



International Summer Research or Residency Award

Seong Ho Choi, 2024

South Korean Teachers' Indigenous Professional Standards Curriculum & Instruction

Thanks to the support of The International Summer Research or Residency Travel Award, I successfully conducted field research in South Korea from May to August 2024. The research aimed to examine Korean elementary school teachers' professionalism through the lens of indigenous professional standards. Teacher professionalism is widely regarded as a crucial factor in the overall quality of a nation's education system and student achievement in international comparative assessments. Finnish education, along with the excellence of its teachers, has been globally acknowledged and studied by both Western and non-Western countries to enhance their teacher education systems. However, discussions surrounding the professionalism of teachers in East Asian countries have often been marginalized, despite the high performance of their students in these assessments. Therefore, I decided to address this marginalization from a post-colonial perspective, highlighting South Korean teachers' indigenous professional standards.

To achieve the goals of my research, I visited Chinju National University of Education and Gwangju National University of Education to collect and analyze the curricula and programs for pre-service elementary school teachers in South Korea. These findings provided deep insights into how pre-service teachers are extensively trained across all subject areas in the national curriculum, including Korean, mathematics, science, English, social studies, moral education, music education, physical education, computer education, art education, and more. In addition, they gain a comprehensive understanding of educational theories, such as curriculum and instruction, educational policy, assessment, counseling, psychology, special education, and teaching methods for each subject. This comprehensive preparation exemplifies how Korean elementary school teachers are thoroughly trained to become experts in all subject matters.



I also had the opportunity to present the pilot study on Korean teachers’ professionalism at The Annual Conference of the Korean Society for Curriculum Studies, held in collaboration with the Korean Educational Research Association on June 28th–29th at Chonnam National University in Gwangju. Presenting my research at the conference allowed me to receive valuable feedback from the audience and fellow presenters, which enhanced my understanding of Korean teachers’ practices and their continuous efforts toward improvement. In particular, the feedback on the use of indigenous Korean concepts as analytical tools was invaluable in broadening the scope of my study. By incorporating these historical and cultural concepts, I was able to contextualize my work further using vivid examples from the Korean context. Moreover, I visited several seowons, Confucian academies from the Joseon Dynasty, to explore the indigenous notions of learning and teaching rooted in Korean history. Through my visits to these historical sites, including pictures, signboards, comments, and guidebooks, I gained insights into the roles, expectations, and professionalism of teachers as reflected in the Korean ontological and epistemological traditions. After analyzing additional data and literature, and comparing them with Western standards, I ultimately identified three key standards of Korean teachers’ professionalism: professional knowledge and skills (ji-seong, 知性), ethical practices (deok-seong, 德性), and professional collaboration and leadership (hyeop-dong, 協同).

