

A Study in Improvement Strategies in Rural Multicultural Elementary Schools in Korea

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Abstract

Objectives: To investigate possible improvements of rural multicultural elementary schools in Korea. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** A survey of a total of 27 teachers at 3 multicultural elementary schools was conducted using a free-response questionnaire to collect their full opinions about improvement strategies in rural multicultural elementary schools; the survey responses were analyzed to identify the central concepts of their responses. **Findings:** The improvement plan for rural multicultural schools can be condensed to four main concepts: interactive experience, participation, diversity, and multicultural competence. For the experience, teachers themselves should receive multicultural education field experience. To promote multicultural sensitivity, the teachers mainly suggested multicultural learning by doing. In addition, the teachers suggested encouraging philanthropic and caring personalities and respect for diversity of students. **Application/Improvements:** Therefore, the study suggested that the proposed activation plans for these schools be implemented by considering central concepts such as experience orientation, participation orientation, diversity and multicultural competence.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Multicultural School, Rural Area

1. Introduction

With the constant increase in the number of multicultural families in Korea, multicultural children's school attendance has also been increasing rapidly. In 2014, a total of 67,806 multicultural students attended elementary, middle, and high schools nationwide. Among them, the majority, 71.2% (48,297), attended elementary schools, 18.5% (12,525) were junior high school students, and the remaining 10.3% were enrolled in high school (6,984 students). Altogether, they accounted for 1.07% of all of the students in Korea¹.

When the students were separated by urban vs. rural, (*si* is "urban," and the rural areas are either *eup* or *myeon*), 61.0% (18,323) of the students lived in urban areas, and only 39.0% (11,717) lived in rural areas; that is, more students lived in urban than rural areas¹.

However, the rural areas had a greater proportion of multicultural families compared with the urban areas,

and rural areas tend to be poorer educational environments than do urban areas. Thus, rural schools require a greater focus on academic and administrative facilities and policies to improve their quality.

This appeal can be also justified because rural schools tend to be small and scattered; schools with 60 students or fewer accounted for 36.8% of all of the schools in *myeon* communities and up to 56.7% in the islets and backcountry regions. Further, small schools comprised 43% of all rural schools (elementary, middle, and high) in 2010, and they will continue to increase in number to the extent that they will comprise up to 50% of schools in 2015 and 67% in 2020². Because they tend to have fewer students and teachers tend to teach multiple classes, the small schools in rural areas usually cannot maintain standard curricula, let alone provide different educational programs for students. Further, these schools are also faced with overall management challenges such as class formation, personnel management and deployment and duty assignment

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of teachers. These disadvantages can serve as excuses for many teachers to avoid being assigned to rural schools, which even further marginalizes the rural schools and keeps them noncompetitive with urban schools³.

In addition to the above challenges is the fact that most rural multicultural families are poorer than other populations in Korea. As shown in the Nationwide Survey on Household Income, the household incomes of the multicultural families were so low in general that household with average monthly incomes of one to two million won accounted for 38.4% of their whole community⁴. Before they married, the majority of Korean men who married foreign women were from lower income groups⁵, and the multicultural families formed by these marriages more often experienced serious financial difficulties⁶. This household poverty leads to gaps in rural children's education opportunities⁷, so that the children of multicultural families in rural areas tend to routinely receive lower-quality education.

Ultimately, the challenges faced by children in rural multicultural families evoke our concern and highlight the need to seek appropriate solutions for them. According to the research, most children of rural multicultural families routinely experience challenges such as: identity confusion caused by their parents' conflicting child-rearing processes; the lack of other children who resemble them; linguistic problems caused by their deficiencies in the local language; the lack of social relationships resulting from passive interactions with their peers; the emotional

pain caused by prejudice from local residents who pity the children and their families; fear of bullying, and many others⁸⁻¹⁰.

Therefore, in view of the increase in the numbers of multicultural families in rural areas, the quality of education in most rural schools, the economic difficulties faced by rural multicultural families, and the challenges faced by their children, it is considered essential that rural multicultural schools be improved. Without timely interventions, rural multicultural students could, based on their inadequate education and limited opportunities, could emerge as adults as a potential threat to the stability of Korean society, requiring massive social spending to address¹¹. Meanwhile, the research on the trends in rural schools, which had been marginalized since the government adopted policies in favor of abolishing small schools, has recently increased in number as multicultural families in rural regions increase as well. This upward trend in the research has reaped some valuable outcomes, primarily targeted in three tiers: rural schools themselves^{2,3,12,13}; multicultural families in rural areas¹⁴; and the children of rural multicultural families^{8,10,15,16}. However, most of these studies utilized qualitative methods centered on case studies and have focused mainly on themes such as immigrant women's difficulties in rural multicultural families, the associated factors of their children's academic achievement, and the differences between native Korean and multicultural children and their families.

Table 1. Survey and questionnaire areas

Subject	Questionnaire Topics
School learning environment	- The human, physical, and psychological environments necessary for improving rural multicultural education,
Teacher's role	- The skills and qualities required by teachers in order to improve rural multicultural education
Curriculum	- The contents to be included in rural school curricula and programs
Students	- The student attributes and capacities required for them to succeed in improved rural multicultural education - Measures to promote students' cultural sensitivity
Evaluation	- Methods that are conducive to evaluating rural multicultural education
Parents' role	- The parental role in improving rural multicultural education
Community's role	- The role of rural communities in improving rural multicultural education
Total	8 Items

The literature review revealed that there are comparatively few studies on multiculturalism in rural schools. Therefore, this study was targeted at teachers in rural multicultural elementary schools with the aim of analyzing and investigating possible improvements to be applied in these schools.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants for the study were 27 teachers who were working at multicultural elementary schools in rural areas of Chungnam Province: 10 from School C in S city; 6 from School M in T gun; and 11 from School E in Y gun.

2.2 Data Collection

Once the teachers agreed to participate, the free-response questionnaires were distributed to each, and their responses were collected after one week. The teachers who responded to the survey were paid for their cooperation.

2.3 Research Tools

The research tools applied in the previous studies^{12,13} were referred to, and the education components that were

investigated were divided into teachers, curricula, student assessment, the schools' learning environments, and the parents' and communities' roles in local education. The researcher formulated a questionnaire for each segment area and developed two questionnaires for the student areas. The survey contents were as Table 1.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were subjected to content and frequency analysis. The content was analyzed by the researcher's codifying the information after the participants' responses were analyzed; the codified data were then analyzed for frequency. The central concepts were determined by the frequency analysis results and then categorized based on the results.

3. Results

3.1 The Human, Physical, and Psychological Environments Needed for Improving Multicultural Schools

A total of 29 measures were developed to assess the human, physical, and psychological environments that the teachers felt would improve rural multicultural education. Specifically, 10 respondents, the most for any item,

Table 2. Analysis of human, physical and psychological environmental factors (UnitL Persons)

Human Environment	Frequency	Physical Environment	Frequency	Psychological Environment	Frequency
Counseling resources or programs	12	Financial support	5	Proper social awareness	1
Bilingual instructors	5	Experiential learning facilities	1	-	-
Interpretation services	4	Classroom environments that recognize multiculturalism positively	1		
Multicultural education instructors	3	School bus support	1		
Multicultural coordinators	2	Developing multicultural education materials	1		
Administrative staff for multicultural matters	2		-		
Korean language lecturers	1				
Total	29				

stated that consultation resources or counseling programs would improve the human element, followed by bilingual instructor assistance, translation support, and employing instructors who specialize in multicultural education. Secondly, to improve the physical environment, financial support was the most commonly proposed, by five of the teachers; other suggestions were improved classroom environments, school bus support, and developing multicultural education materials. Thirdly, for improving the psychological environment, one respondent suggested increasing social awareness, the least frequent response. Above results were shown in Table 2.

3.2 Skills and Qualities Teachers Should Have

For the skills and qualities that would be necessary for teachers to succeed in improving rural multicultural education, the respondents identified three main concepts: qualities, skills, and multicultural efficacy, which referred to the teachers' confidence in their multicultural education.

Table 3, two respondents recommended equality and rationality in teacher quality, and two others suggested

Table 3. Analysis of required teacher qualities and skills (unit: persons)

Quality	Frequency	Skill	Frequency	Multicultural efficacy	Frequency
Equality and rationality	2	Ability to understand Korean curricula	1	Training in understanding multicultural families	21
Passion	2	Counseling skills	1	Multicultural teaching methods	2
Sense of duty	2	Communication skills	1	-	-
-	-	Empowerment	1		
Total	33				

passion and a sense of duty. For necessary skills, one person each suggested that teachers should understand Korean curricula, have counseling skills, have communication skills and receive talent development. Twenty-one teachers responded that their multicultural efficacy and understanding of multicultural families could be increase with multicultural education, and two persons suggested multicultural teaching approaches. That is, most of the teachers felt that multicultural efficacy was the most necessary requirement for them to improve their performance.

3.3 Content to be Included in Curricula

For the contents to be included in improved rural multicultural education curricula, a total of 12 measures, which was shown in Table 4, were proposed and condensed to three central concepts classified by content: multiculturalism, personality building, and improving teaching methods. For multiculturalism, the most teachers, nine, suggested education to enhance multicultural understanding, followed by two suggestions for language education, two for reducing prejudice, and correcting misperceptions about other cultures. For personality

Table 4. Analysis of content to be included in curricula (unit: persons)

Multiculturalism	Frequency	Personality education	Frequency	Improving teaching methods	Frequency
Education in multicultural understanding	9	Respect for diversity	3	On-site experiential learning	9
Language training	2	Awareness of human rights	2	Student-centered teaching techniques	2
Overcoming prejudice	2	Consideration	1	-	-
Recognizing differences	2	-	-		
World civic education	1				
Education in international understanding	1				
Sensitivity training	1				
Total	33				

building in a multicultural society, three respondents recommended respecting diversity, two suggested increasing awareness of human rights, and one suggested neighborhood consideration. To improve teaching methods, nine participants suggested on-site learning experience, two supported a student-centered approach, and two suggested curriculum reform.

3.4 Evaluation Methods

To examine ways to improve methods for evaluating efforts to improve rural multicultural education, four methods were put forth, divided into quantitative and qualitative, and analyzed based on these two concepts as shown in Table 5.

First, for the quantitative evaluation, eight teachers suggested surveying teachers, students, and parents, and five recommended surveying multicultural families. In contrast, for qualitative evaluation methods, 10 participants favored observation, and two suggested performance evaluations.

3.5 Students' Attributes and Abilities

The teachers suggested 14 attributes and abilities that students should have in order to help improve rural multicultural education. These items were divided into two central concepts, personality and multicultural sensitivity, and the analysis centered on these concepts. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 5. Evaluation methods analysis (unit: persons)

Quantitative	Frequency	Qualitative	Frequency
Survey of teachers, students, parents	8	Observation	10
Survey of multicultural families satisfaction	5	Performance evaluation	2
Total	25		

Table 6. Analysis on suggested student's attributes and abilities (unit: persons)

Personality	Frequency	Multicultural sensitivity	Frequency
Philanthropic and caring mind	5	Respect for diversity	6
Reducing prejudice	4	Recognizing differences	4
Increasing sense of community	3	Bilingual capability	3
Receptivity	2	Cultural identity	2
Tolerance	2	Multicultural understanding	1
Sense of harmony	2	Positive thoughts about multiculturalism	1
Self-esteem and pride	2	-	-
Awareness of human rights	1		
Total	38		

Five teachers suggested philanthropic and caring personalities, four people proposed reducing prejudice, and three suggested developing in students a sense of community. For multicultural sensitivity, six teachers recommended increasing students respect for diversity, four suggested teaching children to recognize differences in others, and three proposed increasing students' bilingual abilities.

3.6 Increasing Students Multicultural Sensitivity

The teachers suggested six approaches to improving rural multicultural education by promoting students' cultural sensitivity, and the analysis results are shown in Table 7. Thirteen teachers proposed conducting multicultural learning for students, 11 suggested expanding students appreciation for the arts of different countries—possibly through concerts and performances—and two teachers suggested three additional proposals: presenting positive perspectives and sharing thinking about different cultures, peer clubs, and harmony programs.

3.7 The Parents' Role

Teachers suggested 12 measures for expanding parents' roles in improving multicultural education divided into two central concepts, individual and community orientations. The analysis results based on these two concepts are shown in Table 8.

Table 7. Analysis of enhancing students' cultural sensitivity (unit: persons)

Plans	Frequency
Conducting multicultural learning	13
Increasing students' appreciation of the arts of different countries	11
Sharing positive perspectives and thinking about different cultures	2
Peer clubs	2
Harmony programs	2
Expert lectures	1
Total	31

For the individual-oriented role of parents, three teachers suggested increasing parents understanding of diversity and encouraging their participation in multicultural understanding training programs, followed by encouraging parents to recognize the importance of multicultural education, have positive mind-sets and learning the Korean language. For the community-oriented role,

six teachers proposed increasing parents' interest and participation in school operations, five suggested exchanges with multicultural families and eliminating prejudice. Two proposed that parents accompany students, and one proposed increasing confidence in the school.

3.8 The Community Role

The teachers proposed nine ways to use the community to improve rural multicultural education, categorized into three main areas: leadership, support, and networking. The analysis results are shown in Table 9.

Eight teachers proposed human and material support for multicultural education from the community, and two suggested community financial support. For leadership, two respondents each suggested that communities arrange multicultural events, educational programs and cultural experience programs, and one teacher each proposed local mentoring and a labor pool system. For networking, four teachers proposed that local communities establish links between schools and public

Table 8. Parent's role analysis (unit: persons)

Individual orientation	Frequency	Community orientation	Frequency
Understanding of diversity	3	Increasing interest and participation in school	6
Participation in multicultural understanding education	3	Exchange with multicultural families	5
Recognizing the importance of multicultural education	2	Eliminate prejudice	5
Positive mind-sets	1	Accompany students	2
Learning the Korean language	1	Increasing confidence in the schools	1
Total	29		

Table 9. Community role analysis

Support	Frequency	Leadership	Frequency	Networking	Frequency
Human and material support for multicultural education	8	Multicultural events	2	Linking schools and public institutions	4
Financial support	2	Educating parents of multicultural families	2	Developing and operating bridge programs	2
-	-	Cultural experience	2	-	-
		Mentoring	1		
		Building a labor pool	1		
Total	24				

institutions, and two suggested developing and operating networking programs

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated strategies for improving rural multicultural schools by surveying 27 teachers from three multicultural elementary schools. Their responses to the free-response survey were analyzed to identify the central concepts, and the analysis results are discussed.

Most of the teachers suggested that the schools and education could be improved with support for consultation resources and counseling program (the human element), increasing financial support (the material element), and increasing social awareness (the psychological element). Regarding teacher quality, the respondents suggested that teachers possess equality, rationality, passion, and sense of duty as well as increasing their Korean curriculum, counseling, communication and capacity building skills. The teachers suggested that their overall multicultural efficacy, understanding and teaching capabilities could be improved with these techniques. Nine teachers also proposed that curricula include multiculturalism perspectives, education, and understanding and that teachers themselves receive multicultural education field experience.

Regarding evaluation methods, the respondents suggested quantitative evaluation based on surveying teachers, students, and parents and qualitative assessment based on observation. For the student attributes, the teachers suggested encouraging philanthropic and caring personalities and respect for diversity. To promote multicultural sensitivity, the teachers mainly suggested multicultural learning by doing. Concerning the role of parents, the teachers suggested that, individually, parents learn to appreciate diversity and participate in multicultural education and, as part of their communities, express interest in school operations and participate proactively. Finally, for the communities' participation in the responses were categorized into three areas: support, leadership, and networking. For the three categories, the teachers most frequently suggested that communities provide human and material resources for multicultural education (support), hold multicultural events (leadership), and link schools with other public institutions (networking).

To summarize the above research results, the plan to improve rural multicultural schools can be condensed into four main concepts: interactive experience, participation, diversity, and multicultural competence. Any improvement techniques to be implemented should also consider the central concepts of experience- and participation-oriented learning.

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