Reality of Multicultural Homes in Korea and Ways of Supporting Education of Children with Disabilities

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I . The necessity and purpose of the study

In Korea, a population of 90 million people was found to consist of people from 190 countries in 2010. The number of immigrant workers increased during the 1990s. A survey of foreign residents, conducted by Public Administration and Security, in 2010, listed the number of immigrants and their children as 181,671 and 121,935 respectively. Following this trend, the foreign population in Korea is estimated to reach 5–10% of the total population by 2020. The cultural difference between the mainstream society and the immigrants has given rise to several social equality issues. As a positive solution to long-term education for children from multicultural families, in terms of national policy, debate on multicultural education would be practical and relevant research should be actively conducted (Chae, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2008; Sun & Park, 2008). A conceptual study of culture, ethnicity, race, social status, gender, sexual orientation, language, and age has led to the inclusion of more diverse groups and has consequently expanded the concept of multicultural education (Grant, Elsbree, & Fondrie, 2004). With the inclusion of “disability” issues in the field of multicultural education, a systematic emphasis has been placed on teacher education (Won, 2008).

With more people of different nationalities residing in Korea, multicultural homes have become more common. An increasing number of multicultural families, especially children, has not only resulted in educational inequality but also caused reproduction of inequality. Interracial and international marriages have resulted in more multicultural families, and the interest in these multicultural homes has increased considerably in Korea. More voices have been raised for the cultural adaptation and academic support of multicultural families in our society, and it rests with the central and local governments and private organizations to initiate policies and execute programs to achieve this objective.

Although multicultural families try to adapt to the ways of our society, there are several concerns that need to be addressed. In Korea, and particularly in immigrant families, mothers raise their children and impart social and cultural education. This leads to many difficulties as far as a child's psychological aspects are concerned. Studies have revealed that children who were brought up by foreign mothers with a limited knowledge of the Korean language exhibited delays in language development and had problems in adjusting to school life. Lately, the increase in the number of children with disabilities from multicultural families has sparked interest and active support for early intervention is urgently required. Multicultural families became aware of disabilities in their children only after the teachers discovered it when the children were enrolled in a kindergarten or in an elementary school. In most cases, it was found that
children with verbal disabilities could only be identified by professionals who could recognize the characteristics of the disorder. Since multicultural families are not usually associated with education, it is difficult to predict the extent of effectiveness of teachers and educational measures for children with disabilities from multicultural families.

The Korean society, with its history of half a million years, places emphasis on the consciousness of a single ethnic group, rather than on individualism associated with a diverse society. This perception is common across many subjects and the field of education is no exception. In order to achieve equality in education, a change of consciousness is more important than what a teacher teaches (Chang, 2003). The purpose of this study is to provide direct support to multicultural families and children with disabilities. Special teacher education, with respect to any of these entities, requires a good support plan. Basic data for such a plan can be obtained by investigating the status of multicultural families and teaching methods employed for children with disabilities in Korea.

Specifically, the aims of this study can be summarized as follows:

First, to recognize the overall awareness of special education teachers about children with disabilities from multicultural families

Second, to determine the procedure for the screening, diagnosis, and evaluation of children with disabilities from multicultural families

Third, to study the present system of education for children with disabilities from multicultural families

Fourth, to examine the support system available to parents for the education of children with disabilities from multicultural families

II. Methods

1. Set of research areas

Multicultural family support and education of children with disabilities encompass a wide area of research, but based on the research interest of this study, the questionnaire focused on the following areas:

First, the perceptions and attitudes of special education teachers towards disabled children from multicultural families
Second, the status of disabled children from multicultural families

Third, the status of educational support available to children with disabilities from multicultural families
Fourth, the status of support available to parents of disabled children from multicultural families

2. Participants

Participants in this study, conducted in 2011, comprised of people currently responsible for the education of multicultural families and children with disabilities. They included teachers from kindergarten and elementary schools, who conducted special classes for at least three children with disabilities. All participants had an experience of 3–5 years in teaching and worked in the rural areas.
3. Methods

This study, based on the recognition of the need of special education teachers for children with disabilities, aims to find ways to support educational needs of children with disabilities from multicultural families. In this study, it was important to understand an insider’s perspective of the current situation. Data collected through open questionnaires and in-depth interviews were analyzed. Participants were asked to respond freely to the questions, and the interviews were conducted in person. All participants were interviewed twice and the time taken for each interview was approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. The process was repeated if any anomaly in the recorded content could not be resolved over phone or through mail. In case of any redundancy or similar interviews by researchers, the contents were analyzed through repeated readings of key excerpts from the description.

III. Results

1. The recognition of special education teachers in the education of children with disabilities from multicultural families

In the field of child education, a teacher is an important factor in determining the success or failure of education. Since Korea consists of a multicultural society, it is necessary to evaluate the extent of a special education teacher’s overall interest and enthusiasm for children with disabilities from multicultural families. Teachers trained in dealing with multicultural families can help develop an efficient training plan for disabled children from multicultural families.

The number of multicultural families in the rural areas has greatly increased. As children with disabilities require special education teachers, so do the children from multicultural families. For the purpose of admission, our educational institutions can identify children from multicultural families and those with special needs by first considering their family environment and then organizing child-related conferences, thereby adopting a multiple approach for their education. However, teachers who have a relevant understanding of multicultural families have never been trained specifically. (T 1)

The number of children with disabilities from multicultural families admitted to schools was more than the previous year. Their ability to adapt to language problems depended on the amount of attention they received from those who helped them. However, adjustment problems of these children are never discussed in seminars conducted by agencies involved with providing support to multicultural families. It is essential to understand the situation of these children in everyday life and to be prepared to lead them effectively. (T 2)

An immigrant mother of a disabled child in Korea cannot often provide the support needed by her handicapped child owing to her lack of understanding of the benefits of education. Therefore, special education teachers should intervene actively and pay more attention to these children. They should also have a better understanding of the literacy level in multicultural families to provide effective educational support, which was found to be lacking during this study. (T 3)

Our studies also showed that the ratio of preschool children with disabilities from multicultural families to all preschool children is very low owing to insufficient awareness of teachers. Therefore, in the coming years, children with disabilities in the class should be provided with greater attention. Moreover, an understanding of the characteristics of these children is also needed provided weir sing. In this fegardth di M siseiycutfHealth conducted eir singctufless than an hour underh di fisticscutfichildren program. However, normal children and children with disabilities were not targeted for related information. (T 4)
2. Children with disabilities from multicultural families found

Early screening of children with disabilities and secondary disabilities and early intervention is required to maximize the effectiveness of prevention and education of these children. However, there is not enough data on such children from multicultural families in Korea. In addition, it was found that the procedure involved in the screening, diagnosis, and assessment is not very clear. The status for locating children with disabilities from multicultural families is detailed below.

The regional administrative office is responsible for collecting information on disabled children in multicultural families. However, personal information of these children is not available. The department officials need to cooperate in a realistic manner and intervene actively to support the child’s education. When teachers come to know about the disabled children from the neighboring multicultural families they visit them and arrange for a consultation. However, grandparents, who usually live with their grandchildren in multicultural families in the rural areas, refuse to send their children with disabilities to preschool because of their lack of awareness of the disability. (T 1)

It was also found that families of disabled children from a multicultural background sought advice from their own community and hesitated to approach the agency on related activities. It is unfortunate that multicultural families and isolated communities, cut off from the outside world, are reluctant to be exposed to early education. Moreover, most of the government: supported, low: income groups find it difficult to afford, much less care about, their child’s education. (T 2)

Educational institutions appoint special education teachers for disabled children from multicultural families who attend a regular preschool. In some cases, these institutes consult information on multicultural families obtained through meetings held at the community support centers. (T 3)

Educational institutions discuss a child’s disability with the parents either in person or over phone and encourage them to seek consultation. Elementary school students, whose disability was discovered in their infancy, were, in most cases, trained specially. However, children with disabilities from multicultural families did not receive a similar training. Therefore, schools have requested for the active involvement and support of parents of disabled children from multicultural families for their benefit. (T 4)

3. The reality of education for children with disabilities from multicultural families

Any suggestions for improving the educational support for disabled children from multicultural families can only be devised after determining the current scenario. The status of education for children with disabilities from multicultural home is as follows:

First, families of children with disabilities should understand the problem. For their guidance, it is important for school education to be in conjunction with home education. Studies on disabled children in educational institutions confirmed that the daily lifestyle and the social and emotional characteristics of multicultural families presented significant problems to their work and social life owing to their lack of education. In a large number of multicultural families, both parents contribute to the family’s earning. Internal disputes between parents, over choice of education, for example, make it difficult for the connection to work. To solve these problems, parents should be trained to understand the Korean language and culture and provided with support to help them achieve economic stability. (T 1)
The general characteristics of special education have been derived from the concept of individualized education. Observation of interaction between small playgroups of different age groups was attempted to interpret the sequence. The extension of verbal disability to early childhood in Korean children of poor families is serious because delay in language development leads to limited social interaction with peers. Therefore, teachers should encourage and assist with verbal and emotional interaction between normal children and children with disabilities. (T 2)

The two challenges that multicultural families of children with disabilities have to face simultaneously are those of discrimination and prejudice. Our society needs to understand and eliminate discrimination and prejudice by participating in outreach efforts. Homes, schools, institutions, etc., should come together and develop a community voucher system to maximize the benefit of multicultural education for children with disabilities. A local multicultural family support center could provide relevant information and guidance on programs to support education for children with disabilities. (T 3)

Multicultural families are unaware of the education and support available for their children with disabilities. It is fortunate that training in an educational institution can help children with their disability, which is not the case in rural areas where such cases are widespread. Therefore, as an ongoing promotion, the community center functions as an administrative agency to support children with disabilities in their training from relevant institutions. (T 4)

4. Support for parents of disabled children from multicultural families (family)

Recently, emphasis has been laid on the ecological aspect in the education of children with disabilities. Importance is being given to a child’s home environment, his/her education, as well as to an understanding of his/her background and the support system, which can maximize the effectiveness of education. The status of support available to parents of disabled children from multicultural families (family) is outlined below.

In case of economic difficulties at home, parents may arrange for help at their place of employment. By becoming friends with teachers and people from institutions, they are able to withstand the loneliness that comes from living in a foreign country. Counseling is also available for helping them deal with depression or family conflict. (T 1)

Parents of children with disabilities in the community should be educated about the agency and should be provided with support and information on the rights of disabled children. However, much interest and understanding of education and information on support system is required by people for the role of public authorities. (T 2)

If the parents migrate for a short term, their lack of understanding of the Korean language and cultural conflicts contribute to their child’s disability and affect his/her education. Undesirable role of parents of children with disabilities often leads to behavior problems. Therefore, parent counseling and guidance to families and children with disabilities should be in conjunction with the content delivered and should not result in communication problems. Moreover, language training should be made mandatory. Thus, parent meetings should be held and the family should be supported through camps. (T 3)

Also, parents should attend the annual two week multicultural family counseling and parent education as well as seek consultation at home for their children with disabilities. This would provide a better understanding of the situation of children with disabilities and would lead to better quality support for these children. Despite the support provided by institutions to disabled children, family support, although essential, remains a concern. (T 4)
IV. Conclusions and suggestions

In this study, the recent increase in problems in the field of education in Korea is investigated. It examines the status of education for children with disabilities from a multicultural family and studies the role of special education teachers in their education. The research aims to explore plans for the education and social development of children with disabilities from multicultural families in Korea. Plans can be developed according to the following conclusions and proposals.

First, with an increase in the number of multicultural families, the number of also children with disabilities also increased. Although special education teachers are requisited for the education of children from multicultural families, they do not have education and awareness in most cases. Therefore, more opportunities, the number provided for the education and education of special education teachers to enhance their understanding of multicultural families.

Second, early detection of disabilities and early childhood education is important. However, in the case of multicultural families in Korea, their lack of relevant information and their isolation from the outside world delays early detection of disabilities in children. Multicultural families are referred by the parent agency of the institution for general screening, and general education teachers or special education teachers visit their homes to find out about instances of disabilities in children. Since community and administrative agencies block access to information on grounds of personal information, it becomes difficult for them to locate children with disabilities from multicultural families. Thus, with the emergence of multicultural families, it becomes necessary to collect statistical data to determine the ratio of disabled children in multicultural families. Early detection of disabilities in children and early intervention can only be possible if community agencies, the education support information center, and the special education support center are linked together to enable smooth exchange of information.

Third, the individual characteristics of children with disabilities in multicultural families can be nurtured through individualized education. However, to expect that school education alone would be sufficient to fulfill the educational requirements of such children is not feasible. On the other hand, it has also been observed that home education by itself is not as effective as school education in case of multicultural families, and especially for children with disabilities. Thus, it is necessary for schools, families, and communities to work together and develop a common program, such as the school voucher system, for their education.

Finally, to maximize the effect, it is important to consider the effect of education imparted as well as the home environment provided to children. However, a large number of multicultural families with disabled children experience financial problems when it comes to their education. Therefore, professional support should be provided to children and their families for the purpose of education and economic stability. Moreover, immigrant women should be provided with information on the Korean culture and language, as well as on the education system for children with disabilities to maximize the effectiveness of all the adopted measures. Therefore, the community center that is currently in operation should expand its role to become a multicultural family support center.
Reference


