



Harnessing Korean English Learners' Funds of Knowledge through Culturally Responsive Readings

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Abstract

The intersection of language learning and the construction of authentic meaning by bilinguals through culturally responsive reading activities remains relatively underexplored in academic discourse. Moreover, prevailing instructional methodologies often fail to fully leverage the linguistic and cultural assets that English Learners (ELs) bring to their educational experiences. This study adopts a case study approach to investigate the responses of two Korean ELs as they interact with culturally responsive texts, drawing upon their rich funds of knowledge and employing a specific reading strategy within their learning process. Given the dearth of research on the impact of culturally responsive texts on ELs' literacy learning, particularly within the context of Korean ELs, this study offers a nuanced examination of the reading experience and language learning of two individuals from this demographic. Data collection includes direct classroom observations and video recordings from the Korean Heritage Language (HL) school. The findings underscore the proficiency of ELs in leveraging their funds of knowledge during retelling activities, enabling Korean ELs to personalize and internalize the text. By showcasing the effectiveness of these practices in shaping meaningful reading experiences, this study offers valuable insights into instructional practices in literacy and language education for ELs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The English Learners (ELs) represent a rapidly growing segment within the school-age population of the United States, emerging as a significant cohort with distinctive educational needs. Recent data from the National Education Statistics (2021) reveals that ELs now comprise 10% of the total K-12 student demographic, underscoring the necessity for the implementation of effective instructional strategies tailored to students whose primary language is not English or who are in the process of acquiring English proficiency. As the number of ELs in educational settings continues to rise, there exists an imperative to enhance the academic performance of these students, particularly within the domain of reading education (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Proficiency in reading and comprehension holds a pivotal role in determining the academic success of students, particularly in the context of high-stakes assessments that serve as benchmarks for scholastic achievement. With the increasing number of ELs in the classroom, the need to improve ELs' academic achievement (Schmitt & Carter, 2000) has become a prevalent concern in the realm of ELs' reading and literacy education. The propensity for misidentification as learning disabled often stems from an overreliance on standardized test results that fail to account for the unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds of these learners (Cathleen, 2008). This discrepancy underscores a critical lack of understanding and accommodation for the linguistic and cultural diversity present in classroom practices, encompassing both instructional methodologies and assessment strategies thereby impeding the pursuit of educational equity. Given the persistent emphasis on the reading

performance of ELs as a cornerstone of academic achievement, educators are urged to prioritize the cultivation of literacy and reading skills (Schmitt & Carter, 2000). While various factors such as socioeconomic status, access to reading resources, home support, and educational opportunities contribute to ELs' diminished reading proficiency, the pervasive focus on Eurocentric cultural narratives within school curricula and materials often overlooks the cultural richness and diversity of non-Western backgrounds (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Consequently, there arises a pressing need for research initiatives in reading education that empower ELs' literacy and reading development within contemporary classroom settings. Despite the recognized significance of cultural and linguistic diversity in the learning process, the discourse surrounding literacy and reading education has thus far afforded limited attention to these multifaceted dimensions (August & Shanahan, 2006). In light of this, the current study seeks to investigate the reading experiences and language learning progression of Korean ELs within the framework of a culturally responsive text, providing avenues for the utilization of their inherent linguistic and cultural resources. By delving into the critical role of cultural contexts in teaching and learning processes, this study posits two fundamental inquiries aimed at advancing scholarly understanding and pedagogical practices (Han & Reed, 2012).

1.1.A Funds of Knowledge Perspective

The underlying framework of this paper embraces the concept of 'funds of knowledge.' ELs come from diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, each bringing a unique set of skills and knowledge nurtured within their home communities to the educational environment, known as 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2002). These funds of knowledge represent a valuable repository of essential skills and knowledge prevalent within immigrant home communities (Greenberg, 1989). However, the current educational system often fails to recognize the significance of these cultural resources, viewing them as obstacles rather than assets. Particularly, Moll (2002) highlights the importance of adopting a meaning-centered approach in literacy instruction, "We believe that a meaning-centered model... allows bilingual students to take full advantage of their first language abilities, and to surpass the limits set by their more limited knowledge of their second language (p. 4)." This speaks to a need to use appropriate resources in literacy instruction for ELs.

A way to promote ELs' funds of knowledge in their learning process, this paper utilizes another concept of culturally responsive teaching drawing upon Gay's (2010). He states that culturally responsive teaching involves a) "using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p.30), and b) utilizing culturally relevant text in literacy instruction as a form of culturally responsive practices. This emphasizes the importance of incorporating culturally appropriate reading materials in classroom instruction to support the learning and reading development of ELs. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research on the efficacy of employing culturally responsive reading materials in literacy instruction, particularly focusing on Korean English ELs. The current educational setting often limits ELs' ability to demonstrate their understanding of texts using their linguistic and cultural background knowledge, prioritizing a curriculum geared towards standardized tests (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). This approach falls short in harnessing the cultural and linguistic resources of ELs to optimize their learning process (Cummins, 2007). To enhance ELs' reading and literacy development, scholars such as Baca (2002) and Brice (2002) advocate for a shift away from relying solely on standardized test outcomes towards authentic reading instruction and curriculum that promote comprehension of texts rather than assimilation into the general education system. Creating spaces within the classroom where ELs can connect their unique background knowledge with the learning materials and implementing differentiated instruction with authentic learning resources are crucial strategies to support ELs' academic and literacy success (Gay, 2010). One effective approach to fostering ELs' learning development is through

the use of culturally responsive readings in literacy instruction. When ELs engage in reading practices that value their cultural and linguistic knowledge, their learning development, particularly in the realm of the reading process, can be nurtured (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Genesse and Riches (2006) state that texts hold meaning for learners when they are connected to their background knowledge and personal experiences. By integrating their background knowledge into the learning process, ELs' literacy development can be enhanced, leading to a deeper understanding of the text and its relevance to real-world contexts (Davidson, 2000). While non-ELs derive meaning from texts based on their mainstream cultural context, providing opportunities for ELs to explore their own cultural and linguistic experiences through culturally relevant texts, including their home culture, can enrich their learning experience (Harlin & Souto-Manning, 2009).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has shown that literacy instruction using culturally relevant texts plays a crucial role in facilitating the dynamic learning process of ELs (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992). When texts that resonate with their own lives and are accompanied by pictures, children can enhance their literacy skills through meaningful connection to the texts (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). According to Freeman & Freeman (2004), ELs learn academic literacy skills in English more effectively when they select books that they can relate to their own experiences and cultural background. In a study conducted by Freeman (2000) with students in Arizona, it was found that ELs showed improved storytelling abilities and higher engagement with texts when they read culturally relevant books. Similarly, Landis and colleagues (2010) observed that ELs used stories to practice oral fluency and expand vocabulary by generating narratives in their home language, Hausa. Despite the scarcity of literature directly addressing reading and literacy development among Korean ELs, few research has highlighted the importance of cultural awareness in literacy classrooms. Yoon's (2007) study explores ELs' participation in regular reading classrooms, with a case study centered on a sixth-grade Korean EL named Jun. With the specific example of Korean EL's participation in the main classroom, the authors emphasize teachers' awareness of the ELs' cultural and social needs and differences in classroom teaching practices. Although the study does not exclusively focus on Korean ELs, it sheds light on the cultural and social factors influencing ELs' classroom interaction and underscores the significance of educators' awareness of ELs' diverse needs within the learning environment. Incorporating folktales in the classroom provides a valuable opportunity to honor ELs' unique culture and linguistic backgrounds, thereby nurturing their literacy skills in both their primary language and additional languages (Spagnoli, 1995). Folktales particularly offer young children moral lessons and exposure to different lifestyles, humor, languages, and cultural nuances for readers who live in diverse worlds (Oh & Kim, 2007). For example, Louie and Davis-Welton (2016) observed that ELs exhibited enhanced storytelling and artistic expression after engaging with folktales that reflected their heritage culture and language in either English or their home language. This study highlights that leveraging their full linguistic repertoire during culturally relevant reading activities not only enriches the learning process but also deepens understanding of the text by bridging the gap between languages. Such practices enable young learners to interpret texts creatively and view the world from a unique perspective (August & Shanahan, 2006).

2.1. Research Question

Given the limited research on how culturally responsive texts can impact ELs' reading and learning development, particularly focusing on Korean ELs, this study aims to investigate the

reading experiences and learning progress of Korean ELs using culturally responsive text. By creating spaces to leverage their linguistic and cultural background resources or funds of knowledge, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into the following questions.

1. What is the reading experience of Korean ELs when engaging with text closely related to their own culture?
2. How do the Korean ELs utilize their funds of knowledge to make meaning and apply reading strategies in the process?

3. METHOD

Given that this research is focused on a specific context and a particular population, I identify this study as a case study. Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner (1984) define a case study as a detailed description of a single example. Therefore, the examination of two Korean ELs' learning process with a culturally responsive text falls under the category of detailed case studies. The reading experience of two Korean ELs is situated within the specific context of the Korean Heritage Language (HL) school in the mid-western region of the United States. Since the study is grounded in context-dependent knowledge and the experience that ELs have developed within their home community, the methodology guided in this research aligns with the principles of case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2013). As case study research focuses on considering knowledge and experience that are context-specific, this study delves into the reading experience of two Korean ELs within the Korean community context in the United States. Recognizing that ELs come from diverse backgrounds and have unique experiences shaped at home, it is evident that context-independent facts alone cannot explain such phenomena. Therefore, the use of case methodology facilitates a deeper understanding of these individual cases (Christensen, 1987). A nuanced understanding of reality cannot solely be derived from context-independent knowledge and rules; rather, it emerges from concrete experiences and practices rooted in a specific context. To comprehend Korean ELs' reading experience with a culturally responsive text, this study can be categorized as an instrumental case study which is employed to offer insight into a particular phenomenon (Stromquist, 2007). In a broader sense, this study may contribute to our understanding of ELs' learning and reading development.

3.1. Positionality

Utilizing my membership within the Korean community, I conduct an in-depth exploration of the localized cultural experiences of Korean ELs through culturally responsive reading lessons (Saldaca, 2011). Given the study's focus on cultural phenomena experienced through reading practices, the interpretation of the research holds significant importance (Markham, 2017). As an insider within the Korean community, I possess a shared experience, enhanced access, cultural interpretation skills, and a profound understanding of Korean ELs' reading experiences with culturally responsive texts (Moll et al, 1992). The trust and shared experiences I have with my Korean ELs contribute to uncovering the nuanced reality of their reading experiences, fostering my growth as a researcher and educator throughout the research process (Flyvbjerg, 2013). Given the reading activities aim to facilitate meaning-making by connecting with learners' background knowledge developed within specific contexts, my own funds of knowledge play a crucial role in understanding the reading experiences of Korean ELs.

3.2. Settings

The study took place at a Korean HL School located in the mid-western region of the United States, where the majority of the residents are either students or employees at a land-grant university. Typically, the students enrolled in the Korean HL school are the children of Korean graduate students or faculty members at the university. Parents are encouraged to send their

children to the Korean HL school every Saturday morning from nine to noon. The classes at the school are structured into two parts: two hours dedicated to learning the Korean language and one hour focused on studying or engaging in math instruction. Sometimes, there is an extra curriculum focusing on traditional Korean cultural activities. The students, whose ages range from 4 to 10 years old, are placed into specific classes and assigned to teachers based on their age and level of proficiency in the Korean language.

3.3. Participants

To gain a detailed understanding of the reading experience of Korean ELs through culturally responsive text, this study limited the number of participants to two students. This approach, aligned with the principles of a case study, allows for a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of their reading experiences and the contextual influences such as cultural and linguistic elements developed within the learners' home community in the realm of human language learning (Gee, 2000). The study involved two Korean ELs, one female and one male, who exhibited varying levels of language proficiency in both Korean and English. The selection criteria for the target students were as follows: a) they are bilingual, capable of speaking both Korean and English to elicit reading responses, b) their decoding abilities in both Korean and English are at a similar stage, (c) they are enrolled in my class at the Korean HL school. Detailed descriptions of the participants are provided below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants information

Name & Gender	Country of Birth (Age of Arrival)	Grade (Age)	L1	L2	English learning in the U.S	Speaking level in Korean	Speaking level in English
Minsu (Male)	Korea (5 years old)	1 st grade (age of 6)	Korean	English	16 months	Intermediate	Fluent
Jimin (Female)	Korea (5 years old)	1 st grade (6)	Korean	English	6 months	Fluent	Intermediate

3.4. Post Reading Activity

Through my personal observation of Korean ELs at the Saturday Korean Heritage Language (HL) School, I embarked on research to explore authentic reading experiences of Korean ELs during post-reading activity, particularly the retelling task. The class at the Korean HL school is structured into two parts: Korean language learning and Math. In the Korean language session, Korean ELs engage in pre-, during, and post-reading activities. The Korean Language learning class starts with reviewing key vocabulary from the book and spending some time activating background knowledge relevant to the upcoming reading material. Pre-reading activities focus on connecting the Korean ELs' previous experiences with the themes of the book. During reading sessions, as the teacher (myself), I read the book aloud to the class while displaying corresponding illustrations from the book. Comprehension checks and clarification questions are integrated throughout the reading process, allowing students to engage with the text and make personal connections. Following the teacher-led reading, Korean ELs participate in a retelling task as a post-reading activity. Korean ELs are allowed to review the book for reference as they engage in retelling tasks, often drawing on personal experiences to connect with the text.

3.5. Reading Material: The Name Jar

I used a modified version of the book titled *The Name Jar* for the purpose of the study as some of the vocabularies in the book may interrupt their reading fluency. In order to enhance

comprehension and foster authentic reading experiences for Korean ELs, I included a Korean translation of the book to aid in better understanding the story as a whole. The modified version had a total word count of 468 across 32 sentences. Each learner's response is organized under specific themes within the content, and details about the book can be found in the reference list. The brief story of the book is below.

The book, *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), is a story about differences, identity, language, and cultural assimilation. When moving to the United States with her family, Eunhye, a Korean girl, she begins to wonder if she should also adopt a new name at her new school to fit in more. She introduces various new names like Daisy, Miranda, Lex, and more, but none of them appears to fit her.

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

The study at the Korean Heritage Language (HL) school utilized three primary methods—direct observation, field notes, and videotaping—to investigate Korean ELs' reading experiences in response to culturally relevant texts. The field observation spanned a semester in the spring of 2017, focusing on two Korean ELs' learning performance during reading and language classes over three consecutive Saturdays. Researchers meticulously documented their interactions with culturally relevant texts through observation notes and video recordings. The video recording captured detailed learning development and reading experiences, shedding light on specific reading responses in cultural contexts. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Korean ELs' reading experiences based on their funds of knowledge, the researcher combined observation field notes with video recordings of the Korean ELs' actual reading responses to culturally relevant texts. This approach aimed to produce high-quality knowledge transcending individual reading events, ensuring the relevance and significance of the study (Fick, 2008).

In my analysis for this paper, I examined the audio recordings of the Korean ELs' reading responses to culturally relevant texts. Each recording lasted approximately 4 minutes. It took 8-10 minutes per student to complete the reading of an entire story during two reading sessions. The reading activities comprised three key parts. First, the Korean ELs shared their thoughts or any experiences that are relatable to the text while viewing the cover page of the book. This was followed by shared reading with the researcher (me) and a discussion of the text. After reading the text together, the Korean ELs are tasked with retelling the story along with the drawing. During the post-reading activity, students engaged in verbal reflection responding to questions that prompted them to connect their experiences to the text. For instance, they were asked to explain and add why they thought a character was shy or how they would react in a particular situation after retelling a part of the story. The researcher also examined the children's use of languages, both Korean and English, in various situations such as break time, greetings, and lessons. This examination provided insight into how students engaged with the texts and how their funds of knowledge were reflected in their reading response.

According to Stake (2003), an instrument case study pursues uncovering new insights that can draw external interest by examining contexts and detailed activities. Following Stake's definition of the instrument case study, all video recordings were transcribed and thematically coded to align with emerging themes, offering valuable insights for external interest. The research questions served as a guide for data coding and analysis (Stake, 2003). Initially, I reviewed field notes from February, March, and April 2017, along with video recordings of reading lessons involving the two Korean ELs. While capturing their reading responses to the text, I used prompt questions to elicit their thoughts on the text. Employing the think-aloud protocol allowed students to articulate their reflections on the text. The field notes and spoken data from retelling tasks captured the students' unique experiences with the text, facilitating the creation of a preliminary code scheme. Through open coding of field notes and verbal and

non-verbal data between the students, comparisons were made to enhance the understanding of their reading experiences with the culturally relevant text, considering their levels of L1 and L2 proficiency. By continuously comparing the data, a code scheme was developed based on the similarities observed in the Korean ELs' reading responses. Subsequently, various codes were identified through categorical analysis and organized into themes (Rose & Sullivan, 1996). Through ongoing comparisons and the incorporation of additional data, themes were expanded and refined. This meticulous approach to data collection and analysis culminated in the subsequent presentation of findings.

4. CASE STUDIES AND FINDINGS

In this section, I present and discuss the two Korean ELs, Minsu's and Jimin's, reading responses to the culturally responsive text along with the emerging themes surrounding Korean culture and language derived from students' reading responses. After data analysis, I developed a selective coding scheme to categorize and define the significance of key themes identified in Table 2. Each code within the scheme is illustrated with an example to elucidate its meaning and relevance within the context of the study (See Table 2).

Table 2. The Cultural Themes from the Children's Reading Responses

Cultural Themes	Definition	Example
Loyalty and Obedience	The way of greeting adults/elders The relationship with others	Minsu: I bow to grandma saying Annyunghaseyo (안녕하세요)
Family bonding/cohesion (L1)	Relationships and strong connections among individuals recognizing themselves as a part of the same family.	Minsu: 할머니 집 좋아요 (I like to go to grandma's house). Jimin: I have two grandmas and two grandpas.
Collectivist culture (L1): minimization of verbal interaction	To emphasize more group goals than individuals	Minsu: 알아도 아무말 안해요 (I know the answer but I don't speak out)
Gender roles (L1 & L2): suppression of emotion	Beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics in Korean culture	Minsu: 잘 놀았다고 해요. (I don't talk about it, but say I had fun)

**Jimin was more comfortable speaking in Korean. Her response was written in Korean first followed by English translation in parenthesis.*

4.1. Loyalty and Obedience

One of the most significant findings that we observed from Minsu's and Jimin's reading responses is a core value of Korean society, loyalty and piety. Loyalty is one of the fundamental concepts with which all people are encouraged to be developed in the traditional Korean society. It is not so related to the loyalty to the nation but emphasizes the loyalty to the older (Kim, 2000). The value of loyalty represents filial piety for family members, grandparents and parents. Koreans typically do not separate from their parents and grandparents until they start their own family. They stay together in the same house, and thus, the virtue of respect for the family elders naturally passes down to generation and generation. Considering the foundation of Korea's traditional values stemming from Confucianism which is a form of eastern philosophical understanding considering loyalty to the elders a good manner to be developed as a member of the community in society (Lee, 2017). Because of the beliefs and behaviors of

Koreans as a people in Korea, the elders including Korean parents expect their children to learn the essential Confucian virtue, respect for parents and elders. By closely examining two Korean ELs' reading responses of the book, *The Name Jar*, the languages indicate how Minsu and Jimin show their respects towards their parents and grandparents in the excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1) Loyalty and Obedience

Teacher (Myself): Can you remember what this part of the story was about?

Minsu: Grandma told her "go well" (잘 다녀오라고 했어요.)

Jimin: Grandma gave her a stamp and ink pen. I have two grandmas and grandpas. She gave me a hug, always.

Teacher(myself): What else did you do when you say goodbye to your grandma?

Minsu: I said goodbye and bowed to her (안녕히 계세요 하면서 인사했어요.) My dad told me, always bow to grandma and grandpa (항상 할머니 할아버지한테 인사하라고 했어요).

Jimin: 인사하고 안녕히 계세요 했어 (Bow down and say goodbye)

Teacher: Do you always bow down to your grandparents?

Students: Yeah, because they are my grandma and grandpa.

On the second page of the book, Eunhye's family is depicted bidding farewell to her grandmother at the airport in Korea. In the story, the grandmother presents Eunhye a stamp and an ink pen as they say their goodbyes, surrounded by Eunhye's immediate family members: her father, mother, brother, and herself. Upon reading this passage, my participants, Minsu and Jimin, immediately relate the narrative to their own experiences, sharing the expected etiquette observed during farewells. When the teacher asks "*What do you remember here in this part of the book?*" Minsu said, "I said goodbye and bow to her." The act of bowing holds significance in Korean culture, seen as a gesture of respect when meeting new people or encountering elders. In Jimin's response, she also describes "bowing down" as a gesture of respect for elders, her grandparents. She said, "인사하고 안녕히 계세요 했어 (Bow down and say goodbye)" Both Minsu and Jimin exhibit a clear understanding of the expected behaviors when greeting and bidding farewell, particularly to elders. In this interaction between the younger and older generations, key Confucian virtues such as family loyalty and obedience come to light. The act of showing respect and loyalty through bowing to elders exemplifies these virtues. This adherence to traditional practices instills in young children a sense of loyalty to their parents' beliefs without question. Another example in the excerpt 1 when Minsu acknowledges that his father instructed him to always bow to his grandparents reflects his acceptance and internalization of these cultural norms. He said "*My dad told, always bow to grandma and grandpa (항상 할머니 할아버지한테 인사하라고 했어요)*" Minsu's unwavering adherence to this custom of bowing to their grandparents signifies a continuation of inherited traditions and values that have been passed down through generations. This traditional practice not only demonstrates reverence for one's elders but also instills in young children a profound sense of loyalty to their parents' teachings and values. By embracing and internalizing such customs, both Minsu and Jimin exemplify a continuation of inherited traditions and values, highlighting the enduring importance of loyalty and obedience within Korean society.

4.2. Value of Extended Family

Family structure and function is another important consideration in Korean culture. Extended family composed of at least three generations appears to be a common form of Korean family structure. The grandparents, the parents, and the children build strong family bonding and kin relationships on both sides. The extended family plays a significant role in Korea, often serving as the cornerstone of social support (Georgas, 2003). It is common that extended family

provides necessary support during life events, times of need, etc. To better support those needs, extended families live in the same house and/or reside closer to their children. Extended family is one of the collective cultural characteristics where all family members are interdependent and share responsibilities (Waiters, 2009). Because of the unique family function with extended family members, they tend to make decisions as a collaborative team which leads to strong kinship bonds relying on family culture values (Engstrom, 2012). Such extended family structure and function can easily be found in Korean culture. My participants in excerpt 2 reflect on their extended family members after reading the page of the book depicting the close relationship between Eunhye's family and her grandparents. This excerpt illustrates how two Korean ELs, Minsu and Jimin, view their extended family members as integral parts of their family unit, irrespective of whether they live together.

Excerpt 2 Value of Extended Family

Teacher: Eunhye was at the airport with family. Eunhye looks like very close to her grandparents.

Jimin: 우리 가족도 네 명이에요. 우리 엄마, 아빠, 여동생, 나 이렇게요. 아, 할머니, 할아버지도 있어요. (There are four in my family like Eunhye. My mom, dad, little sister, and me. Oh, I forgot to tell I have two grandmas and two grandpas as well)

Teacher: Do you live with your grandmas and grandpas? Sounds like you really like your grandmas and grandpas.

Jimin: 네, 할머니 할아버지 좋아요. 우리 가족이에요. 할머니 할아버지 집에 자주가요, 엄마 아빠랑 동생이랑 (Yes, I love my grandma and grandpa. They are part of my family. I often come to visit their home with my mom and dad and little sister).

Minsu: Same here. I like going to my grandma's home. 잘해주세요 (They are very kind.)

During the discussion on family members, Jimin initially included her immediate family members—her mother, father, younger sister, and herself. She further expands this circle to encompass her grandparents on both sides, acknowledging them as integral members of her family, saying “아, 할머니, 할아버지도 있어요. (Oh, I forgot to tell I have two grandmas and two grandpas as well)” This particular talk demonstrates the traditional importance of multiple generations living and caring for each other in Korea. Minsu and Jimin express When asked about whether she lives with her grandparents, Jimin expresses her deep affection for her extended family, emphasizing their importance in her life: “네, 할머니 할아버지 좋아요. 우리 가족이에요. 할머니 할아버지 집에 자주가요, 엄마 아빠랑 동생이랑 (Yes, I love my grandma and grandpa. They are part of my family. I often come to visit their home with my mom and dad and little sister).” The subsequent remark demonstrates the bond Jimin shares with her extended family, particularly her grandparents. Similarly, Minsu also highlights the special connection he has with his grandparents, expressing his enjoyment of visiting his grandma's home “Same here. I like going to my grandma's home. 잘해주세요 (They are very generous)” By openly expressing their love for and enjoyment of spending time with their grandparents, Minsu and Jimin exemplify the cultural significance of honoring and maintaining strong connections with extended family members in Korean society.

4.3. Collectivism and Conformity: Minimization of Verbal Expression

Collective good and harmony are emphasized in Korean society where individual interests tend to be sacrificed by group interests for the sake of harmony (Chung, 1994). This emphasis on collective welfare often manifests in various aspects of social interaction including minimization of verbal and direct expression. Due to social pressure, making oneself different

and outstanding from others is socially unencouraged (Fielding, 1997). Individuals in Korean culture tend to be more inclined to adhere to the group's decision to achieve harmony and cooperation. Social pressure leads individuals to preserve social cohesion by complying with social norms and avoiding conflict, preferring to minimize verbal and direct communication (Fielding, 1997). The excerpt 3 illustrates how both Jimin and Minsu choose to minimize their verbal and direct expression of their feeling of discomfort in the situation as they find that better for others.

Excerpt 3 Minimization of Direct Expression

Teacher: 책에서 어떤 부분이 또 생각나? (Do you recall anything else from the story?)

Jimin: 스쿨 버스를 타고 아이들이 너 이름이 뭐야 하고 물었는데, 은혜가 말할까 말까 생각하다가 안말했어. 말하고 싶었는데 안했어 (While riding the school bus, the kids asked, "what's your name? but Eunhye thought about whether to answer or not and ended up not saying anything. It sounds difficult to say. Eunhye wanted to tell her name but didn't)

Minsu: Oh I remember. The teacher said her name in class. And Her friends call her something different like Unyee. But She does not correct them because she thinks it's easier for her friends. Eunhye 좀 sad 했어. (Eunhye looks a bit sad).

Jimin: 집에서 엄마한테 다른 이름으로 바꾸고 싶다고 얘기했어. 나도 영어이름 있어, Jane. (She came back home and she told her mom that she wants to change her name to a different one. I have an English name, Jane)

Analyzing the responses of Minsu and Jimin in excerpt 3, it becomes evident that their experiences are deeply intertwined with the core values of Korean society, emphasizing collectivism and conformity. Specifically, Jimin's account of Eunhye's reluctance to disclose her name on the school bus due to concerns about pronunciation difficulties highlights the societal pressure for individuals to conform and avoid standing out. Jimin said "스쿨 버스를 타고 아이들이 너 이름이 뭐야 하고 물었는데, 은혜가 말할까 말까 생각하다가 안말했어. 말하고 싶었는데 안했어 (While riding the school bus, the kids asked, "what's your name? but Eunhye thought about whether to answer or not and ended up not saying anything. It sounds difficult to say. Eunhye wanted to tell her name but didn't)" Similarly, Minsu's observation of Eunhye accepting a mispronounced name without correction to spare her friends any discomfort underscores the importance of harmony and consideration for others in Korean social interactions. Minsu said "Her friends call her something different like Unyee. But She does not correct them because she thinks it's easier for her friends. Eunhye 좀 sad 했어. (she looks a bit sad)" These instances reflect different communication styles, with Eunhye grappling with direct expression while Minsu prioritizes maintaining smooth relationships. Moreover, Jimin's narrative delves into a broader context of collectivism and conformity, depicting how Eunhye's desire to change her name to an English one signifies the negotiation of personal identity within societal expectations. For example, Jimin said "집에서 엄마한테 다른 이름으로 바꾸고 싶다고 얘기했어. 나도 영어이름 있어, Jane. (She came back home and she told her mom that she wants to change her name to a different one. I have an English name, Jane)" By opting for an English name like Jane, Jimin symbolizes a willingness to adapt and conform to mainstream norms, aligning herself with broader societal standards. In cultures that value collectivism, individuals often navigate between personal expression and societal harmony, seeking to strike a delicate balance between individuality and group cohesion (Fielding, 1997). In essence, these interactions underscore the intricate dynamics of social conformity and individual identity within Korean culture, illustrating how

individuals navigate between personal desires and societal expectations in their pursuit of harmony and cohesion within the community.

4.4. Gender Role: Suppression of Emotion

In the context of gender roles in Korean society, traditional expectations and norms play a significant role in shaping the identities and behaviors of individuals from a young age. Boys and girls are often socialized into distinct gender roles that reflect the societal values and expectations placed upon them. For example, boys are typically taught to embody traits such as authority, strength, assertiveness, the importance of carrying on the family name, etc. On the other hand, girls are often encouraged to learn roles centered around domestic responsibilities like cooking, nurturing, and caregiving, as well as cultivating attitudes and behaviors deemed appropriate for women in society (Lee, 2017). These gender expectations extend beyond just physical roles and skills, influencing the development of personality traits and emotional expression in children. Consequently, boys may feel pressure to suppress their emotions and appear strong and stoic, as vulnerability is often discouraged in traditional notions of masculinity. In contrast, girls may be more comfortable expressing their emotions openly and seeking support from others, as they are encouraged to embody qualities that are traditionally associated with femininity (Yu, 1980). The reading response of Minsu in excerpt 4 exemplifies the socialization of emotional restraint in boys as a learned gender role in Korean society.

Excerpt 4. Suppression of Emotion

Teacher: 은혜가 집에 와서 처음엔 엄마한테 아무 말 안했던 거 기억나? (Did you remember anything from the conversation between Eunhye and her mom at home?)

Minsu: after school, Eunhye 집에 와서 엄마가 학교 이야기 했어 (After school, Eunhye came back home and talked with her mom about her day at school.) I kind of like her. When my mom asked me how was school, I just said yes, and it was good. I hang out with friends. That's all.

Teacher: but later on, Eunhye shares her school experience with her mom. What about you?

Jimin: 나는 다 얘기해요 엄마한테. (I told my mom everything)

Minsu: Yeah, sometimes I talk, but not much.

The excerpt illuminates different societal expectations regarding the expression of emotions based on traditional gender roles. Minsu's account reveals his brief and straightforward communication about his day at school, focusing on the activities he enjoyed with friends. He said *"I kinda like her. When my mom asks me how was school, I just said yes, and it was good. I hang out with friends. That's all"* Minsu relates to Eunhye's initial conversation with her mom at home. Minsu's succinct style of communication mirrors stereotypical expectations of masculinity, which often discourage the open expression of emotions as a male. Young boys are often taught to adhere to these traditional gender norms, leading to a tendency to suppress or simplify their feelings to align with societal ideals of manhood (Yu, 1980). On the other hand, Jimin's statement *"나는 다 얘기해요 엄마한테. (I told my mom everything)"* demonstrates a different communication approach. She displays no hesitation in sharing various aspects of her school life with her mother, underscoring a more open and emotionally expressive demeanor typically associated with girls seeking support. Minsu's subsequent comment, *"Yeah, sometimes I talk, but not much,"* further emphasizes his inclination to communicate with his mother in a reserved manner, downplaying the depth of his emotional expressions. These interactions shed light on the influence of gender roles on individuals' emotional expression and communication styles, highlighting how societal norms can shape

the way people navigate and convey their emotions from a young age. In Korean culture, Men, like Minsu, are typically encouraged to adopt a reserved and stoic demeanor, focusing on practical aspects of their experiences. In contrast, women, exemplified by Jimin's openness with her mother, are often encouraged to express their feelings more freely and seek emotional support from others. These different expectations shape how individuals navigate their emotional lives and interpersonal relationships within the cultural context of South Korea.

5. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Korean ELs' reading responses to the culturally relevant text reveals important implications for educators. Readers such as Minsu and Jimin, who are Korean ELs, can effectively construct meaning from stories that resonate with their culture and language because their background knowledge enables a deeper understanding of the text. By integrating culturally relevant texts into classroom teaching practices, teachers can enhance ELs' comprehension and engagement with the materials. While not every book needs to be culturally specific, ELs benefit from seeing their own identities and linguistic/cultural background represented in the curriculum (Cummins, 2000), fostering both literacy skills and a sense of identity. Exposure to diverse cultural and linguistic perspectives through multicultural readings not only enriches the educational experience for ELs, but also benefits non-ELs by providing a broader worldview which non-ELs are usually unfamiliar with. Young readers like Minsu and Jimin, particularly appreciate stories that mirror their own experiences and feature characters of their age group (Freeman & Freeman, 2004), leading to increased engagement and the sharing of personal anecdotes related to the narrative. In other words, culturally relevant readings offer ELs a valuable opportunity to leverage their funds of knowledge in the learning and reading process.

Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of tailored curricula and materials for student development, there often exists a significant discrepancy between current classroom practices and the actual needs of learners (Milner, et al., 2019). ELs in the study actively engage with texts and interpret the world through a bilingual lens. As many schools in the United States tend to prioritize Eurocentric themes in their curriculum, emphasizing culturally relevant texts in classroom libraries and instructional practices can play a vital role in promoting equitable education and inclusivity for marginalized groups in society (Milner, et al., 2019). This shift towards inclusivity and diversity in education not only enriches students' learning experiences but also contributes to creating an educational culture where all individuals feel valued and recognized.

Additionally, ELs can develop empathy and cultural competence by exploring diverse perspectives and different cultures from classroom readings (Kim & Ma, 2019). Specifically, both ELs and non-ELs can have an opportunity to reflect their own cultural values and norms and compare to those of others. By providing young learners with collaborating projects or assignments, they can engage in research, discussion, and presentation on different cultures. This classroom activity not only promotes cross cultural communication but also develops their empathy and tolerance for differences.

Research has emphasized the positive impact on ELs when they are given opportunities to activate their background knowledge, which often stems from their home environment. However, there has been limited focus on how these principles can be effectively translated into actual classroom practices. This study's findings indicate that ELs' reading experience can significantly benefit from the integration of appropriate teaching practices. For instance, incorporating diverse classroom materials and curriculum, creating space for the exchange and sharing of ELs' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and integrating collaborative assignments can cultivate a more inclusive and tolerant classroom environment where young learners learn to appreciate and respect diverse cultures and experiences without imposing pressure on ELs to assimilate into mainstream cultural norm. While addressing the diverse teaching approaches in teaching practices may pose challenges, it is crucial to recognize the

value of incorporating culturally relevant materials as to create an inclusive and empowering educational experience for ELs. As noted by Ladson-Billings (1995), promoting equity, engagement, and academic success for ELs in school can begin with embracing culturally responsive approaches in classroom teaching

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