although Seohee does not explicitly prohibit students from raising sensitive issues in her discussion-based course, she responds minimally when such topics arise. By not reinforcing the conversation, she allows students to recognize on their own that certain subjects are not appropriate for the classroom context. Jiwon adopts a similar approach. She described an instance in which students debated how to refer to Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong identities in Korean. Students from Taiwan and Hong Kong preferred to call themselves Taiwanese and Hong Kong people in Korean, while students from China objected. Jiwon explained:

“The issue was too dangerous to control because it was too political. I used the strategy of avoidance. I just let them know the relevant Korean words and did not make any comments on the political issue.”

The second strategy is the intentional incorporation of diversity into the lesson at the socio-cultural dimension. Jiwon provided an example of adapting a study on heterosexual marriage in a class that included LGBTQ students. Recognizing that the content did not apply equally to all learners, she supplemented the textbook images with photos of both heterosexual and gay couples to present a more inclusive representation. She also made use of Chinese characters when teaching Chinese-speaking students, finding that this approach enhanced their comprehension of Korean. In addition, she attempted to

offer more gender-neutral vocabulary when possible—for example, providing 애인 (“lover”) alongside 남자친구 and 여자친구.

All four teachers reported drawing on students’ lived experiences and cultural practices to build more inclusive classroom environments. For instance, after teaching about Korean New Year traditions, they asked students to describe how they celebrate New Year’s Day in their own cultures. Such activities enabled students to compare cultural practices, develop cultural awareness, and consider perspectives beyond their own.

The third strategy is to differentiate the teaching contents and methods at the linguistic dimension. Eunbi adapts her teaching to accommodate varied proficiency levels, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds. After conducting a student survey about their motivations for learning Korean, she adjusted her materials accordingly. She now provides assignment choices that allow students to select topics aligned with their interests and uses rotating activity stations to encourage collaborative, student-centered learning rather than relying solely on lecture-based instruction.

Similarly, Minseo’s online class—implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic—demonstrated differentiated instruction. She divided her class into three groups based on Korean proficiency, with one group typically composed of Korean-background students with stronger listening skills. She prepared separate PowerPoint slides for each group, which students reviewed before class. During the class session, she met with each group in separate time slots. According to her, students responded positively to the structure and learned more effectively with materials tailored to their needs.

Together, these strategies reflect the teachers’ efforts to create more responsive, inclusive, and flexible learning environments for increasingly diverse Korean language classrooms.

5. Essential Teacher Qualities and Professional Roles in Diverse Classrooms

The participants identified three key qualities or roles that they believe teachers must possess in linguistically and culturally diverse educational contexts.

First, cultural self-reflectivity or self-awareness emerged as an essential quality. Eunbi emphasized that teachers must recognize that both teachers and students bring their own languages, cultures, and assumptions into the classroom. Her view aligns with Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon (2019), who argue that teachers must be reflective not only about their own “experiences, attitudes, opinions, preconceived notions and beliefs on cultural and socioeconomic differences” but also about “the experiences, identities and sense of belonging of their students as they grow, develop and change over time” (p. 24). Eunbi added that she constantly reminds herself that her assumptions may be inaccurate, noting that what is considered normative in Korean culture—such as showing deference to teachers—may not be taken for granted in her students’ cultures. When students behave in ways that appear disrespectful, she refrains from assuming confrontation and instead asks questions to understand their intentions.

Seohee likewise highlighted the importance of teachers becoming aware of potential bias or prejudice. She acknowledged that previous experiences with certain groups sometimes lead her to expect that a student might withdraw from a course. However, she intentionally resists forming such assumptions and strives to approach each student “with a blank slate,” free from preconceived notions.

Second, the teachers emphasized the importance of actively learning about students’ backgrounds, needs, and strengths. Jiwon noted that as her classes became more diverse, she needed to make greater efforts to understand students with cultural or linguistic backgrounds unfamiliar to her. While she already possesses a strong understanding of learners with Korean backgrounds, this is not the case

for those from other contexts. She believes that effective feedback depends on understanding students' specific strengths and weaknesses: "I think it is good to give my students feedback on their weak points." For example, she tracks pronunciation errors during student presentations and provides guidance on how to improve. To avoid embarrassing individual students, her verbal feedback is directed to the entire class, whereas more specific comments are given in writing when uploading student scores online. She also acknowledged that she tends to give more pronunciation-related feedback to non-Korean students than to Korean-heritage students due to differences in prior exposure to Korean.

Third, the participants highlighted the importance of pedagogical flexibility and the ability to adopt multilingual-inclusive teaching practices. Given the increasingly heterogeneous nature of their classrooms, the teachers noted that effective instruction requires adapting teaching methods, materials, and communicative approaches to accommodate learners with different linguistic repertoires, cultural backgrounds, and proficiency levels. This includes modifying instructional materials, offering differentiated tasks, allowing alternative modes of expression, and—when appropriate—making strategic use of students' L1 as a resource for learning.

For example, Eunbi adapted her materials and assignments based on students' motivations and learning preferences, incorporating rotating activity stations and choice-based tasks to support diverse learning styles. Similarly, MInseo used differentiated instructional materials and grouped students by proficiency when teaching online, allowing her to tailor content and pacing more effectively. Jiwon, informed by her training in second language acquisition, adopted a multilingual stance, permitting students to use English or their L1 to support comprehension and participation.

Together, these practices illustrate the need for teachers to demonstrate flexibility in instructional design and an openness to multilingual ways of learning. Such competence aligns with research em-

phasizing that multilingual-inclusive pedagogies can enhance learner agency, facilitate deeper engagement, and allow diversity to function as a resource rather than a barrier in language classrooms.

V. Discussion

In contexts characterized by increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, language teaching has inevitably become more multilingual and intercultural in nature, involving continuous “interactions between languages and cultures” (Canagarajah, 2013: 78). The findings of this study indicate that teachers’ linguistic, cultural, and historical backgrounds, along with their prior experiences, shape their attitudes toward and interpretations of student diversity, ultimately influencing their pedagogical practices. For teachers working with diverse learners, recognizing the impact of their own assumptions, beliefs, and ways of knowing is crucial, as these can either expand or constrain both teaching practices and student learning.

Teachers must therefore engage in sustained inquiry into their own understandings and interpretations of experience. Reflective approaches that foreground teachers’ meaning-making processes are essential in this regard. Language educators must also engage conceptually with the changing nature of language teaching and learning in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Such engagement requires a shift from monolingual to multilingual orientations—orientations that allow diversity to be viewed not as a problem to be managed but as a resource and an opportunity for enhancing learning. In doing so, teachers can move beyond merely acknowledging student diversity to actively leveraging it to support learning.

This conceptual reorientation is necessary not only for individual teachers but also for the broader field of language education, including Korean as a second/foreign language. The Korean language

teaching profession continues to be grounded in monolingual ideology, reflected most visibly in teacher demographics. Since its emergence as a formal field, Korean language education worldwide has been dominated by native Korean speakers. As the number of Korean language learners studying Korean as a second or foreign language continues to grow, it is likely that more non-native Korean speakers will become qualified to teach Korean. Yet a deeply entrenched Korean-centered monolingual ideology may hinder the acceptance and legitimacy of non-native Korean teachers.

This issue surfaced during the interview with Jiwon, who noted that a Japanese program at one of her institutions hired a non-native Japanese speaker as an instructor. She questioned whether a similar hiring decision would be possible in her Korean program. Both Jiwon and I doubted that a non-native Korean teacher would be readily accepted by either the program or the students. This situation mirrors a broader trend across education, where—even as classrooms become more diverse—teaching demographics remain largely homogeneous (Egbo, 2011). Gay (2000) describes this discrepancy as a “demographic divide,” and it is especially pronounced in Korean language education.

Jiwon and researcher also discussed the voices of characters in widely used Korean language textbooks. Researcher shared an experience from co-authoring a Korean textbook in which all authors, including myself, were native Korean speakers. Researcher pointed out the incongruity that characters portrayed as Korean language learners spoke perfect Korean without any accent. When researcher suggested hiring voice actors with accents reflective of language learners’ backgrounds, the idea was not well received. Jiwon echoed this concern, citing the unrealistic fluency of characters such as “Mike,” who speaks flawless Korean despite being a beginner. These examples underscore how monolingual ideology permeates Korean language teaching materials and practices.

Ironically, while Korean language education continues to repro-

duce monolingual ideology, the very act of teaching Korean as a second/foreign language has the potential to promote multilingualism at both individual and societal levels. As with teachers themselves, the field of Korean language education must engage conceptually with the meaning and nature of language teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Such engagement requires a fundamental shift from monolingual to multilingual orientations—one that recognizes linguistic diversity as central to effective and equitable language education.

VI. Conclusion

This study showed that teachers of Korean as a second/foreign language generally held positive attitudes toward student diversity, and that their perceptions were shaped by their personal and professional histories, prior experiences, levels of training, and the broader sociohistorical contexts in which they were situated. The teachers regarded diversity as both a valuable learning opportunity and a challenge requiring thoughtful pedagogical responses—a finding consistent with earlier research highlighting the difficulties many teachers face in meeting the needs of diverse learners (Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). The teachers in this study employed several strategies to address diversity-related issues, including avoiding sensitive topics, incorporating diversity into lesson content, and diversifying instructional methods and materials. They also emphasized the importance of cultural self-reflectivity, self-awareness, and sustained efforts to learn more about their students.

The findings point to the need for both language teachers and the broader field of language education to engage conceptually with the changing nature of language teaching and learning in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Such engagement requires a shift away

from monolingual orientations toward more multilingual perspectives that recognize diversity as a resource for learning rather than a deficit.

This study, however, is not without limitations and warrants further investigation. Although the participating teachers expressed positive attitudes toward student diversity, it is well documented that explicit attitudes do not always align with implicit beliefs or biases. Individuals are often aware of this dissonance. Future research examining how teachers' actual classroom practices reflect—or diverge from—their self-reported attitudes could illuminate implicit dimensions of teacher belief systems. Such inquiry may be especially valuable for teacher education, as identifying gaps between explicit and implicit attitudes can help raise teachers' awareness of hidden biases and inform efforts to better support diverse student populations (Kise, 2006).

Additionally, further research is needed on students' own attitudes toward diversity and how these attitudes shape their Korean language learning experiences. Because classroom interactions involve both teachers and students bringing their own histories, understandings, and needs, exploring these dynamics will be important for developing more inclusive and effective approaches to Korean language education.

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한국어 교육에서 다양성에 대한 교사 인식과 다언어적 전환

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본 연구는 캐나다 내 한국어 교실에서 학습자 다양성에 대한 한국어 교사들의 인식과 경험을 탐구하고, 이러한 신념이 교수 실천에 어떻게 반영되는지를 분석한다. 캐나다 학교 전반에 걸쳐 문화적·언어적으로 다양한 학습자가 일반화됨에 따라, 한국어 교육 프로그램 역시 이질적인 학습자 집단을 특징으로 하게 되었다. 그러나 한국어 교육 맥락에서 교사들이 다양성을 어떻게 개념화하고, 이러한 이해가 수업에 어떠한 방식으로 영향을 미치는지에 대한 연구는 제한적인 실정이다. 이에 본 연구는 서로 다른 교육 환경에서 근무하는 교사 4명을 대상으로 한 반구조화 면담을 바탕으로, 교사들이 다양성을 어떻게 정의하고 그 중요성을 인식하며, 이를 교수·학습 의사결정에 어떻게 반영하는지를 살펴본다.

연구 결과, 참여 교사 모두 최근 몇 년간 교실 내 학습자 다양성이 현저히 증가했음을 경험한 것으로 나타났다. 전반적으로 교사들은 이러한 변화에 대해 긍정적인 태도를 보였으며, 교육적 이점을 인식하는 동시에 점점 복잡해지는 학습자 요구를 충족해야 하는 어려움도 함께 언급하였다. 교사들은 이러한 인구학적 변화의 주요 원인으로 한류를 중심으로 한 한국 대중문화의 세계적 확산과 한국의 국제적 위상 제고를 지적하였다. 또한 분석 결과, 학습자의 민족적·언어적·문화적 배경에 대한 교사들의 인식은 다양한 지식과 경험을 수업에 반영할 수 있도록 교수 내용을 조정하고, 지지적이며 반응적인 학습 환경을 조성하는 데 기여한 것으로 나타났다.

종합하면, 본 연구는 다양성에 대한 교사의 태도가 공정하고 의미 있는 한국어 학습 경험을 형성하는 데 핵심적인 역할을 함을 보여준다. 나아가 변화하는 학습자 집단을 효과적으로 지원하기 위해, 다양성 반응형 교수법에 초점을 둔 지속적인 교사 전문성 개발의 필요성을 강조한다.

핵심어 한국어 교육, 교사 인식, 학습자 다양성, 다언어성, 교수 실천, 언어 이데올로기

ABSTRACT

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Diversity and the Multilingual Turn in Korean Language Education

Jeon, Mihyon · Kim, Daehee

This study examines Korean language teachers' perspectives and experiences with student diversity in Canadian Korean language classrooms, focusing on how these beliefs inform pedagogical practice. As culturally and linguistically diverse learners have become common across Canadian schools, heterogeneous student groups in Korean language programs are now typical. However, limited research has explored how teachers conceptualize diversity within Korean language education or how such understandings shape instruction. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with four teachers working in varied educational contexts, the study investigates how teachers define diversity, perceive its relevance, and translate these perceptions into pedagogical decisions.

Findings indicate that all participating teachers have witnessed a substantial rise in classroom diversity in recent years. Overall, they expressed positive attitudes toward this shift, recognizing its pedagogical benefits while also acknowledging the challenges associated with meeting increasingly complex learner needs. Teachers attributed this demographic change largely to the global expansion of Korean popular culture—driven by the Korean Wave—and to the broader elevation of Korea's international status. The analysis further demonstrates that teachers' awareness of learners' ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds enabled the creation of supportive and responsive learning environments in which instruction could be adapted to accommodate diverse forms of knowledge and experience.

Taken together, these findings underscore the critical role of teachers' attitudes toward diversity in shaping equitable and meaningful Ko-

rean language learning experiences. The study highlights the need for continued professional development focused on diversity-responsive pedagogy to better support the evolving learner populations in Korean language classrooms.

KEYWORDS Korean language education, teacher attitudes, student diversity, multilingualism, pedagogical practices, language ideology