Incorporating Cultural Narratives as an Instructional Strategy in EFL Teacher Education*

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Even though Korean society is rapidly becoming multicultural and multilingual, EFL teacher education tends to teach language skills and pedagogical knowledge without sufficiently addressing multicultural issues. This study explored the potential of incorporating cultural narratives (CNs) as an instructional strategy in EFL teacher education to foster Korean EFL teachers’ cultural sensitivity and competency. The primary data came from two surveys with 12 secondary school English teachers and a focus group interview with six of them. The teachers all participated in a six-month in-service English teacher education program and took the researcher’s cultural course. The researcher, who taught English in secondary schools in Korea as well as who had diverse cross-cultural experiences, incorporated not only her own CNs but also various types of multicultural stories in the curriculum. The study revealed that the teachers perceived the CNs presented in class as meaningful and useful in promoting their cultural sensitivity and competency. The researcher concludes that CNs could play an important role as an instructional strategy in EFL teacher education.

Key words: cultural narratives, EFL teacher education, instructional strategy, multicultural issues

I. Introduction

In the globalized world, many societies, including Korea, exhibit cultural and linguistic diversities. According to the Korea Immigration Service (KIS, * This paper was supported by the research grant of Pai Chai University in 2017.
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2017), the influx of foreign immigrants in Korea has greatly risen from 680,000 in 2003 to 2,024,813 in 2017, and they came from various countries, including China, Vietnam, and America. Consequently, “Korea is quickly moving from a homogeneous and monocultural community into a heterogeneous and multicultural society” (Kang, 2010, p. 287). Korean students do not live as an isolated group but live in a globalized world where “local and global needs meet and merge, collide and conflict, and new culturally and linguistically hybrid thirdness[es] emerge” (Mauranen, 2001, p. 51). As a result of the changes, Korean English teachers are and will be called to work with a wide array of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. However, as Kang pointed out (2010), there are reservations about whether Korean society as a whole is undertaking this new transition well. There seems to be a lag between diverse student populations and teacher educators’ understanding of its implications. For example, in East Asian contexts (e.g., Korea, China, Japan, and Taiwan), most English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education has emphasized teaching language and pedagogy (Liou, 2001; Sung, 2012). Cultural issues have yet to be addressed adequately. Kramsch (1993) explicitly emphasized the importance of teaching cultural competency in school:

Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them. (p. 1)

Because of the implicit notion of culture in school curriculum, many Korean EFL teachers might assume that their primary responsibility is to “teach students English skills with a nice native-like or so called ‘standard’