

## Cultural diversity and National identity in English Textbooks of Korea

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to understand how English textbooks in Korea reflect English education policies for improving the English language learners' cultural ability. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the method of analyzing English textbooks was used because English textbooks are an important tool that most specifically reflects the English policy of a country. This study analyzed a total of 15 English textbooks currently used in South Korea. We analyzed nouns/pronouns related to culture presented in the reading section included in each unit, and compared cultural diversity and cultural identity included in English textbooks in Korea. As a result, it was found that South Korea has tried to cultivate Korean learners' cultural competence through English education and introduced their cultural pride to Western culture to realize the goal of strengthening global capabilities.*

**Keywords:** *Language policy, Globalization, Textbook analysis, Intercultural competence, Cultural contents, National identity*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Education agenda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century : Globalization

With the beginning of the 21st century, an important educational agenda for many countries, including South Korea, the question is how to respond to the challenges posed by globalization. One of the essential features of globalization is to interact each other in all aspects of society. So cultural competence is very important for all global citizens to understand the diverse cultures which are not familiar with them [1].

Two missions for English education : improving English skills and cultivating cultural competence

South Korea has recently made great efforts to educate people on the ways in which its Korean young learners can propagate Korean culture into the world, assimilate themselves into the various cultures and respect other cultures. The challenge is to train Korean students to be able to play a leading role in international business in response to the challenges of the globalized world. To achieve this goal, the main task is to educate students who are proficient in English skills, and understand the others' cultures different from their own. At the same time, it is important for students to strongly recognize Korea's national identity. This is because Korean students must have the ability to introduce Korean traditions and ethnic homogeneity to the world in English [2,3].

Main components of the cultural competence : introducing a variety of world cultures to Korea and introducing Korean values and traditions to the world, while improving national self- esteem [4].

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## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the era of globalization, many scholars emphasized the educational agenda in the 21st century. Some research show “The 5 Cs in the ear of global communication”, and the five Cs include culture, connections, comparisons, communities, and communication [5]. Among 5Cs, this study focus on “culture” in order to investigate the role of English education in cultivating Korean learners’ cultural competence.

The recent studies emphasized the language policy in the global age and the cultural identity of the nation [6]. The importance of language policy in the field of education has been emphasizing that multilingualism is a trend now and that language policy plays an important role in controlling social and political conflicts and that language policy and ideology have important links to each other [7]. The English policy reflected in Chinese elementary school English textbooks were analyzed through analyzing the linguistic materials in which various Chinese cultures are expressed [8]. The process of globalization has been accompanied, facilitated and accelerated by the global spread of the English language [9, 10, 11]. Intercultural competence is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication [7, 12]. Language textbooks’ functions must take an explicit global perspective in the globalized world [13, 14]. This study was conducted on the previous theoretical research and investigations focusing on English education policy and English language textbooks’ functions in the globalized world. in cultivating Korean learners’ cultural competence.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 1) Are the models of cultural competence in English textbooks diverse enough to embrace the multilingual and multicultural contexts? Or depending on a particular culture and language norm?
- 2) What are included in the English textbooks of Korea to enhance national pride and national identity while improving a global sense?

This study analyzed 15 middle school English textbooks currently used in S. Korea.

- 1) In all of the textbooks, each lesson includes one main reading passage and cultural section. The analysis counted types and tokens of every noun and pronoun related with cultures in the reading passages and cultural sections.
- 2) The nouns and pronouns with referential meanings that referred to any country, region, or continent were identified. Total 49 countries are referred to at least once, so the country names were categorized into South Korea, Inner circle countries (6 countries; Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K, U.S.A), Europe (16 countries), Middle Asia (3 countries), Africa (4 countries), South America (6 countries), and Asia (13 countries). So 49 countries over almost 6 continents were referred as the culture related information, which improves that Korea’ English textbooks contain the diverse cultural information around the world.

Table 1. shows the information about research subject in this study.

**Table 1. Information about research subject**

Type	A	B	C	D	E
Middle School 1	authorized in 2017				
Middle School 2	authorized in 2018				
Middle School 3	authorized in 2019				
total	15 textbooks				

The English textbooks analyzed in this study consist with 8 lessons in each book, so total 120 lessons (8 lessons \* 15 textbooks) were analyzed focusing on the cultural contents of reading passages and cultural sections in each lessons.

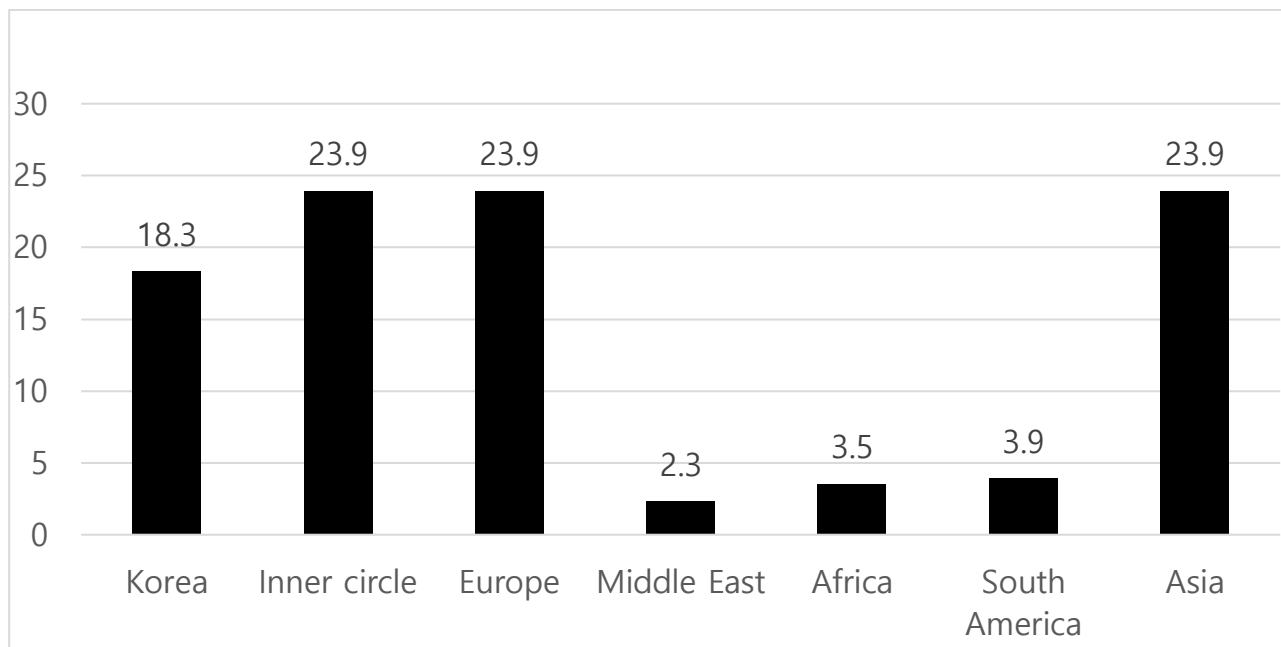
#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The cultural representations from diverse countries in English textbooks of South Korea are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Cultural Representations from Diverse Countries in English Textbooks of Korea**

Category	Name of country (Number of Culture references)	Number of Culture references	Ratio (%)
Korea	Korea(46)	46	18.3
Inner Circle Countries	Australia(6), Canada(5), Ireland(2), New Zealand(6), U.K.(10), U.S.A(31)	60	23.9
Europe	Belgium(1), Bulgaria(2), Denmark(3), Finland(1), France(16), Germany(6), Greece(1), Italy(9), Netherlands(3), Norway(1), Poland(1), Romania(1), Russia(4), Spain(8), Sweden(2), Switzerland(1)	60	23.9
Middle East	Israel(3), Saudi Arabia(1), Turkey(2)	6	2.3
Africa	Egypt(5), Kenya(1), Nigeria(1), South Africa(2)	9	3.5
South America	Argentina(1), Brazil(3), Chile(1), Colombia(1), Mexico(3), Peru(1)	10	3.9
Asia	Bangladesh(1), Cambodia(2), China(19), India(7), Indonesia(1), Japan(10), Malaysia(2), Nepal(1), Pakistan(1), Philippines(3), Taiwan(1), Thailand(6), Vietnam(6)	60	23.9
Total		251 (49 countries)	100

As we can see from Table 2 and Figure 1, the cultural representations from Inner circle countries (23.9 %), European countries (23.9 %) and Asian countries (23.9 %) are the highest, and next is Korea (18.3%), South America (3.9 %), Africa (3.5%) and Middle East (2.3%). If we consider Korea is one nation counted in this analysis, we can suppose that the 18.3% is relatively high. From these results, we can assume that English language textbooks of S. Korea not only contain the diverse cultures from 49 countries, but also include much information about Korean culture in order to enhance Korean learners' pride for their own country and its culture.



**Figure 1. Ratio of cultural representation from diverse continents**

Table 3 shows the themes for propagating Korean culture into the world.

**Table 3. Themes for Propagating Korean Culture**

Themes	Contents
We love Korea	I am planning to go to a K-pop concert next Sunday. What do you think about K-pop music? A few month ago, I saw a Korean food truck. I like Korean food very much.
Korean Culture: Gonu; a Korean Folk Game	Gonu is a folk game for people of all ages. People enjoy the game because it is easy and fun. What do you think about the mask? I think it is great.
Wonderful Korea: My Love, the city of Ahn Jung-geun	To many Korean-Chinese, Harbin is the city of Ahn Jung-geun. It has two special halls for this hero. The old one is the Joseon Art Museum, and the new one is in Harbin Station.
Korean Wave Around the World	We love the hot beat of K-pop. We love the soft moves of traditional Korean dances, too. We want to put them together and create rhythmic waves., My first stop will be Insa-dong. I've heard that there are many fun activities to do there and lots of street food to enjoy.
The Way to Korea: Taste of Korea	Special Food for Special days; Seollal(tteokguk), Chuseok(Songpyeon), birthday(miyeokguk), samgyetang
Love for My Country	My Wish – If God asks me what my wish is, I would say clearly, “It is Korea’s independence”. If he asks me my second wish is, I would say, ‘It is the independence of my country”. If he asks me what my third wish is, I would say loudly, “It is the complete independence of my country”. That is my answer.

Table 4 give the information about definitions of sub-categories and some examples of Korean cultural representations for each sub-category.

**Table 4. Cultural Representations of sub-categories for Korean Culture**

Category	Definitions of Sub-categories (Examples of Korean cultural representations)
Natural attractions (NA)	Geographical information, such as country name or city in a particular country (Yeongwol camping site, Seonam village, Dong River, Jejudo Island, Busan, Suncheon, Daewallyeog pass, Gyeongbokgung, Swonjaedo Island, Sinuido Island, Homgdo Island, Cheongsando Island, Ulleungdo Island, Deokjeokdo Island)
Achievements (Ach)	Information about material achievements, such as historical buildings and industrial outcomes as well as non-material national achievements, such as literature, artistic and scientific works (The National Museum, The creation of Hangeul)
Persons (Per)	Cultural information about historical figures or role models in a particular nation (Kim Gu, Patriot Lee Bong-chang, patriot Yun Bong-gil, Kim Hong-do)
Social activities (SA)	Information about sports, household chores, leisure activities and literacy learning, etc. (Gonu, a game of yut, chajeonnori, jegichagi, haenyeo, taekwondo, cheonghakdong, environment protection movement, retire life)
Customs and holidays	Cultural information about customs and festivals in a particular nation (Seollal, traditional masking, Chuseok, Mud festival)
Material products (MP)	Information about material products in a particular national culture, such as food, clothes and money, etc. (Snack, fusion Korean food, cheer stick, fan, deladon, miyeokguk, samgyetang, dessert, currency unit)
Value systems (VP)	Explanations of the values and beliefs behind certain activities (Representative animals, how to make a name)

Table 3 and Table 4 prove that English language textbooks contain various themes for propagating Korean cultures into the world. Also if we look into the cultural contents for Korean focusing on sub-categories of cultural representations, we can find that diverse nouns and pronouns related with Korean national attractions, achievements, persons, social activities, customs and holidays, material products and value systems are contained in English textbooks. From these findings, we can suggest that English language textbooks are adequate for enhancing Korean learners' national identity. It can be concluded that South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through surveying the cultural contents in English language textbooks of Korea, the following suggestions can be given as the answers to the research questions in this study.

Q 1 > Are the models of cultural competence in English textbooks diverse enough to embrace the multilingual and multicultural contexts? Or depending on a particular culture and language norm?

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the English textbooks of Korea contain various cultural content from 49 countries from 6 continents in the world. It can be concluded that South Korea advocated a policy that actively accommodates the various cultures of other countries, prompting Korean society to assimilate into

other cultural elements, especially those of the English-American bloc.

Q 2 > What are included in the English textbooks of Korea to enhance national pride and national identity while improving a global sense?

Table 3 and Table 4 imply that Korea's cultural pride is also emphasized in the English textbook contents. Especially the diverse tourist attractions were introduced, and social activities (including sports, traditional games, and markets), material products (including food, clothes, and local specialties) and value systems implying Korean spiritual beliefs were emphasized to promote the cultural pride about Korea among Korean young learners and keep national identity into the world.

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