

# Language education of South Korea

**Hayann Lee**

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea

E-mail: [bulgariyann@gmail.com](mailto:bulgariyann@gmail.com).

**Abstract:** The paper presents the result of a survey of the current status of bilingual education in South Korea and bilingual policy as well as a policy proposal. The focus is on the observation of good practices, documents in connection with bilingual policy, changes at schools, and trends in bilingual education. The methodology includes observation and comparative analyses between Korea and Germany.

**Keywords:** language education, bilingual education, bilingual policy, policy proposal, South Korea.

## Introduction

Korea's bilingual education policy is inextricably related to its immigrant policy. Korea was originally an emigrating country, and its history began in earnest after the end of the Second World War. Beginning with labor migration to Germany and the Middle East, its migration toward U.S., Canada, and Australia also increased with the amendment of their immigration law in 1965. However, by the end of the 1980s, foreign migration of Koreans decreased, and with the engagement of Korean-Chinese immigrants in national construction industry, during their visit to see their relatives, migration transition started to appear with foreign laborers coming into Korea.[1] Afterwards, at the end of 1993, domestic inflow of Southeast Asians, such as Filipinos and Bangladeshis, became active and nationalities became diverse with the adoption of the 'Industrial Trainee System'. Domestic inflow of foreign laborers rapidly increased with the adoption of the employment license system in 2004 and the visiting employee system in 2007. [2] Entering the 2000s, marriage-based immigration, alongside with the increase of foreign laborers, also rapidly increased. Particularly, international marriage of Koreans with Asian foreigners, such as Chinese and Korean-Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Fillipinos, sharply rose [3], and even though marriage with foreigners gradually decreased to 7.3% out of the total marriages in 2016, it has been around 10% out of the total marriages since 2005. The foreign nationality of wives was Vietnamese (36.3%), Chinese (28.3%) and Philippine (5.8%). The foreign nationality of husbands was Chinese (25.4%), American (23.9%), Vietnamese (9.8%). [4] Above this, international students and North Korean defectors have been the majority of national immigrants.

## Multicultural and bilingual education in Korea

The multicultural history of Korea is only about 20 years old, and foreigners settled in Korea are mostly from Asia, from places such as China, Japan, and Vietnam.[5] Most of them are permanent residents, or in case of laborers, they stay for a short-term, and during their stay, they sometimes form their own communities. This is closely related to the characteristic of Korean society, with its ideology of a homogeneous society. In particular, unlike regular foreigners, marriage migrant women, who settle in Korea as a result of marriage, or North Korean defectors, who are considered of the same ethnicity, have easier time acquiring citizenship, and through it, immigration policy of jus sanguinis Korean can be confirmed. [6] Because of this form of conservative multiculturalism of cultural assimilation, where minority cultures get absorbed by the dominant culture, a policy of immigrants within the Korean society came to existence in societal unification, and the initial multicultural policy of Korea focused

itself on multicultural education for adaptation into the Korean society with marriage-based immigrants as the center.

### **Bilingual education status of Korea**

Currently, language education for multicultural children is focused on Korean education. This is because language is thought of as an essential requirement in entering the mainstream society, and learning Korean to adapt in Korean society is seen as a core task in language education. Recently, this has been expanding even toward children of immigrant laborers, but still, multicultural language education is being limited to children of international marriage. In recent times, as a part of not only Korean education, but language education, bilingual education opportunity is being provided to children of multicultural families by introducing it to designated multicultural education schools.

In 2017, the ministry of Education established and announced a plan to support multicultural education in 2017 to help multicultural students grow into talented people in our society and to raise the acceptability of multiculturalism for all students as shown in the table below. [7]

	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Adaption</b>	<b>Development</b>
<b>Children born in Korea</b>	▪ <b>Multicultural education</b> in multicultural kindergarten	▪Mentoring with university students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Setting up a career with a role model</li> <li>▪Career guidance considering characteristic of multicultural students</li> </ul>
<b>Immigrated children of multicultural families and Children of foreign families</b>	▪Korean language (KSL) in Preparatory school.	▪Mentoring with university students	

### **Limitations of current bilingual education**

First, there is an absolute lack of bilingual teachers. Currently, teachers working in elementary and middle schools are lacking the knowledge and teaching qualification in bilingual education. [8] Some schools do recruit external teachers who are bilingual, but unlike English and Chinese, which facilitate the process of recruiting teachers since these languages have many speakers worldwide, for minority languages, such as Russian and Mongolian, it is extremely difficult to recruit teachers who have the teaching qualification and also the ability to use them while being fluent in Korean. [9]

Preparing teachers who are bilingual is a necessary factor in any education policy, so teacher training is under a very urgent situation.

Second, unlike the intent of current progression, there is the problem of overly stressing on foreign language education. First of all, bilingual classes provided to students are mostly focused on mainstream languages, such as English, Japanese, and Chinese. The problem lies within the fact that normal Korean students are accepting and participating in bilingual classes in the form of private tuition. In the case of bilingual classes, these are provided for the first time to grades 3 and 4, when most of the students are familiar with Korean. Thus, it means that, in the fear of Korean getting mixed up, foreign language is taught at the age of 10, after Korean gets completely settled as the mother language. Most of all, because multicultural children barely learn their parents' language, which are not Korean, they attend bilingual classes as if they are learning a foreign language, so from this perspective, it, indeed, is an urgent situation where rectification of bilingual education policy is needed.[10]

Third, bilingual education as a method is only being experimentally operated within some schools, and has yet to be structurally settled. In the case of Germany, even though every state is different, they are unified in the execution of bilingual education, but for Korea, language teaching methodology isn't unified and lacks corresponding teaching materials. Additionally, this creates another urgent situation, since efficient teaching for students with different language skills cannot be provided, and is absent from the formulated long term goals. [11]

This can be the result of lack of relevant research on this issue, due to the fact that Korea rapidly entered the situation of a multicultural society. Also, from the fact that most multicultural children are elementary students, it is not possible to grasp the effect of language education yet. However, the necessity to adapt language teaching methodology still exists, with the increase of foreigners wanting to settle in Korea and the rapid progression of globalization.

Bilingual education in Korea is still in its infancy and is experiencing a lot of trial and error, but positive effects can be seen if Germany's bilingual education methodology can be custom-tailored to Korea's situation because methodology and philosophy of Korea's bilingual education are not established. In the case of Germany, a methodology aimed at enabling bilingual acquisition based on a scholarly background is being gradually applied. Similarly, in Korea's case, an integrated policy must be unfolded based on a theoretical methodology and philosophy, as seen fit with the reality of Korea, based on a scholarly background. Additionally, language education which is included within the official education curriculum is needed, instead of it being a disposable and supplementary concept. The educational effect will be maximized, once bilingual education is provided to students based on a long term and concrete goal.

Korean current language education depends on national resource, but if needed, an attempt has to be made to cooperate with the country of the respective language. The State of Hamburg in Germany either receives language teachers from the respective country, or enables students to participate in trainings and field trips to the respective country, through cooperation with the country in question. This kind of program can compensate for the lack of teachers in Korea, on the other hand, it can provide motivation for bilingual education for students.

When implementing a policy, Korea doesn't necessarily have to apply Germany's educational policy as it is.

In the case of Germany, it is common for both parents to be immigrants, but in the case of Korea, the biggest ratio is that of children of international marriage among multicultural backgrounds. An environment for learning Korean is relatively well equipped if one of the parents is Korean, and because of growing up while using Korean, there is usually no problem communicating in everyday life. However, as pointed out in the introduction, an education policy can be unfolded by developing suitable methodologies to resolve intensively in the area of acquiring a command of the language studying.

The current purpose of Korea's language policy is 'to provide Korean education in order to help the children of multicultural background achieve academic outcome, while helping them develop into global leaders with their unique background'[12]. In accordance with this purpose, the utmost goal would be to aid the children of multicultural background academically, while also aiding them to adapt well to the society by achieving practical purposes.

### **Application and proposal for Korea**

At the current school education dimension, research on multicultural society is still in its infancy. It is a fortunate event that the Ministry of Education has started showing a lot of interest in multicultural education since 2006. [13]

Also the "Establishment of a Policy Paradigm for the Transition into Multiracial and Multicultural Society" which centered around the Korean Women's Development Institute, represents fruitful research. Occupational and Korean education, centered around the Ministry of Labor, for married immigrants, and Korean education, centered around public and private institutions, are being used to cope with multicultural society's demands.

As part of linguistic life, bilingual education can be a solution to the new problematic situation of multicultural society, as well. Language has been discussed as a means of communication, largely emphasized on for its role as societal unification system by scholars for a long time. Bilingual education can contribute by allowing mutual understanding of each other's cultural background beyond cultural prejudice, and, by extension, cultivating communal awareness of 'us'. Therefore, in countries where multicultural society has been experienced for some time, such as countries in North America, Europe, and Australia, bilingual education is actively utilized as a policy method for societal unification. In the process of entering multicultural society, the number of children of international marriage and foreign laborers is increasing. Racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity through this is also being gradually reflected within schools. Children of international marriage, whose number has grown rapidly after the 90's, are of age to enter school, and the ratio of children of foreign laborers entering school is also increasing.

In 2016, there were 99,186 multicultural students in Korea in total. [14] The number of students is shown in the table below.

	<b>Elementary school</b>	<b>Middle school</b>	<b>High school</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Born in Korea</b>	59,988	11,489	7,657	79,134
<b>Immigrated children of multicultural families</b>	4,583	1,627	1,208	7,418
<b>Foreign families</b>	9,453	1,989	1,192	12,634
<b>Total</b>	74,024	15,105	10,057	99,186

There were debates, in the meantime, those families of international marriage, foreign laborers, and North Korean defectors should be considered a multicultural family. In addition to this,

families returning after a long-term stay abroad, and overseas Koreans have to be included, too. The table below shows the directions of language use depending on the type of multicultural family.

Multicultural Family	Type of Multicultural Family	Language Used	Direction of Language Education
Family of International Marriage	Family of Korean father and foreign mother->(2 <sup>nd</sup> generation Korea)	Korean, mother's language(minority language)->(partial) bilingual(Korean dominant)	Bilingual education, educate Korean underachiever
	Family of Korean mother and foreign father->(2 <sup>nd</sup> generation Korea)	Korean, father's language(minority language)->(partial) bilingual(Korean dominant)	Bilingual education, educate Korean underachiever
Family of Foreign Laborer	Family formed after immigration of foreign laborer->(Korean-born 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation)	Parents' language, Korean as a second language(KSL), Korean as a foreign language(KFL)	Bilingual education
	Family immigrated to Korea after marriage in home country->(Home country-born 1.5 generation)	Parents' language, Korean as a foreign language(KFL)	Bilingual education
Family of North Korean Defector	Family of North Korean defector	North Korean, partially correct South Korean	Rectify Korean, allow dialect
	Family formed after defecting to South Korea	North and South Korean	Partially rectify Korean, allow dialect
Family of Returning Overseas and Long Term Stay Abroad Korean	Family of returning overseas Korean, interracial family among overseas Korean, etc.	Diverse, including partial Korean and language of residence	Reinforce Korean, maintain foreign language
	Family of long term study abroad	Korean, language of the resident country, etc	Reinforce Korean, maintain foreign language

### **Mother language and heritage language**

According to the Statistics Office of Canada, mother language is defined as “the first language learned domestically when an individual was young, which is also the understood language at the time of statistical research [15]. For those children who were born into interracial families,

where they encounter two languages simultaneously, their mother language can be both. Even if the child learned language A from their mother and language B from their father, language B isn't called a second language, because even language B was learned domestically. Out of the many types of Korean intercultural families, most of them were generated by interracial marriages. In this respect, Korean culture families have some differences compared to multicultural families, composed of immigrants. Therefore, taking in consideration language policy of foreign countries, the latter must be custom tailored to the situation in Korea. On the other hand, for children of foreign laborers, normally the language of the parents becomes the mother language, and Korean becomes the second language. In cases where two or more languages are acquired in a household of foreign laborers, the mother language is also the family language. From a social perspective, the mother language is also called heritage language. If children of multicultural families bury this because they lack education, the languages they receive from their parents don't become heritage languages. All of these problems for children of interracial marriages, deciding which parent's language becomes the mother language or the heritage language, or whether the immigrant mother's or father's language becomes the mother or heritage language, depends on the parents. On the other hand, discussion at the social system, and the educational system level, which will maintain this, depends on the nation.

### **Current status of bilingual education**

#### **(1) Institutional Aspect**

Institutionally acknowledging languages of multicultural families and guaranteeing the multilingual usage is exceedingly important in the sense that they are considered and acknowledged. Even in UNESCO, multilingual usage is encouraged and the cultures of mother nations are treasured by designating February 21<sup>st</sup> as the International Mother Language Day. In the EU, educating to allow having a command of two or more languages, plus the mother language, as early as you can by implementing the 'mother language+2' policy is encouraged for member countries. This is to smooth out communications among European citizens in all areas of society by equipping them with the ability to speak in two foreign languages, other than their mother language. Its intention is to increase the economic efficiency of EU's economic community by relieving linguistic barriers.

### **Policy proposal for bilingual policy**

Current Korean education for children of multicultural families is handled domestically, or at daycares and kindergartens before entering school, and by education institutions at the national level after entering school. Children of interracial families often lack language development and are restricted in communication, due to getting educated by mothers who are not proficient in Korean, either, during their early childhood, which is the most important period in learning language. Lack of linguistic skills can cause poor academic achievements after entering school. This is the reason why Korean education policy for adults of interracial families runs parallel to Korean education policy for children. However, a problem exists which cannot be resolved only by reinforcing Korean education for immigrants of interracial marriage. There is the limitation of fluency for immigrants of interracial marriage, because learning Korean is learning a foreign language. Therefore, bilingual education of children must go side by side. If children are to acquire a minority language at a young age, the degree of acquisition can be quick and fluent.

Children of foreign laborers, they have to be educated at the KSL (Korean as a Second Language) level. If they fail to learn Korean before entering school, it is difficult to educate

them with regular students. Children of North Korean defectors are a little different. Because North Korean education is influenced a lot by Russia, and South Korea by Western Europe and North America, lots of differences exist in educational with relation to methodology terms. It will be case by case, but by considering these points, a specific direction can be proposed regarding bilingual education in Korea. Based on everything we have discussed, the following is the potential proposal for education direction.

- 1) Before attending regular school, school adaptation has to be promoted by helping them acquire the necessary Korean language skills needed for their Korean school life through a certain period of time in KSL (Korean as a second language) program.

There are two ways to go about this: arranging a KSL institution inside the school or outside the school. If a KSL class is to be operated within a school, foreign students will attend the same class as regular Korean students for subjects centered around the arts, such as music, art, and gym, and for subjects which have greater importance in language, such as language, math, society, and science, they would attend corresponding KSL classes based on their level of Korean. Then gradually, they would be integrated into normal classes by reducing the amount of KSL class time. At this time, assistance is needed for KSL from teachers who are bilingual.

A method of deployment for bilingual teachers after completing or getting trained on a certain amount of teaching is to be implemented at multicultural center of Seoul National University of Education in 2009. It is also worthwhile to recommend a system in which teaching certificates are granted for preservice teachers who complete a KSL instruction program.

- 2) Multilingual Education Policy and Multilingual Media Policy

Multicultural policy is introduced as multicultural policy, multi-institutionalized policy, multi-socialized policy, and multi-equalized policy. Among them, language education policy is introduced partially as multicultural policy. Multicultural policy represents policies, such as languages, standards, values, religions, ideologies, lifestyles, and laws, and out of these, multilingual education policy and multilingual media policy are being picked for serious consideration. These are policies which make official/unofficial education institutions provide culture education to majority and minority societies, and each media source to use multiple languages. It enhances the multilingual abilities of members of the majority society, and it is effective in promoting interaction by vitalizing intercultural understanding and communication.

- 3) Utilization of a Substitute Teacher

Children of multicultural families demonstrate low academic achievements, due to a lack of academic understanding. If this intensifies, they can experience maladjustment to school life, so by utilizing substitute teachers, their study is assisted. University student mentoring is also implemented in relation to university students' voluntary service. Also offering voluntary service and mentoring in the areas of language and culture education, and translation service to university students and graduates, who are majoring Vietnamese or Indonesian, can be another method.

- 4) Education in Understanding Multiculturalism

Education in understanding multiculturalism is to be executed by targeting multiple students. By acknowledging and understanding cultural differences of minority students, harmony is promoted as leaders of future society. Second language education should be educated by expanding it to the level of intercultural understanding, instead of limiting it only at the language level.

- 5) Expansion of Minority Language Learning Opportunity

After school, by providing opportunity to learn minority languages through education and

regional culture centers, it gives opportunity to learn languages for children of multicultural families, and, by extension, aids in forming self-identity by learning culture, and promotes open mindedness by providing chance to learn minority languages to citizens.

### **Brief Conclusion**

In Korea, globalization will have to be fulfilled by acknowledging and understanding others' differences and promoting harmony, instead of adhering to assimilation policy based on cultural supremacy.

### **References:**

- [1] Hae-Kyoung, Lee. (2014). Trend and Prospect of International Immigration Multicultural Research. *Korean society* (No.1, 15th series,2014).
- [2] Hae-Kyoung, Lee. (2014). Trend and Prospect of International Immigration Multicultural Research. *Korean society* (No.1, 15th series,2014).
- [3] *National Statistics Portal, International Marriage Status– 2008 – 2016*  
[http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx\\_cd=2430](http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2430)
- [4] *National Statistics Portal, International Marriage Status– 2008 – 2016*  
[http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx\\_cd=2430](http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2430)
- [5] *National Statistics Portal, International Marriage Status2008 – 2016*  
[http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx\\_cd=2430](http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2430)
- [6] Byunglul, Lee. (2011). *The nature and prospect of Korean immigration policy*. (No. 90, 2011): 349
- [7] *Multicultural Education Support Plan*, (2017). Ministry of Education (2017.01.13).
- [8] Eunju, Jeon (2009). Current Status and Direction of Language Education Policies for Multicultural Families: *A Study of Korean Language Education* (Vol 36, 2009), 117.
- [9] Song Young-bok (2010). A Case Study on Bilingual Education for Elementary Multicultural Learners (*Bilingualism*) (No. 43, 2010), 267.
- [10] Cho Young Dal, Park Yoon Kyung, Sung Kyung Hee, (2010). Analysis of the Actual Condition of School Multicultural Education (*Civic Education Research*) (42, 1, 2010), 172.
- [11] Eunju, Jeon (2009). Current Status and Direction of Language Education Policies for Multicultural Families: *A Study of Korean Language Education* (Vol 36, 2009), 118.
- [12] Eunju, Jeon (2009). Current Status and Direction of Language Education Policies for Multicultural Families: *A Study of Korean Language Education* (Vol 36, 2009), 111.
- [13] Cho Young Dal, Park Yoon Kyung, Sung Kyung Hee, (2010). Analysis of the Actual Condition of School Multicultural Education (*Civic Education Research*) (42, 1, 2010), 172.
- [14] Cho Young Dal, Park Yoon Kyung, Sung Kyung Hee, (2010). Analysis of the Actual Condition of School Multicultural Education (*Civic Education Research*) (42, 1, 2010), 172.
- [15] Jeong Eun, Park, (2009). Language Policy and Multiculturalism, *Korean Language and Culture Studies* (Volume I) *International Journal of Korean Language and Culture*, 6 1 (2009.06.30).